



**OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
DORSET
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

September 2001

**OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999 insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the local authority (LEA) on Best Value. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with LEA members, staff in the education department and in other council departments, headteachers and staff in schools and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 181 schools. The response rate was 82 per cent.
3. The inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to three first schools, one infant school, five primary schools, two junior schools, and two middle schools. The inspection team also visited four secondary schools and two special schools. A telephone conversation was held with two additional upper schools. The visits ascertained the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools within the LEA was also considered.

COMMENTARY

4. At the time of local government reorganisation (LGR) in 1997 the population of the re-designated county of Dorset was reduced by 45 per cent but it retained 94 percent of its geographical area. It is a mainly rural county with only two major urban areas in Christchurch and Weymouth. In a population of 393,000, that is predicted to grow by over 6 per cent in the next ten years, a relatively small proportion, 12.8 per cent, is of school age. Economically the county is relatively prosperous with low levels of unemployment but, by contrast, some localities, both in the towns and rural areas have recognised levels of economic deprivation.

5. The organisation of school provision is complex. Different parts of the county provide either a two-tier system of primary and secondary schools or a three-tier system of first, middle and upper schools. Although subject to review when local issues arise the current pattern of schooling is set to continue. Overall the standards in schools and the quality of education in Dorset present a good picture. Performance in English and mathematics in Key Stage 2 is above national averages. The proportion of pupils passing five or more General Certificate of Education (GCSE) examinations at grades A* to C is also above the national average. The number of schools requiring special measures or that have serious weaknesses is very small.

6. The Education Development Plan (EDP) provides a sound basis for school improvement and progress in implementing it has been very effective overall. Many services are providing satisfactory or good support for school improvement and there are particular strengths in school self-evaluation and the monitoring of teaching. There are weaknesses in the quality of education planning and evaluation and in the rigour with which Best Value principles are applied

7. Dorset LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory duties. Performance in the great majority of functions is satisfactory and good in a few. There are few key weaknesses.

8. The authority exercises the following functions well:

- support for information and communication technology (ICT) in the curriculum;
- support for governors;
- statutory provision for pupils with special educational needs; and
- support for children in public care.

9. Areas where the LEA fulfils its functions satisfactorily include:

- progress in implementing the EDP;
- support for literacy in primary schools;
- services for admissions and personnel; and
- support for school management and attendance.

10. Areas where the LEA fulfils its functions unsatisfactorily are:

- support for numeracy;
- the strategy for special educational needs (SEN);

- support for behaviour;
- performance management and processes for securing Best Value; and
- measures to combat racism and monitoring and support for minority ethnic pupils.

11. Since LGR the council has funded education significantly above the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). However, at the time of LGR opportunities to change and develop the directorate in the context of the new national agenda were lost and Dorset made slow progress. The result was a level of frustration in schools that manifested itself as serious criticism of communications and relationships with the LEA plus dissatisfaction with some key strategies. In the past two years senior officers and elected members have made strenuous and appropriate efforts to catch up the lost ground and this work is beginning to have an impact, though changes have not yet been fully implemented. Elected members now provide sound leadership for education and their scrutiny role is developing effectively.

12. In May 2001 a new management structure was established with the key purpose of securing better co-ordination of strategies and services both within the LEA and with other providers. Directorates and services providing support for many of the LEA's most vulnerable pupils continue to improve. Systems are developing for the more effective use of data and pupil tracking to inform directorate planning. The LEA is appropriately supporting local pyramids of schools to extend their joint work but will need to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities in these partnerships. The biggest challenge for the management team is to implement urgently the new management structure, ensure that all services improve their client focus, and to reinforce a more challenging edge to service provision and the evaluation of work in all parts of the directorate.

13. Dorset LEA now fulfils most of its functions satisfactorily and services are improving. There are few major strengths but also few key weaknesses. However, the lack of a consistent performance management framework as part of the Best Value procedures is unsatisfactory; it hinders the county's capacity to improve. The director of education has set a new climate for change and development. There is a mood of optimism in many schools. Senior staff provide sound and thoughtful leadership. They have a strong commitment to school improvement and have established appropriate structures for the future which are beginning to take shape. There is a professional determination to make Dorset more successful and LEA managers have the capacity to implement the recommendations made in this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

14. Dorset is a predominantly rural county with now only two major urban areas, Weymouth in the south and Christchurch in the east. As a result of LGR in 1997 the population of the re-designated county reduced by 45 per cent but retained 94 per cent of its geographical area. The total population of Dorset is 393,000 of which only 12.8 per cent are of school age, the smallest proportion in England and Wales. National projections indicate that the population will grow by over six per cent in the next ten years.

15. Dorset is relatively advantaged economically; unemployment is below both regional and national rates and the county's position in relation to national socio-economic measures is above average. The proportion of the population with higher education qualifications is above the national mean and the number of the population in the highest social classes is well above the national average. However the county has below average national earnings with high levels of employment in public services, tourism and agriculture. Child poverty in some urban wards is within the worst 20 per cent of wards in England. The rural character of the county results in isolation and factors of social exclusion in some communities.

16. The LEA maintains 182 schools organised in a two and three tier pattern with variable points of transfer for pupils:

Two tier structure	12	Infant schools (4-7)
	54	Primary schools (4-11)
	10	Junior schools (7-11)
	4	Secondary schools (11-16)
	10	Secondary schools (11-18)
Three tier structure	62	First schools (4-9)
	17	Middle schools (9-13)
	6	Upper schools (13-18)
In addition there are	6	Special schools
	1	Pupil referral unit (PRU) with provision on three sites.

17. Over half of the schools are denominational and there are nine foundation schools of which two are special schools. A quarter of the primary schools have fewer than 100 pupils but only one of the secondary schools has below 600 pupils.

18. In primary schools both the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need and the proportion in special schools is equal to the national average. In secondary schools both of these figures are below the national average. In all schools the proportion of pupils eligible for free schools meals is well below the national figure. The county also has a very low percentage of minority ethnic pupils. In two locations the proximity of naval and army camps results in higher than normal levels of pupil mobility.

Performance

19. Pupils' attainment on entry to primary school is higher than that found nationally. With the exception of writing at Key Stage 1, pupils in Dorset achieve standards which are equal to or above the national average. The progress made by pupils through Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 is in line with the average progress made nationally and through Key Stages 3 and 4 it is above the average.

20. At Key Stage 1 pupils achieve standards in reading that are above the national average, whilst in mathematics they are equal to those found nationally. Standards in writing are in line with the national average. Improvements in the standards of reading and mathematics over the past three years have been equal to the national improvements, but in writing they are well below. Standards are above the national average at Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science. In all three subjects the recent rate of improvement has been the same as the national trend. At Key Stage 3 attainment remains above the national average in English, mathematics and science. By contrast recent improvements in mathematics have been below the national average compared with improvements in English and science which are above the national figure.

21. In GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades is above the national average, as is the average point score of all pupils. For those pupils achieving one or more A* to G grades the standards are in line with the national mean. Trends in improvement are less good and well below the national average for one A* to G grades and for the average points score, whilst the improvement in five A* to C grades is equal to the national improvement.

22. The standards achieved by post-16 students taking two or more advanced courses are broadly in line with those nationally.

23. OFSTED Inspections of Dorset schools indicate that the percentage of primary schools judged to be good or very good is in line with the national average. By contrast, in secondary schools the proportion deemed good and very good is well above the national average. In the most recent inspections the quality of teaching in Dorset schools was judged to be in line with the national average in secondary and middle schools but well above the average in primary schools.

24. Attendance in both primary and secondary schools is above that found nationally. Unauthorised absence in primary schools is broadly in line with the national average whilst in secondary schools it is well below, at half the average figure. Permanent exclusions are below the national average in primary and secondary schools.

Funding

25. Dorset's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per pupil is below county and England averages (96 per cent and 91 per cent respectively). The Authority spends considerably above its education SSA and, over the past three years, planned spending has increased faster than the SSA.

	Education SSA (£m)	Expenditure (Budget)	Expenditure as % of SSA
1999/2000	135.3	141.9	104.9% (+4.9%)
2000/2001	144.0	151.8	105.4% (+5.4%)
2001/2002	151.5	161.5	106.6% (+6.6%)

26. In contrast primary and secondary school budget shares in 2000/01 were lower than county, statistical neighbours' and national averages. Dorset's relative position is, however, affected by the inclusion of 17 middle deemed secondary schools.

2000/01	Dorset	County	Statistical Neighbours	England
Primary ISB per pupil	£1,679	£1,739	£1,714	£1,869
Secondary ISB per pupil	£2,221	£2,376	£2,353	£2,559

27. Centrally retained spending has been high in the LEA because it was slow to delegate. In 2000/01 it retained £524 per pupil compared with the county average of £427. New delegations in 2001/02 have changed the balance of this differential. Dorset now retains £374 per pupil which is slightly less than the county average of £383.

28. The major areas of variation in 2000/01 comparisons include:

- retained special educational needs (SEN) spending at £215 compared with England (£160), county (£147) and statistical neighbours (£162). Following delegation decisions this year, the Dorset figure has been reduced to £160 for the 2001/02 financial year. Within this area of expenditure the budget for fees at independent special schools and out of county provision was £83 per pupil compared with England (£42), county (£38) and statistical neighbours (£34) and will remain fundamentally unchanged;
- home to school transport budget was high at £126 per pupil compared with county (£100) and statistical neighbours (£113). The Dorset figure has increased in 2001/02 to £134;
- outdoor education spending was £13 per pupil compared with £2 in each of the comparator groups.

29. The council is taking up its full Standards Fund allowance in 2001/2002. Dorset has achieved some success in attracting external funding to education through Single Regeneration Budget funding, the European Social Fund and Lottery and Sports Council grants. The LEA has secured formula capital allocations from the DfEE as a result of satisfactory progress on its asset management plan (AMP) and has been active in securing additional funding through Private Funding Initiatives (PFI). A pioneering secondary school PFI scheme has already been successfully completed and a cross service special school project, involving social service

facilities for adult learners and residential care for the elderly, is at the bidding stage.

Council structure

30. The council has 42 members, comprising 21 Liberal Democrat, 15 Conservative, five Labour and one Independent. A positive feature of the new council has been its determination to operate corporately. This is reflected in the work of council committees and the monthly meetings of service directors with the leader of the council.

31. At an early stage the council established a committee structure to meet the needs of the government's modernising agenda. The eight member executive committee has cross party representation, there are four scrutiny committees and an audit committee. The education overview and scrutiny committee, including diocesan representatives, evaluates the planning and development of policy and the effectiveness of services. Greater involvement of members in scrutiny has improved their understanding of education issues and led to better informed judgements with effective and timely decisions. The structure of the council remains under review and a countywide consultation is currently considering three options for future decision making. (Immediately after the inspection local government elections, in June 2001, resulted in some change in party representation and council structures)

The Education Development Plan

32. The EDP is a sound framework for school improvement. It has clear priorities which reflect the national agenda and within it are activities that respond to local needs. There are eight priorities:

- a) improve pupil achievement;
- b) improve the quality of teaching;
- c) enhance schools' capability to track and support pupil progress, through a consistent framework of support, to raise standards ;
- d) improve ICT capability;
- e) improve leadership and management;
- f) aim to ensure that no school goes into special measures and weaknesses are minimised;
- g) improve literacy and numeracy;
- h) develop strategies to enhance community contribution to pupil achievement.

33. The plan was established from an audit of LEA and school evidence that identified areas of weakness. Subsequent review and development of the plan has maintained the priorities but also identified key activities for each year, which in 2000/01 are appropriately focused on developing self evaluative schools. The activities take account of other related plans such as the education service plan, the early years' development and childcare plan and the children's service plan, and links are explicit in the original document. Consultation on the original plan was effective and primary schools found it satisfactory whilst secondary schools regarded it as good. Subsequent consultation through representative groups and questionnaires has been equally effective.

34. The EDP actions are clear, they identify key personnel, some targets are quantifiable and success criteria indicate the broad outcomes. Weaknesses lie in the imprecise time scales for activities, insufficient measurable targets, limited evaluation and insufficient detail on the resources for each activity.

35. The LEA's achievement targets for 2000 were met in all areas. In the main these targets were challenging but in the case of English at Key Stage 2 the target was exceeded by seven percentage points. The target for 2002 in English has been raised to 85 per cent. Schools have been successful in reducing the number of permanently excluded pupils and the LEA target has been exceeded. Children in public care also exceeded the LEA target for their GCSE results.

36. Systems for monitoring the EDP are good. They involve consultative groups of headteachers, the education overview committee, externally commissioned evaluations, annual reviews of the literacy and numeracy strategies and customer satisfaction surveys. These processes are thorough and the outcomes have been used to refocus activities in subsequent years.

37. Progress with the priorities of the EDP has been good overall and the LEA has begun to identify those areas where the actions are having an impact on school improvement. The evidence in EDP reviews, from school visits and school inspections indicates that pupil attainment continues to rise and the quality of teaching has improved. Standards in literacy are rising and the implementation of the strategy has been good. The provision and support for ICT in the curriculum is good. Activities to support other priorities of the EDP have made satisfactory progress with the exception of the collection and monitoring of data on the attainment of minority ethnic pupils, and the management of the numeracy strategy.

The allocation of resources to priorities

38. The council's approach in this area is satisfactory overall. Corporate three-year medium term financial planning ensures that overall resources are appropriately matched to priorities. Procedures for the delegation of financial responsibility to cost centre managers and budget holders are clear. Over each of the three years the authority has passed on to education the full SSA education budget. The council's priorities of increased delegation to schools and long term capital investment in schools are also reflected in the budget planning of the education directorate. The basis of corporate recharges to education, however, is not always clearly defined.

39. The allocation formula for the Individual School Budget (ISB) is largely historic and currently reflects the LEAs intention to retain its variety of two and three tier provision. Although there is consultation on the formula with the budget advisory group for schools (BAGS), which includes professional associations and school representatives, schools feel that there is a lack of transparency as well as a lack of fairness in the current formula. Much work has been carried out on a needs-led model but little of it has been incorporated into the current scheme. Changes in the budget to incorporate aspects of a needs-led allocation to schools have been deferred recently because of other budget demands, such as SEN, that have taken up money available to education. Within this context members have recently approved a consultation process to review the formula.

40. Budget making is accurate in most respects although there has been, in the past, a failure to set a realistic SEN budget. However budget difficulties are recognised promptly and remedial action initiated.

41. Overall cumulative school balances are not excessive. Within primary and middle schools budget deficits are acceptably small and controlled. However the position in the secondary sector is unsatisfactory with one third of secondary schools having deficits above 2.5 per cent. It was only in spring 2000 that the LEA put in place a strategy to work with schools to reduce these deficits. They are now properly licensed and recovery plans are in place and closely monitored. Insufficient work is done to encourage schools that have excessive surpluses to spend up to their budgets.

Best Value and performance management

42. The authority's corporate procedures for Best Value and performance management are unsatisfactory overall and processes in the education directorate are inconsistent. The external auditor's report on the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) identified weaknesses in the processes, planning and targets in the plan, the scope of the five year programme for reviews and the quality of guidance offered by the toolkit. The second year BVPP now provides a clearer summary of the targets, planning and procedures, the review programme is being restructured and the toolkit is being revised.

43. Of the six Best Value reviews in education, those related to outdoor education, admissions and school places and the advisory service are complete. Overall, in these reviews, there is insufficient rigour applied to the element of challenge to ensure that outcomes do not become affirmations of existing practice. In one case consultation procedures were limited by a low response rate from stakeholders. Action plans are insubstantial because they are predominantly short term actions to investigate alternative provision without the detail of principles, success criteria, targets and outcomes required from the future service, whatever its configuration. As an example an analysis of the best value review of the outdoor education service is included here; those for admissions and school places and the advisory service are located in sections 2 and 5 of the report respectively.

44. The Best Value review of the outdoor education service followed the guidance in the corporate toolkit. It was led by a senior officer from another directorate experienced in providing traded services giving a suitable external challenge. The review's purpose was to challenge the service in its current form, clarify the type of service for the future and establish improvement targets. It made a reasonable attempt to use comparative evidence from similar services in neighbouring LEAs in a context where little national data and no performance indicators are available. Consultation was good, going beyond Dorset schools to evidence from other users of the service. Elected members and trade unions were also involved.

45. Nevertheless there were shortcomings in the process because seemingly unused management analyses are quoted in the report and there are limited outcomes from well-intentioned visits to other providers. The level of challenge to the

current service is insufficient and the narrative suggests an uncritical acceptance that no other service can provide what Dorset offers. The outcome of the review is to delay the intention to delegate for one year and, without explanation, apply a ceiling for such delegation. Consequently the draft action plan is for preparatory work and lacks clarity on how this service, which is satisfactory and well received by users, will change and improve.

46. The council is at an early stage with its performance management procedures and currently has no agreed corporate system in place. The expectation is that the European Foundation Quality Model (EFQM) will be adopted. Performance management in education is based on developments from the original appraisal system and is unsatisfactory because individual staff targets are not closely enough linked to the measurable outcomes of service plans.

47. Some schools visited during the inspection were aware of the principles of Best Value and their significance for the school. Fewer recalled that they had been consulted over best value reviews but were conscious of much better general levels of consultation in the past two years. Governors have been offered training on best value procedures and each school is now required to make an annual statement on its use of best value information when securing services. At present schools have variable detail and clarity on services available to them from the LEA which hampers their ability to make judgements about the service quality and value for money. Although there are pockets of good practice the LEA is not active in assisting schools in procuring services from other providers or giving financial benchmarking information on schools' spending patterns.

Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- improve the quality of the next EDP and the LEA's ability to evaluate outcomes rigorously by using precise time scales and more measurable targets.

In order to improve financial management, transparency and equity:

- ensure that corporate recharges to the education directorate are subject to agreed standards in terms of specification and costs, involving service level agreements where appropriate;
- further develop the role of BAGS, and other appropriate consultative groups, ensuring that information is satisfactorily disseminated to all headteachers;
- continue to review formula funding with schools to incorporate aspects of the authority's needs-led model and ensure a clear timetable for future action; and
- put in place appropriate mechanisms to identify and challenge schools with surpluses.

In order to improve Best Value processes and outcomes:

- make more rigorous the procedures used in Best Value reviews to include a wider range of performance indicators, ensure significant and informed challenge to existing service practice and improved action plans which have measurable and demonstrable outcomes.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

48. The support for school improvement has more strengths than weaknesses. Evidence from school visits strongly endorsed this view; they regard the work of the LEA as satisfactory in all cases and mainly good.

Implications of other functions

49. The school improvement function of the LEA has been well supported through the work for Traveller children and children in public care. Operational links with health trusts and the police are developing effectively in support of pupils and schools and strategic links with social services are good. In some services however, exacerbated by recruitment difficulties, strategies have been less effective in securing good support to pupils and guidance to teachers. The LEA is in the process of a fundamental internal restructuring which will have significant implications for many of its services. These are referred to throughout the report.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

50. The LEA is satisfactorily implementing the code of practice for LEA/school relations and the policy for the monitoring and support of schools has recently been amended to reflect the code of practice more closely. Effective consultation has taken place with schools on the implications of the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success. Headteachers understand the effect upon their school and the great majority are in agreement both with the principle and the category into which their school has been placed.

51. Resources provided centrally for improvement in all schools are now one and a half days per year. Additional services are bought by almost all schools and those with difficulties have access to differentiated support based on need. The school improvement consultant has the key role for monitoring and support and school visits indicate, justifiably, that most consultants are highly regarded for the skills and expertise they bring to the role. Overall, in schools causing concern, the LEA provides effective guidance, advice and development support to headteachers, staff and governors and statutory powers have been appropriately used. However, in a small number of cases, senior officers have failed to tackle the problems with sufficient rigour. Officers and elected members are now much more alert to these issues.

52. Procedures for monitoring schools are now broadly satisfactory and improving but wider systems for gathering information about schools need to be formalised. Consultants know the schools well. A profile of performance data and other key indicators on each school is drawn together by the cross-branch monitoring group. This data requires a greater breadth of information from across education and other directorates to make the profile a more secure evidence base. Plans are in place to use information systems to collect and analyse a wider range of data in the future.

53. Consultants challenge schools to improve and this is carried out with variable rigour. The focus of challenge is about pupil performance and the teaching strategies needed to achieve the improvements but does not robustly cover wider management

factors. Most consultants make a detailed analysis, with the school, of individual pupil performance but their work in setting targets is hampered by the absence of LEA-analysed data on added value and predicted performance for each school. Some headteachers report a high degree of professional challenge in these discussions, whilst in two schools visited the headteachers would welcome more robust debate. The performance of consultants in challenging schools is not routinely monitored.

54. The school effectiveness service, with other services, has a key role to deliver the priorities of the EDP and this it achieves effectively, giving satisfactory value for money. A very good contribution has been made by the LEA to enable schools to be successfully autonomous through a training programme of self-review for school managers. The range of expertise in the service is satisfactory and there is a reasonable match between advisers' skills, knowledge and expertise and schools' needs. The lack of all phase specialist mathematics and English advice is a weakness particularly for secondary schools. When specialist expertise is not available the LEA secures external support but no formalised brokerage procedure or quality assurance system is in place. Staff have suitable opportunities for training and development often linked to EDP priorities. There are effective service level statements for traded services that provide accurate information on the range, costs and quality of the services on offer. Schools report that in most cases the quality assurance by each service is good and the annual information booklet is helpful.

55. Monitoring of the work of the school effectiveness service is satisfactory through twice-yearly supervision and review meetings for staff. Heads of service and all staff have targets linked to service plans but they are not sharply defined in relation to measurable outcomes. To improve performance management senior staff recognise the need to use performance indicators and job competencies. In addition the service is monitored through the headteacher's monitoring group, the education overview committee, the standing education conference, and questionnaires to schools relating to service functions. These activities are comprehensive, but they do not sufficiently evaluate the actions to determine whether they are the right activities for the desired outcomes.

56. The LEA has recently completed a Best Value review of its advisory service and EDP. The Dorset toolkit of guidance was used. An appropriate degree of independence was provided by the lead officer from the social services directorate (SSD) and scrutiny by elected members. The review gave an effective overview of service aims and management, the challenge section was well structured and used some comparative performance indicators. The review questioned the provision of the service through the LEA and presented seven alternative procurement and management options.

57. The inspection found the review procedures to be sound but with unsatisfactory outcomes overall. Weaknesses included insufficient rigour in challenging the existing service and its claims of high performance. The use of comparative data was limited and responses to consultation were patchy. The decision to adopt option 2 (a public/private partnership) without incorporating option 4 (a market testing activity) as an associated action point is a concern. The current service is satisfactory with more strengths than weaknesses. The review has begun

a procedure for improvement but the action plan lacks clear targets and outcomes for the future service required.

Collection and analysis of data

58. The support the LEA gives to schools through the collection and analysis of data is satisfactory, strengths outweigh weaknesses.

59. The LEA provides a wealth of benchmark material to aid all schools in target setting. This data places the individual school in the context of other LEA schools, statistical neighbours and nationally with breakdowns available by, for example, SEN bands and size of school. All primary schools and the 60 per cent of secondary schools that buy the service receive additional breakdowns including free school meal bands and trends over recent years. Headteachers know what will be provided and when they will receive it. Schools visited reported that they found this material useful. Good INSET opportunities have been provided to help schools interpret and analyse performance data. These were well received, particularly by primary schools. The consultants' work in guiding the detailed analysis of pupil attainment and identification of suitable strategies for improvement is needed in a minority of schools and this additional support is effective.

60. The LEA is developing, but does not yet have in place, the data or an effective strategy to securely challenge schools' targets. National test results are available at statutory and interim stages but they are not used to provide added value data, predictors of future attainment or a potential target range for each school. As a result consultants are not best equipped to robustly challenge targets or to ascertain whether schools are predicting results rather than target setting. Some schools are setting targets that are too low. Many schools exceed their targets, in some cases by a wide margin. The recent development of a communication and data co-ordination branch is designed to achieve better analysis and use of data but as yet there is no systematic communication between the school consultant and the central statistical staff in relation to target setting. Systems for improved and more comprehensive data collection, analysis and transfer electronically are at the planning stage for implementation in 2002.

Support for literacy

61. Support for raising standards of literacy overall has many more strengths than weaknesses. In primary schools it is good whilst in secondary schools support has been less effective but the LEA is now extending its work, particularly at Key Stage 3. Standards in reading at Key Stage 1 and English at Key Stages 2 and 3 are above the national average. In Key Stage 1 writing standards are in line with the national average but the proportion of children achieving level 2B is below the national figure. The predicted LEA target for English at Key Stage 2 was exceeded in 2000. The effective delivery of the literacy strategy together with the good LEA support for focus schools, should enable the challenging target of 85 per cent to be met in 2002.

62. The EDP clearly identifies the need to raise attainment and progress in English. In the primary phase the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has been effectively managed. The team's action plan for 2001 appropriately focuses on

literacy targets in Key Stage 2. There is a sensible rationale for identifying those schools selected for light touch literacy support, and the next cohort of schools selected to receive intensive support. Appropriate activities link a number of EDP priorities, such as action to improve the quality of teaching, and schools' capability to analyse data and track and support pupils' progress. The literacy team and school improvement consultants collaborate well, and there is now a better focus from SEN specialists on literacy provision.

63. Where schools have received additional input from literacy consultants and expert teachers, staff report the benefits of well focused in-service sessions, helpful demonstration lessons, constructive feedback following shared class observations, good levels of expertise within the team and a rapid response from the Literacy Centre to schools' inquiries. Work to develop the use of benchmarking and tracking information in literacy is a key strategy in the primary phase for improving standards. Useful resources such as access to the web-site and a portfolio of writing at level three, are being used to raise achievement particularly in writing at the lower and higher levels at both key stages.

64. Secondary support has been less intensive, but now has a clearer focus. The NLS has recently been launched at Key Stage 3 and the LEA is appointing a co-ordinator for this stage. The LEA recognises the need to involve Key Stage 4 departments in developments at Key Stage 3. Middle and primary schools are represented on the literacy steering group, bringing together a range of staff including heads and teachers. The group has had a significant influence on the successful delivery of the NLS and there are plans to widen membership to include upper schools.

Support for numeracy

65. There have been weaknesses in the management of the LEA's strategy and support for numeracy is unsatisfactory overall. Standards at Key Stage 1 in mathematics are in line with the national average and there has been a significant improvement in the past three years. At Key Stage 2 the proportion of pupils gaining level 4 and above in 2000 was 73 per cent, which is just above the national average but the improvement since 1999 has been very small. The LEA and schools will need to invest significant effort if the target of 80 percent in 2002 is to be met. At the time of the inspection the LEA had not launched its Key Stage 3 strategy.

66. Initial training for the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) was poorly received. There were weaknesses in the early presentation and explanation of the underlying philosophies of the national framework. After this disappointing start, the LEA has taken action to improve training by appointing a seconded headteacher, making changes to the overall line management structures of the programme, and involving a senior school improvement consultant in the overall direction of the work. Schools visited reported a positive impact from these effective but recent changes. The work of individual consultants in schools is good, they monitor the teaching of numeracy and provide effective support and guidance to teachers. Staff training in schools has been effective; leading mathematics teachers are providing valuable guidance and some schools can confidently demonstrate the impact of the support they have received.

67. Management decisions about the selection of schools for intensive support have also had weaknesses. The LEA appropriately adopted a long-term strategy for achieving numeracy targets. However the emphasis at the outset was on targeting pupils who would reach year 6 in 2001 and not surprisingly the overall impact of support on Key Stage 2 performance in 2000 was disappointing. Standards in the thirteen schools receiving intensive support in the first year rose by only 2.5 per cent points above that of schools overall. In two schools results fell over the same period. A further group of sixteen schools were selected for light touch support by a process of partial self selection for some, one of which had a benchmark grade of A, and the others selected by the LEA. Arrangements are now in place for strategic changes in the implementation of the strategy.

68. A 'kick start' project for Year 7 and 8 pupils in middle schools was successfully piloted in 1999/2000. Evaluation, through pupils repeating the national Key Stage 2 tests, resulted in an average gain of 12 percentage points for the group.

Support for Information and Communication Technology

69. The LEA's support for the use of ICT in the curriculum and raising standards in schools is good. There is a clear strategy that is linked with a wider county vision for e-government being developed in conjunction with the Learning Skills Council and with Bournemouth and Poole LEAs. Dorset has conducted an analysis of, and continues to review schools' needs through a robust audit of ICT development plans. Data collection and analysis are strengths but the information is not used sharply enough to challenge schools to improve performance. Standards achieved by pupils are effectively analysed to inform future development in schools. The LEA's curriculum plan contains 12 carefully constructed key targets for ICT as well as timescales for their achievement, each underpinned by sensible action plans. They include clear allocations of responsibility, a timescale for the actions, the resources required and their sources, success criteria and a commentary on progress to date.

70. Good progress is being made with the implementation of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). All schools have access at ISDN 2 standard with unlimited calls to the Internet service provider during the day, unlimited web space and email addresses for all teachers. Content is available on literacy, sustainability, historical fiction and the environment. The Intranet involves universities, libraries, museums and archives. There is appropriate and effective training in the use of hardware and software. Good progress has been made on the implementation of broadband connections with 20 per cent of schools already on line.

71. The good data on pupil performance in ICT includes data collated from OFSTED inspections of schools, Key Stage 3 teacher assessments and Key Stage 4 GCSE grades. It is analysed in relation to national and statistical neighbours. It reveals considerable variation between schools at Key Stage 3 and poor LEA performance at Key Stage 4 by the low numbers of pupils seeking a GCSE qualification in ICT. This data is being used to inform NGfL target setting and the LEA's approval (or otherwise) of NGfL development plans. The LEA has been focussing support on weaknesses identified at the level of the key stage rather than the individual school, a shortcoming in the use of such comprehensive data.

72. Schools receive satisfactory advice on New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training, a number of the schools visited are successfully using the training for whole school development. A few schools criticised the lack of differentiation in the training programmes.

Support for schools causing concern

73. Overall, the LEA's support for schools causing concern is satisfactory although the early identification of difficulties has had weaknesses. At the time of the inspection two schools were in special measures and one has been identified as having serious weaknesses; well below the national average. These schools are making good progress towards their improvement targets. Schools that have required special measures have been removed from that status within, or close to, the two year expected period. Once a school is designated as being in special measures or having serious weaknesses, the LEA responds quickly and effectively to address the key issues. Headteacher mentors, additional staffing and support for a full range of school issues are provided through the LEA.

74. However, in 1997 when the first school in the LEA to be designated as requiring special measures was identified by OFSTED, the LEA was not aware of the difficulties at the school. Since that time the LEA has sharpened its information systems and was aware of difficulties at two schools that were judged to require special measures in 1999 and in January 2000. Even when clear about the problems the LEA did not react robustly in these two schools to address the concerns in a timely way. This indicates some weakness in the LEA's preparedness to challenge schools with difficulties.

75. The LEA has recently introduced a five-category classification system; schools requiring special measures, those with serious weaknesses plus schools that in the view of the LEA have serious weaknesses, are underperforming or require monitoring and support. The triggers that alert the schools and the LEA to these categories are suitable, cover the main issues and are understood by the schools. A set of procedures for the support of schools with weaknesses was established in May 2000. The guidance clearly indicates an appropriate staged response from the LEA in support of headteachers and governors, to the point where a formal warning may be issued. This new system is at an early stage of implementation and has not been operating long enough to form a judgement on its effectiveness.

76. A cross-directorate monitoring team meets fortnightly to consider schools that are causing the LEA concern. Improvement consultants can raise concerns at these meetings and outcomes are reported to the directorate management team. The school effectiveness group of elected members and officers, attended by headteachers and governors, reviews schools causing concern. This is an effective way of ensuring councillors are aware of emerging difficulties in schools. This group has been pro-active in the case of one school with budget difficulties and caused the authority to exercise its powers to appoint additional governors.

Support for governors

77. The LEA's support for school governors is good. The training programmes and support actively promote autonomy and school self-evaluation. The governor self-evaluation tool kit, developed in Dorset, is a particular strength. Governors are provided with good quality information that is not readily available from other sources and the high quality articles from governors in their newsletter are particularly impressive.

78. The LEA does not provide a clerking service but does offer termly briefing sessions for chairs and clerks to governors attended by the director of education. These were praised in a number of the schools visited and are well supported with over fifty per cent of schools represented at recent meetings. The extensive governor-training programme contains elements that relate directly to promoting autonomy and self-evaluation and creating a climate in which headteachers and governors can feel comfortable with professional challenge. The governor support team is accessible and provides a rapid response when approached.

79. Procedures to ensure that LEA governor positions are filled is good and governor vacancies are generally filled promptly. All LEA governor vacancies are advertised publicly, even where an existing LEA governor is prepared to continue. The LEA initiates recruitment drives but also acts effectively in relation to individual schools where a vacancy is proving hard to fill. No specific effort is made to recruit governors from minority groups.

Support for school management

80. The LEA's support for school management is satisfactory and has few weaknesses. The philosophy that self-review by schools and teachers is fundamental to raising standards is well supported through the LEA's programme for school self review, a priority in the EDP. All schools visited were very positive about the training and described clearly how the programme had enabled them, with confidence, to undertake the monitoring of teaching and learning. Training is based on the OFSTED model, supplemented with local case studies and other material, and has proved an effective support programme.

81. The LEA also runs a training programme for middle managers aimed at encouraging them to identify how the work they do impacts on standards. The impact of these programmes has been effectively evaluated. There has been an improvement in leadership and management in 32 OFSTED school inspections with 100 per cent judged to be at least satisfactory. More recently the LEA has embarked on an appropriate training programme which seeks to identify, with headteachers, those who might train as future headteachers, particularly for smaller schools. The LEA actively promotes and delivers the national programmes for serving and aspiring headteachers and the arrangements made are satisfactory. There is a suitable induction programme for new headteachers which includes mentoring support but in two schools visited with heads appointed in the last two years the mentoring arrangements had not proved satisfactory.

82. There is satisfactory LEA support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs). It includes training sessions once a term, guidance to schools on mentoring and the responsibilities for induction plus two monitoring visits in the first year by the school consultant, who observes lessons and gives feedback.

83. School improvement consultants work with headteachers to develop procedures for monitoring teaching and learning. In addition the numeracy and literacy consultants monitor the implementation of both national frameworks. Curriculum support is available through a large number of LEA in-service training courses that are well regarded and widely used by schools. In addition the LEA contributes very effectively to a successful middle school network for management and curriculum support.

Recommendations:

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

- develop and formalise the procedures for gathering information and data on schools such that the scope of the data is widened and information systems are used effectively;
- implement robust performance management procedures in line with corporate strategy;
- ensure that the support for school improvement is evaluated in relation to its impact including the rigour of the challenge to schools when setting targets;
- ensure that the plans for establishing a comprehensive pupil data and tracking system are implemented as soon as possible; and
- improve the range of analysed data provided for schools to include added value, grade predictions and target ranges to support target setting.

In order to raise standards in numeracy:

- ensure an effective and sustained management structure for the future and provide targeted support to areas of greatest need; and
- develop and implement with schools an effective strategy to raise standards of numeracy in Key Stage 3.

In order to improve the support for schools causing concern:

- ensure that the procedures for the identification of and support for improvement are robustly and speedily implemented in all cases.

In order to further improve the support for governors:

- in consultation with minority communities, consider the need for, and practicality of, actively recruiting more governors from or representative of, these groups.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

84. Corporate planning in Dorset suitably reflects educational aims and priorities. The activities of the EDP make clear links to the overall aims of the council as expressed in the BVPP. However weaknesses exist in some key areas. Directorates are required to pursue the priority actions, the performance indicators and success criteria of the BVPP in annual service plans. Resources, based on a three-year assessment, are identified in medium term financial plans and updated annually. A growing commitment to cross directorate strategic planning is demonstrated, for example, in joint work with social services, efficient information exchange with environmental services and action with adult education and the voluntary sector on issues related to rural isolation. Nevertheless, the use of Best Value as the framework for future management and for improving planning, monitoring and evaluation procedures is still at an early stage of development.

85. Elected members give effective leadership to education and to the decisions and strategies for implementing the council's plans. Council members and the chief executive take an active part in education matters. As yet, although a corporate communications unit has been established, a significant number of schools are unclear about the priorities of elected members for education and the outcomes that they expect to be achieved. The education overview committee scrutinises best value reviews, carries out short-term scrutiny research of EDP priorities and receives monitoring and review reports from officers. Officers provide sufficiently clear and helpful information for elected members and reports often present a range of options for their decisions. However these are too rarely informed by rigorous evaluation of current strategies and their effectiveness. Members are effectively informed about schools causing concern through their attendance at the school effectiveness group.

86. The education service plan (ESP) contributes to the BVPP through its detailed priorities and those of the EDP. Progress with the ESP is reviewed with headteachers, governors and elected members at the biannual standing education conference. Directorate service plans are monitored by senior officers on a quarterly basis and reported to elected members half yearly. However there are weaknesses in planning at service and branch level because plans are too variable and insufficiently focused on clear success criteria and measurable or demonstrable targets. Although actions are monitored effectively through branch procedures, robust evaluation of the impact and effectiveness is only now beginning. Performance management in education is based upon developments from previous appraisal systems. These include a range of approaches to staff supervision, monitoring and professional review but without a consistently sharp focus on the use of performance indicators and targets related to the outcomes of the ESP.

87. The senior management of education has very recently been appropriately restructured to give greater coherence to the work of the directorate. It comprises the director of education, two deputy directors and the head of lifelong learning. The new director of education has brought a greater sense of direction and a new level of consultation, transparency and openness to the work of the LEA. The senior management team have a strong commitment to school improvement, provide sound

leadership and management and are well respected by schools. The effectiveness of this new management structure is vital to the LEA's future improvement and senior managers have the capacity to make it successful.

88. The deputy director, pupil and school improvement (PSIS) leads four new branches covering statutory services, (including SEN and pupil support services); school improvement; business development and operations. The deputy director, policy development has responsibility for policy and information, access and premises, finance and information technology. The head of lifelong learning has a co-ordinating role to bring together Dorset's adult and youth work and to link education to the partnerships for lifelong learning. This re-organisation appropriately brings together services in order to make more coherent the provision for schools and pupils, and to co-ordinate and manage the expanding partnerships and multi-agency groups that support national and local initiatives.

89. A key strategy of the directorate is to support the locally established groups of schools, called pyramids. This is appropriate as it builds upon existing partnerships between schools and can enable further dissemination of good practice. LEA funding will promote greater autonomy and self-management and enable schools not to act in isolation. The director of education has made these intentions clear to headteachers and governors and there is growing enthusiasm and action for development. However the LEA has yet to develop systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluation of the use of pyramid funding and agreed procedures to assure equitable access to key aspects of provision, including SEN, for all pyramids. The LEA also supports long established and effective clusters for small school development.

Partnerships with other agencies and local government departments

90. The LEA has developed sound and effective links with its partners, including the Dioceses. The LEA is fulfilling its role in contributing to the development of the Learning Skills Council (LSC) and with the developing Connexions network. Successful collaboration with other departments and external agencies supports the priorities for education, including a sharper focus on improving social inclusion and developing life long learning. Services are sufficiently clear about their responsibilities for crosscutting initiatives and delivery of multi-agency support to pupils and schools. The parent and pupil service (PPS) manages multi-agency support for vulnerable and disaffected pupils effectively and ensures that, in general, the LEA's resources are used to best effect.

91. Liaison with the Health Trusts, police and social services is good at a strategic level. Protocols have been developed and are effectively managed through a number of inter-agency panels, including the special and additional needs strategy group. Nevertheless, liaison is not always as effective at the operational level. Whilst the 'Healthworks' programme in schools and in ten youth advice and information centres around the county provide support for vulnerable and disaffected young people in more disadvantaged areas of the county, schools surveyed were particularly critical of liaison between education and social services. A number of schools visited reported some inconsistency in the quality and quantity of the support.

92. The early years' development and childcare partnership (EYDCP) works well with a number of agencies, through the early years' service. The service is effectively managed by the education and social services departments. A good start has been made with further and higher education establishments to improve the level of qualifications in the childcare and early education workforce. There are useful plans to access the Social Inclusion Fund in order to provide transport for "hard to reach groups". The EYDCP is evolving appropriate plans to work with existing partnership arrangements on difficulties for teenage parents in accessing education, and aspects of drug rehabilitation, through childcare provision.

Management services

93. The quality of management services is satisfactory but arrangements for supporting schools in their procurement are unsatisfactory. The LEA seeks feedback from schools about services through a users group, comprising representative headteachers and governors, which meets regularly and information is satisfactorily disseminated to other headteachers. The information provided to schools in the annual booklet is in a consistent, attractive and easily accessible format. However, it is incomplete and detail of service standards is uneven. There are no descriptions in the annual booklet of core "entitlement" services and no information is provided on alternative providers. Most areas offer choices of service level provision. There is, however, no clear intention to separate the charging system for standard level agreements from the amount delegated and thus contribute to the ability of individual schools to become discerning purchasers of services.

94. **The finance support service** in Dorset is satisfactory overall but has some significant weaknesses. Although some aspects are well regarded by schools, others are criticised. The support provided to individual schools from the school administration support officers (SASOs) is highly regarded. Over 90 per cent of schools purchase each of the accountancy and VAT advice service, the payments service and the banking and cash management service. Appropriately the finance team provides advice to schools on what they should require from alternative providers. Internal audit works well as an integral part of the financial service and communication with schools is clear and precise. Similarly the payroll service functions well and has a low error rate.

95. However, it is only since mid 2000 that an effective system has been established to monitor closely and advise those schools with large deficit budgets. Schools placed the authority in the bottom quartile of all LEAs inspected for the support it provides on the planning and control of the school budget. Some schools have experienced from the county treasurer's directorate a lack of customer focus among some staff.

96. The **personnel service** is effective and well regarded by schools. There is a high take up of the various personnel SLAs and a high level of ad hoc purchases. A particular strength is in the exercise of the LEA's casework function. The manual of personnel practice and policies is comprehensive and up to date. The service is using effectively the additional funding it has accessed to develop its recruitment and retention of staff initiative. The LEA has been slow in the processing of contracts but

this is recognised and measures are in place to computerise the process. Advice is appropriately provided to schools on what they should look for in an alternative provider and the service is investigating partnership working with the private sector to enhance their in-house expertise.

97. **Property services.** Support to schools in this area is satisfactory. Building maintenance is conducted jointly with schools through a combination of strategic programmes of repair and maintenance and a Building Maintenance Indemnity Scheme which 90 per cent of primary schools and 40 per cent of secondary schools buy into. Schools joining the scheme contribute a percentage of their delegated revenue repairs and maintenance budget to a pool used to deal with emergencies and to pay for large items of priority maintenance. Not all schools feel that the prioritisation process for the use of this money is sufficiently clear.

98. **Administrative ICT.** Day to day support for schools' administrative information and communication technology is good. The helpdesk support service provided by the school administrative support officers (SASOs) is highly regarded. The authority's web pages are easy to use and informative. Increasingly, schools are purchasing locally managed services with regular technician visits or are sharing a technician across a pyramid or cluster. All schools have hardware that meets Department for Education and Skills (DfES) requirements and have had electronic mail/internet access since May 1999. Form 7 has been returned electronically for several years and the LEA has recently carried out a pupil census trial. It is in the process of finalising arrangements for a pupil-tracking programme and a comprehensive pupil database but the development has been slow.

99. Currently the authority does not have an information management strategy. E-mail communication with schools is in place but the authority has been slow to establish a formalised communications protocol. Although the education budget is top sliced to contribute to corporate ICT it is unsatisfactory that there is no detailed service level agreement. A newly appointed senior officer with responsibility for communication and co-ordination of data has begun to address some e-government issues such as the mapping of data flows both within the directorate and between schools and the LEA. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this development.

100. **Client contracts.** There are clear systems for contracting services for grounds maintenance. It was rated between satisfactory and good in the school survey placing it in the top 25 per cent of all LEAs inspected. Effective tendering and impressive monitoring processes are in place for contract management and client support for cleaning and caretaking, catering and the procurement of other goods and services.

Recommendations:

In order to improve education planning:

- continue to improve consultation and communication with, and information to, schools to ensure that LEA policies and strategies are clear and priorities understood;
- use Best Value processes as the framework for all development to include:
 - robust performance management procedures;

- a consistent framework for improved service planning;
- rigorous evaluation of outcomes; and
- in pyramid development establish procedures for monitoring and evaluation of the use of delegated resources and introduce systems to disseminate performance information and good practice.

In order to improve provision for management services:

- provide schools with information on LEA services to include details of core provision, service standards and information about alternative providers to assist them in their purchasing decisions; and
- ensure that the method for prioritising building repair and maintenance activities is clear to schools by reviewing the current processes for consultation and dissemination of information.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

101. Dorset has some very good provision for pupils with SEN in both its special and mainstream schools; there are well-respected key senior staff, good administrative systems and improving provision from the support teams. It has a strong, long-standing commitment to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, and to maintaining the existing special schools, who have a key role in implementing inclusion and meeting the needs of pupils with SEN. Much good practice is developing, but at present there is no clear cohesive strategy. The absence of a single document providing strategic guidance for the LEA and the schools, and the lack of a SEN development plan to guide and prioritise what is happening across the range of current developments, are significant weaknesses.

102. There was a review of SEN in 1997 and an inclusion policy was produced in February 2000, but the draft revised SEN policy has been slow in preparation and is only now ready for consultation, subject to approval by the education overview committee. How these documents relate to each other, to the EDP, or to the various initiatives that have been developing in both the special and mainstream schools within the county, is not sufficiently clear. At present SEN provision within the developing school pyramid structure is not being sufficiently co-ordinated and guided by the LEA as part of its SEN strategy, potentially leading to disparate practice and provision across the county.

103. Dorset has an extensive range of provision in the six special schools, the partnership special schools and in the mainstream schools. This is supplemented by the LEA's support services. The LEA and schools are acutely aware that families move to the county to avail themselves of the provision in both the LEA and the Partnership special schools. This is particularly evident for pupils with autism, where the LEA has developed a number of units in several special schools and in one mainstream school.

Statutory obligations

104. The LEA carries out its statutory duties very effectively. In 1999, 93 per cent of statements were completed within the recommended 18 weeks; in some months the figure has been as high as 100 per cent. This has been a major achievement by the SEN casework and administrative team and the LEA is now one of the highest performers nationally. The quality of the statements is good and case files contain meticulous attention to detail and sensitive and informative replies to parents and schools. This is reflected in the number of LEA decisions upheld by the SEN Tribunal. This work is supported by a small but strong Parent Partnership Scheme (PPS) which has now begun to offer families training on parenting skills and mediation work is planned for the future. Booklets for parents produced by the PPS are clear and easy to read.

105. Arrangements for the annual reviewing of statements and the production of transition reviews are good. Few schools visited were critical of either the LEA or social services directorate (SSD) in this respect. However, this effective liaison and

joint working between the two departments did not always filter down to effective and efficient support for children and families.

Improvement and value for money

106. The LEA provides satisfactory support to schools to help raise the attainment of pupils with SEN. In all but one school visited during the inspection SEN support was at least satisfactory and it was good in one third. One special school has obtained technology college status and has been identified as a beacon school. Another special school was in special measures but has improved sufficiently to be removed from that category. Overall expenditure on SEN is comparatively high, but SEN services are generally effective and provide satisfactory value for money.

107. The LEA provides a very effective support network for SENCOs, and good training for both teachers and teaching assistants. Schools are well informed of current national developments and involved in planning conferences and courses for SEN. The SEN inspector and acting head of service are highly regarded. Schools and staff interviewed during the inspection reported significant improvements in the openness, efficiency and commitment of senior LEA staff involved in SEN decisions and advice.

108. Schools receive good support from teachers in the service for sensory impaired pupils. Support from the literacy and numeracy support service (LANSS) was satisfactory in the great majority of schools visited. However, serious staffing difficulties recently experienced by the county psychology service (CPS) have caused problems for half the secondary schools and over a third of the primary schools visited, especially where urgent assessments and advice have been needed. Though individual services are providing sound support, at present, before the establishment of the new management under the PSIS, there is no common format for service planning and in some cases no current development or business plan in place.

109. As reported in paragraph 27, overall spending on SEN has been above average and the LEA has consistently spent above its allocated budget in recent years. The LEA has taken appropriate steps to ensure that overspends have been kept to a minimum and has been engaged in an urgent review of the SEN budget. Delegation arrangements in 2001/02 will bring retained spending in line with comparable LEAs. The reduction in out-of-county placements, some of which are a result of the council maintaining decisions made by a previous authority, is expected to have an impact over time. However, fees for pupils attending independent residential schools outside the county are high. Good protocols between the LEA and Social Services are beginning to affect and increase future respite services within the county and are also encouraging a gradual reduction in out of county placements. However, the LEA has yet to involve special schools sufficiently in working to reduce the number of out of county placements, and produce more imaginative packages of educational, residential and respite provision.

110. From April of this year funding for ancillary welfare assistants who support pupils with statements for high incidence needs has been delegated to schools. This is a transition year, employing the SEN Audit already used for funding pupils at

earlier stages of the SEN Code of Practice. This basis is a fair formula for the allocation of funds to schools. Schools' use of delegated SEN funding and its impact on the progress of pupils are to be monitored by the LEA's existing, and effective, three year SEN audit cycle, linked to individual education plans (IEPs) and stages of the SEN Code of Practice.

111. Schools have been consulted on these changes. However, delegation has been implemented quickly and the recent introduction of transitional funding for pupils with high incidence needs has confused some schools. Most schools visited were happy with the principles of delegation and the flexibility it gave them. Several schools reported innovative developments in some pyramids, pooling funding in order to purchase more comprehensive support from the EPS and LANSS. Nevertheless half the schools visited were not wholly clear on the principles for delegation or funding procedures. Despite the efforts of the LEA, the present arrangements need to be better explained to schools and parents.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the strategy and funding arrangements for SEN:

- produce a strategic SEN development plan that co-ordinates current developments and establishes priorities for the future;
- give a clearer explanation to schools of the arrangements for delegating SEN funds for pupils with statements; and
- keep under review the number of new placements in independent residential schools and develop alternative arrangements with the SSD and special schools, that secures, where possible, provision that is closer to home, and more effectively meets the child's needs.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

112. Management of school places is satisfactory. School organisation is a significant issue in the LEA which has a wide variation in provision. Dorset is a net importer of children from neighbouring authorities, and there is appropriate liaison with these authorities.

113. The LEA collects and analyses data well to inform accurate planning. Primary surplus places are below the county average. At January 2000 there were nineteen schools which had surplus capacity in excess of 25 per cent. Five of these had surplus places of 40 per cent or above and were the subject of recent reviews of provision. Public notices for closure of one school were withdrawn for 'wider community reasons' and for the others it was appropriately concluded that the council needed to await the effects of imminent population movements. Currently there are no school reorganisation proposals of a formal nature although informal discussions sensibly continue to take place. Primary excess places have gradually fallen and the local authority is in line to ensure all KS1 classes will comply with the maximum class size requirements by September 2001. In secondary the level of surplus places is below the average for counties. Secondary numbers are forecast to rise and only two schools have a recorded surplus in excess of 25 per cent. These are also in areas of anticipated population increase.

114. Dorset has a clear school organisation plan (SOP) that meets statutory requirements and has been approved by the school organisation committee (SOC). The SOP has some strengths but it also has two significant omissions. There is no coverage of planned developments in the special school sector or in terms of SEN units in mainstream schools and there is limited coverage of post 16 developments.

Asset management plan

115. Support for asset management is satisfactory as is the progress made in developing the asset management plan (AMP). Condition and suitability surveys of all schools have been carried out and are to be updated in a five-year cycle. Outcomes are held on an internally developed asset management database that is available to all schools on the Intranet. The directorate provides a very accessible guide on capital funding issues which explains the overarching principles and there are termly consultations with the headteachers' reference group on school capital in which details of prioritisation processes are discussed. However, despite these attempts on the part of the LEA, schools remain unclear on the criteria used to prioritise capital projects

116. Appropriately long term capital investment in schools is a declared priority of elected members because, although there has been recent impact in improving the building stock, there remains a substantial maintenance backlog. The authority has also taken an innovative approach to public private partnerships to enhance current capital investment. There remain, however, a number of schools with temporary accommodation which is in very poor condition and that will shortly need to be replaced on health and safety grounds. The LEA works appropriately with schools to

manage formula capital through regular liaison visits by qualified surveyors from the building management division.

Admissions

117. The administration of admissions to schools in Dorset is well managed, effective and a satisfactory service. It provides sound value for money and handles well the complexities caused by the mixture of provision within the county, the number of admission authorities and cross border flow. The operation of the admissions criteria for oversubscribed schools results in a fair and equitable allocation of school places. Performance indicators for satisfying parental preference are in line with comparators. Information for parents is well presented, with most complex issues clearly explained. Although the parent's guide complies with the admissions code of practice, the authority has not considered the need for information in commonly used community languages and there is no offer of translation facilities.

118. The appeals process complies with legislation and is carried out in a satisfactory and timely manner. The corporate services directorate has provided appropriate training to the independent appeals panels following the expression of concerns from some schools.

119. The LEA has recently completed a Best Value review of 'admissions and the provision of school places (including appeals)'. The review team was chaired by the head of operations in the social services directorate and comprised officers from the education and corporate services directorates. They were assisted by an officer from the county treasurer's directorate, a primary headteacher and a scrutiny group of five elected members.

120. Appropriately the review team felt it unnecessary to consider the provision of school places as it had been the subject of a significant District Audit investigation in December 1999 from which a detailed action plan had been developed and against which staff were working. For admissions it was decided that this should be a 'light touch' review. They deliberately did not pursue all the features of a Best Value review because this service had also been the subject of an in depth review in 1998 which had involved external challenge. Regrettably it was decided that unless clear evidence of failing services emerged it was inappropriate to pursue other structures and systems. It therefore remains unclear why these particular services were timetabled in year one of the Best Value process other than to comply with the use of the county's criteria matrix used for determining priorities for reviews.

121. The review was very limited in scope, although it helpfully supplemented the evidence gained in the previous review. Consultations covered the main stakeholder groups and relied upon questionnaires plus face to face and telephone interviews. Comparisons were made with evidence in the earlier review and from the South West benchmarking group. The LEA's action plan to follow up the findings of the review is weak and as such is unlikely to improve the service. There are no measurable outcomes and the majority of the recommendations are for reviews in the future. The process itself was unsatisfactory and incomplete in terms of a Best Value Review but it did endorse the significant improvements that the service

manager and his staff have made to restore confidence in the service following earlier difficulties. The service is unlikely to improve further as a result of this review.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

122. The LEA makes satisfactory provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school (EOTAS). The LEA has acted to address weaknesses in the provision for pupils excluded from school. The costs of provision are in line with those in other LEAs, and the service is now providing satisfactory value for money.

123. The proportion of pupils receiving EOTAS is higher than average. Referral systems are good, assessment and allocation of alternative provision are generally efficient and effectively managed by the children out of school group. Although the re-integration of pupils into mainstream school is often effective the LEA does not have a formal policy agreed with all schools. There is satisfactory liaison between LEA services and other agencies but, in some cases, hard pressed services have not always been able to provide the early intervention and support required.

124. The LEA's home and hospital tuition service (HHTS) provides education for pupils who are unable to attend school for medical or other reasons, including school refusal, and for the small numbers of pupils up to the age of 11 who are permanently excluded or have a fixed-term exclusion of more than 15 days. The progress of these pupils is effectively monitored, evaluated and recorded through IEPs, but termly reports do not consistently target other objectives such as re-integration. The quality of support for pupils with medical problems is satisfactory and contact time is sensibly related to their condition. However the extent of tuition for pupils refusing to attend school is unsatisfactory and, on average, pupils only receive between 5-10 hours home tuition. The LEA has, rightly, attempted to maximise the tuition available, and to stage re-integration into schools, by providing education in two tuition centres. These centres provide education for 50 pupils, but have not been registered as pupil referral units (PRUs) as required.

125. Oversight of children educated at home by their parents is sound and is principally undertaken by a small team of independent inspectors employed by the LEA.

126. The LEA's PRU provision for Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils permanently excluded from school has been unsatisfactory. The LEA responded positively and effectively to critical OFSTED inspections of two of its four PRU sites and the subsequent action plan has formed the basis for the re-organisation and development of the service. Change has been rapid and effective. The number of PRU sites have been reduced to 3 and plans are in hand to ensure access for Key Stage 3 in all units. A new head of service has improved management of provision and the service as a whole. More reliable data is now available and alternative education and training, for example through links with local FE colleges, is being more effectively co-ordinated. Very good progress has been made in improving the level of provision in the PRU. Ninety percent of pupils now receive between 20 and 25 hours tuition per week, and the LEA is on target to reach DfEE requirements a year early.

Attendance

127. The LEA's support for securing the attendance of pupils at school is satisfactory, and has some strengths. Levels of attendance in both primary and secondary schools are above the national average and unauthorised absence has fallen in both sectors. The LEA meets all its statutory and legal responsibilities. Its use of legal powers is significantly lower than other LEAs, but effective co-ordination between services, including truancy sweeps with the police, ensures that non-attendance is pursued sufficiently rigorously.

128. Targets for improving attendance have been set. The EDP strategy, to improve attendance rates and reduce exclusions has been partially successful. Good practice developed in one school is now being disseminated as planned, supported by recent government funding for Learning Support Units. Procedures for monitoring and analysing attendance data are sound and continue to improve, but there has been some slippage in the intended introduction of a common attendance analysis and recording system for schools. Guidance to schools provides helpful advice on registration and improving attendance, and sets out clearly the respective responsibilities of the LEA and schools.

129. The education welfare service (EWS) is principally responsible for securing improved attendance. It also plays a significant role in co-ordinating multi-agency support for social inclusion and four education welfare officers (EWOs) have additional responsibilities for inter-agency work with, for example, the Traveller education service and the youth offending team (YOT). The EWS is now almost back to full strength and is effectively managed. The costs of the EWS are above the average for similar LEAs, but support is sound and, given its wider support roles and improvements in attendance, it is providing satisfactory value for money.

130. EWOs are effectively deployed to support pyramids of schools and data are being used increasingly effectively to differentiate the levels of support that schools receive. Support was satisfactory or better in almost all schools visited. It was good in a fifth, particularly where the EWO was providing or co-ordinating multi-agency support, a key factor in more isolated rural settings. However, not all schools were sufficiently clear on the balance of work of EWOs in improving attendance and in supporting multi-agency work, for example in relation to exclusions.

Behaviour support

131. On balance the LEA's support to schools in dealing with problems of behaviour is unsatisfactory. Strengths, for example in the LEA's good record in reducing overall levels of exclusions in the last two years, are outweighed by the weaknesses in strategic planning and provision of support in mainstream schools.

132. Overall exclusion rates are below the national average in primary and secondary schools and lower than in similar LEAs. The LEA has kept schools informed of changing legislation regarding exclusions. The behaviour support service (BSS) and county psychological service (CPS) have worked effectively with other services to provide support to individual schools. However, the BSS in particular has not had a formal policy for prioritising its workload, making it difficult to meet its

expected contributions to multi-agency support for exclusions, re-integration, individual pupil support and staff training. Both the EPS and the BSS are comparatively small. The BSS in particular is under-resourced and over-stretched. Recent illnesses and staff losses have further reduced the service. Most schools surveyed were critical of the LEA's provision, rating it as unsatisfactory and school visits broadly confirmed this view.

133. The LEA has delegated funding for behaviour support to schools in this financial year as part of overall funding for SEN. Schools visited varied widely in their understanding of delegated provision. Less than half the primary schools were wholly clear on the delegation of the BSS itself and how they were going to meet any future needs. Half the secondary schools and over two-thirds of primary schools visited were not intending to buy fully into the LEA's service due to problems with the extent and effectiveness of support they have received in the past. The LEA has established an integrated service (PSIS) to make more efficient and effective use of resources, including those for behaviour support, but delegation has not been well enough co-ordinated with these wider service developments. Individual agreements with schools are negotiated on a case by case basis, but the LEA cannot guarantee that it will have sufficient resources to meet the needs of those schools who wish to purchase support in the future.

134. There are weaknesses in the behaviour support plan (BSP) and the LEA has not made all the improvements to its provision for behaviour support identified in the plan. The strategy for improving behaviour has lacked clear and incisive analysis of needs. Key activities in the BSP designed to develop effective guidance and behaviour strategies with schools; and to make more effective use of the educational psychology service (EPS), have not been implemented. Initial revisions to the BSP have not yet resulted in a comprehensive and effective strategy document that reflects developments that have taken place in service provision and how the LEA intends to improve behaviour and reduce exclusions.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

135. The authority's arrangements for health and safety, welfare and child protection are satisfactory and have more strengths than weaknesses.

136. The LEA takes reasonable steps to discharge its statutory duties for health and safety. The properly constituted safety committee has appropriate representation from teachers. An up to date safety policy is in place that recognises the role of governors and headteachers and schools were consulted on its development. A rolling programme of health and safety audits operates on a three yearly, or slightly longer, cycle but there is no transparency over the selection of schools in any one year. These audits use a comprehensive checklist which also acts as a self review aid for schools. No issues of non-compliance have been detected to date. Appropriate arrangements are in place to support schools over health and safety matters relating to science, design and technology and physical education and a range of appropriate guidance material is provided to schools.

137. The health and safety officer is responsive to accidents and incidents notified through the accident reporting process. Where an incident raises generally

applicable issues it is followed up with a guidance note for all schools. Training sessions are offered for governors, headteachers, and staff on such new arrangements. The corporate health and safety officer is making safety manuals and advice available, initially on CD ROM with a view to their being available on the Intranet. The council has an occupational health policy and an occupational health service. This is available to schools and includes the services of a counsellor. There is a council policy, and guidance, on stress at work.

138. The council's arrangements for child protection are generally satisfactory. The directorate contributes to the local area child protection committee at an appropriate level and plays a full role in developing agreed procedures and multi-agency staff training. There is an up-to-date list of designated persons in schools. Child protection procedures are circulated to all schools and there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring children on the child protection register and taking appropriate action. All these aspects are strengths of the LEA. However, the LEA does not maintain a list of the training received by school designated staff and does not know, therefore, the extent to which they are appropriately trained.

Children in public care

139. Support for the 187 children in public care (CiPC) in Dorset is good, and continues to improve. It meets statutory requirements and provides good value for money. Support was at least satisfactory in all the schools visited with experience of CiPC and was good in two-thirds.

140. Close, and very effective, joint working procedures have been established between education and the social services directorate (SSD), culminating in September 2000 in the jointly funded appointment of a CiPC co-ordinator. There are good links with other education services such as the EWS, home tuition, and multi-agency projects such as INCLUDE. The educational achievement and pastoral support of CiPC are actively promoted by a steering group consisting of key services, agencies and elected members. Activities are well co-ordinated across key strategic plans, including the EDP, Quality Protects and children's services plans. Challenging targets have been set and good progress is being made. The LEA has exceeded its GCSE targets and the attainment of CiPC pupils in Key Stage 2 tests is above that nationally and in similar LEAs.

141. Monitoring of CiPC is good. Data on changes of placement is collected and analysed and schools are regularly updated. Education and SSD maintain appropriate databases and information on CiPC, including exclusions and attendance, is effectively shared. However, data on the attainment and targets set for these children are not systematically built into annual target setting with schools. All schools have designated teachers and the LEA maintains an up to date register. Education and SSD have collaborated effectively to provide joint guidance and training for schools on corporate parenting arrangements, referrals and information transfer, and on the development of clear, well framed personal education plans (PEPs) to set targets and monitor the progress of CiPC. PEPs will be completed and form part of the overall social care package for each CiPC during the Autumn Term 2001.

Gifted and talented children

142. The provision for gifted and talented children is satisfactory. Although the LEA has no action plan, an EDP priority identifies the intention to promote the achievement of excellence.

143. The LEA appropriately supports Year 5 mathematics days for able pupils expected to attain level 5 and above at Key Stage 2. In-service training is available for teachers to provide challenging activities for gifted pupils in Years 1 to 4 who are two or more years above their peer group. A number of clusters and pyramid groups have begun to provide activities for able pupils which develop their problem solving skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

144. The LEA supports the promotion of arts education. Pupils' and staff skills in dance and drama are successfully developed by LEA staff and external providers. Indian dance, world music and a range of multi-cultural opportunities are encouraged through work in some of the pyramids. The Dorset music service has begun to plan its multi-music work to provide continuity of provision and add to the already wide opportunities for talented musicians in the five-orchestra groups and the Dorset Youth Music Theatre. Arising from an initiative taken by middle school heads, there is a Year 4 project for able pupils focusing on setting higher targets for pupils.

Ethnic minority children including Travellers

145. Overall, provision to meet the needs of pupils from ethnic minorities, including the children of Travellers, is unsatisfactory. The support provided for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) and for Traveller children has a number of strengths. However, this is outweighed by weaknesses in the LEA's development of policies to raise awareness of equal opportunity and racial harassment, and in the reliability of its data on the number and attainment of minority ethnic pupils in its schools.

146. The LEA has not updated its policies on equal opportunities since 1995, nor systematically ensured that schools have a policy in place. It has recognised this weakness and new policies are being produced, but the LEA has not been successful in impressing on schools the importance of identifying the performance of minority ethnic children. As a consequence, it is unable to accurately identify the achievement and relative performance of minority ethnic pupils, other than Travellers, to ensure that priorities and resources are appropriately targeted and target setting with schools is effective. The revised EDP for 2001-02 recognises the need to prioritise the development of this data. Owing to the action of some schools, the LEA cannot be sure that its recent survey of ethnicity required to obtain future Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMTAG) funding is wholly reliable.

147. The estimated percentage of minority ethnic pupils (0.9 per cent) is well below that found nationally and below that in similar LEAs. Pupils are spread widely across the LEA's schools. The ethnic minority achievement service (EMAS), and the Traveller Education Service (TES) provide satisfactory, and in some respects good, education for the 155 pupils receiving EAL support and the 74 Travellers' children currently in Dorset schools. Service development plans and service level statements

provide a clear framework for the use of EMTAG funding and the deployment of staff in each service. Both provide good guidance on the respective responsibilities of schools and the LEA, and on the support available. The TES provides good advice on the culture and language of Travellers. Monitoring of pupils progress is sound; the nature of support is clear and targets are sufficiently specific. Eight schools visited had received support from these services: all EAL support was judged to be satisfactory and was good in one school; two schools had received good TES support.

148. Both services are small and well managed. LEA data indicates that the number of pupils receiving EMAS support has doubled in the last year. However, the resources of the service have not increased. Given this increase in demand, the services currently provide good value for money.

Measures to combat racism

149. Support to schools for combating racism is poor and reflects the very limited progress in addressing equal opportunities issues by Dorset County Council as a whole. The council has only recently decided to adopt the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Equality standard, with the aim of reaching Level 1 by March 2002. The development of policies, and steps to formally co-ordinate cross-directorate planning and action to meet the recommendations of the Macpherson inquiry report into the death of Stephen Lawrence, have been very slow.

150. The LEA recognises that not enough has been done since a previous equal opportunities education policy was issued to schools. It has now adopted the CRE guidance 'Learning for All' as a framework for policy and action, and is in the process of developing written guidance and associated training for schools and LEA staff, to be implemented by September 2001. Funding and officer time for this have been built into the revised EDP, along with a monitoring and evaluation programme in 2001-02. However, the LEA's problems in developing a comprehensive and reliable database on minority ethnic pupils and their performance will inevitably hamper overall developments.

Social exclusion

151. Current weaknesses in the LEA's promotion of social inclusion are outweighed by strengths in provision and in some imaginative initiatives "on the ground". The LEA is beginning to make adequate provision for its most vulnerable pupils. Links with partners and other agencies have helped to promote social inclusion in disadvantaged parts of the LEA. Nevertheless there are important aspects of the LEA's provision that require improvement.

152. The promotion of social inclusion is a key aim of education but nowhere is this explicit in the EDP. The council has no all-embracing equal opportunities policy and there are weaknesses in the LEA's promotion of equal opportunity and in combating potential social and educational exclusion of minority ethnic pupils. The LEA works with some schools and independent trainers to give pupils access to a wider range of cultures and beliefs, but has some way to go in preparing all its young people to play a full part in a multi-racial society.

153. Nevertheless, national and European funded projects in a range of locations help schools to effectively reduce the risk of disaffection amongst Key Stage 4 pupils. LEA pyramid funding supports local school and community initiatives that mitigate against the isolation experienced in some localities. Partnerships with police, health and voluntary agencies are focused effectively on support for disaffected young people, crime reduction and actions against drug and alcohol abuse. There are creative ideas, for example in the multi-agency work in youth advice and information centres and in personal development projects such as 'Tides'; and the LEA has been designated as a Beacon authority for its work in drugs education. Strategic partnerships with health and social services are developing provision for vulnerable pupils, particularly those with SEN, and are leading to good work in support of children in public care.

154. Better co-ordination with local further education provision is planned to improve the provision and management of the service for excluded pupils. However, the LEA only recently began monitoring the impact of lifelong learning and social inclusion initiatives in helping progression for young people. Education services and other departments do maintain and exchange information on pupils, but the development of a comprehensive pupil database is overdue and continues to delay more efficient monitoring by all agencies of those pupils most at risk of social and educational exclusion. The LEA's inclusion policy appropriately seeks to provide high quality mainstream education for the majority of pupils who have special educational needs, and commands widespread support from schools. Nevertheless, further clarity over resourcing, training and support, is required to increase schools' confidence to implement the strategies.

Recommendations:

In order to make the SOP a comprehensive plan:

- include sections within the SOP to cover planned developments in the special schools, SEN units in mainstream schools, and post-16 developments across the sectors.

In order to improve capital management:

- ensure that the method for prioritising capital projects is clear to schools by reviewing the current processes for consultation and dissemination of information.

In order to improve admissions procedures:

- consider the provision of admissions information, at least offering translation facilities in commonly used community languages.

In order to improve provision for pupils educated other than at school:

- take immediate steps to ensure that tuition centres maintained by the LEA to provide education for EOTAS, are registered as pupil referral units, as required by the Education Act 1996; and
- review the level of LEA tuition provided for pupils who, other than for medical reasons, are not educated at school, with the objective of increasing overall provision to 25 hours per week.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- ensure that the revised BSP:
 - contains a sufficiently clear audit of needs and identifies priorities for action;
 - has a firm strategic plan for meeting the targets, including SMART criteria for monitoring and evaluating progress towards those targets;
 - reflects the restructured provision and revised strategy in the PSIS for supporting behaviour, reducing truancy and improving attendance; and
- delay further individual service level agreements until such time as the LEA can issue a clear service level statement defining what schools can expect to purchase under the revised BSP and PSIS.

In order to effectively monitor child protection issues:

- develop and implement a system for monitoring the training records of staff designated for child protection to secure 100 per cent training coverage.

In order to improve the provision for children in public care:

- ensure that data on the performance of CiPC is incorporated into the development of the LEA's Individual Pupil Database at the outset, and forms part of the target setting process for schools.

In order to develop the provision for gifted and talented children:

- develop with schools a policy and planned strategy for the enrichment of the curriculum to utilise the gifts and talents of all children.

In order to improve the provision for minority ethnic pupils including Travellers:

- obtain comprehensive and reliable information about the numbers and achievement of minority ethnic pupils, incorporate it into the LEA's individual pupil data and use it in setting LEA, school and individual pupil targets; and
- ensure that, with increasing needs, the level of service for schools from EMAS and TES can be effectively delivered within the resources available.

In order to establish procedures to combat racism:

- implement the agreed guidance and training on combating racism, and procedures and protocols for reporting and responding to racist incidents in schools and the LEA. Involve schools, the authority's council for race equality and other stakeholders in an evaluation of the implementation and training programme.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve education planning, performance management and procedures for Best Value:

- establish a consistent framework for service planning, including the EDP to include rigorous evaluation of outcomes, precise time scales and more measurable targets;
- continue to improve consultation and communication with, and information to, schools to ensure that LEA policies and strategies are clear and priorities understood;
- implement robust performance management procedures in line with corporate strategy;
- make more rigorous the procedures used in Best value reviews to include a wider range of performance indicators, ensure significant and informed challenge to existing service practice and improved action plans which have measurable and demonstrable outcomes;
- provide schools with information on LEA services to include details of core provision, service standards and information about alternative providers to assist them in their purchasing decisions; and
- ensure that the support for school improvement is evaluated in relation to its impact, including the rigour of the challenge to schools when setting targets.

In order to improve financial management:

- ensure that corporate recharges to the education directorate are subject to agreed standards in terms of specification and costs, involving service level agreements where appropriate; and
- put in place appropriate mechanisms to identify and challenge schools with surpluses.

In order to improve transparency and equity for schools:

- further develop the role of BAGS, and other appropriate groups, ensuring that information is satisfactorily disseminated to all headteachers;
- continue to review formula funding with schools to incorporate aspects of the authority's needs-led model and ensure a clear timetable for future action; and
- ensure that the criteria and methods for prioritising building repair and maintenance activities and capital projects are clear to schools by reviewing the current procedures for consultation and dissemination of information.

In order to extend the range of LEA data and its effective use:

- develop and formalise the procedures for gathering information and data on schools such that the scope of the data is widened and information systems are used effectively;
- ensure that the plans for establishing a comprehensive pupil data and tracking system are implemented as soon as possible;
- improve the range of analysed data provided for schools to include added value, grade predictions and target ranges to support target setting;
- ensure that the data on the performance of CiPC is incorporated into the development of the LEA's Individual Pupil Database at the outset, and forms part of the target setting process for schools; and

- obtain comprehensive and reliable information about the numbers and achievement of minority ethnic pupils, incorporate it into the LEA's individual pupil database and use it in setting school and individual pupil targets.

In order to raise standards in numeracy:

- ensure an effective and sustained management structure for the future and provide targeted support to areas of greatest need; and
- develop and implement with schools an effective strategy to raise standards of numeracy in Key Stage 3.

In order to improve the support for schools causing concern:

- ensure that the procedures for the identification of and support for improvement are robustly and speedily implemented in all cases.

In order to ensure effective facilitation of and accountability for developments in pyramids of schools:

- in pyramid development establish procedures for monitoring and evaluation of the use of delegated resources and introduce systems to disseminate performance information and good practice.

In order to improve the strategy and funding arrangements for SEN:

- produce a strategic SEN development plan that co-ordinates current developments and establishes priorities for the future;
- give a clearer explanation to schools of the arrangements for delegating funds for pupils with statements; and
- keep under review the number of new placements in independent residential schools and develop alternative arrangements with the SSD and special schools that secures, where possible, provision that is closer to home, and more effectively meets the child's needs.

In order to make the SOP a comprehensive plan:

- include sections within the SOP to cover planned developments in the special schools, SEN units in mainstream schools and post-16 developments across the sectors.

In order to improve provision for pupils educated other than at school:

- take immediate steps to ensure that tuition centres maintained by the LEA to provide education for EOTAS, are registered as pupil referral units, as required by the Education Act 1996; and
- review the level of LEA tuition provided for pupils who, other than for medical reasons are not educated at school, with the objective of increasing the overall provision to 25 hours per week.

In order to improve the support for behaviour:

- ensure that the revised BSP:
 - contains a sufficiently clear audit of needs and identifies priorities for action;
 - has a firm strategic plan for meeting the targets, including SMART criteria for monitoring and evaluating progress towards those targets;

- reflects the restructured provision and revised strategy in the PSIS for supporting behaviour, reducing truancy and improving attendance; and
- delay further individual service level agreements until such time as the LEA can issue a clear service level statement defining what schools can expect to purchase under the revised PSIS and BSP.

In order to effectively monitor child protection issues:

- develop and implement a system for monitoring the training records of staff designated for child protection to secure 100 percent training coverage.

In order to develop the provision for gifted and talented children:

- develop with schools a policy and planned strategy for the enrichment of the curriculum to utilise the gifts and talents of all children.

In order to improve the provision for and monitoring of all elements of social inclusion:

- in consultation with minority communities, consider the need for, and practicality of, actively recruiting more governors from or representative of these groups;
- consider the provision of admissions information, at least offering translation facilities in commonly used community languages;
- ensure that, with increasing needs, the level of service for schools from EMAS and TES can be effectively delivered within the resources available; and
- implement the agreed guidance and training on combating racism and procedures and protocols for reporting and responding to racist incidents in schools and the LEA. Involve schools, the authority's council for race equality and other stakeholders in an evaluation of the implementation and training programme.

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