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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

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

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation, and on discussions with members, staff in the education and other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 62 per cent.

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

COMMENTARY

4. The area served by Devon LEA is large and mostly rural. Local government re-organisation in 1998 had a dramatic impact on the authority. While it reduced the land area covered by the LEA by only three per cent, it cut the authority's budget by a third. The loss of key personnel to Torbay and Plymouth, and the need to rationalize while recruiting new and senior staff, both caused difficulties. The new LEA inherited schools that were diverse, widely spread and, in the case of many primary schools, often small.

5. Social disadvantage overall is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is relatively low and the percentage of adults with higher educational qualifications is above statistical neighbours. Exeter is the only significant urban area, although throughout the county there are pockets of social deprivation. Rates of pupil mobility are low.

6. Schools perform in line with those in similar LEAs and nationally. Attainment at Key Stage 2 is rising at faster than the national rate, but in other respects performance should be better. Standards in Exeter schools are consistently below the rest of the county. At Key Stage 3, standards in English have fallen since 1998 and, at Key Stage 4, the percentage of boys achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-C is well below that in similar LEAs. Provisional results at Key Stage 3 and 4 for 2000 showed no overall improvement and were disappointing. Key Stage 4 targets for five or more GCSE grades A*-C and average points score were met; substantial further improvement will be required if those for 2001 and 2002 are to be achieved.

7. Local government re-organisation meant that major changes were needed in the way the LEA supported its schools. Although the LEA responded positively, the new ways of working were not well received in many schools. The LEA faced considerable difficulty in establishing common goals and systems, and in knitting together different organisational cultures and management styles into a new whole-county structure. The comparatively critical response from schools to the survey questionnaire and evidence collected during interviews, suggest that some unintended effects of the changes are still being felt.

8. Strategic management is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. On major strategic matters, the authority's approach is lacking in clarity. The council's current strategic plan provides no detail of intended outcomes and how these might be achieved, making it impossible to monitor progress. In contrast, financial decision-making is effective; clearly structured and consistent with agreed priorities. The allocation of resources to priorities is good and members have shown good resolve in maintaining the real value of individual school budgets.

9. The LEA has tried, but with only partial success, to embrace the national agenda. While the Education Development Plan (EDP) has strengths, it also has several important weaknesses. Support for the national literacy and numeracy strategies has been good, but in some other areas of support for school improvement and individual pupils, potentially effective provision has only recently been put in place. The LEA's practice of phase advisers visiting every school twice a year to monitor progress is inefficient and no longer necessary. The LEA is not yet effectively challenging its schools and critical aspects of

support, for example in identifying and providing timely support for schools with difficulties, have not been consistently good enough.

10. In its short life, the authority can point to some important achievements. Once it has been made aware of their difficulties, the LEA's support for schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses has been good. Performance management is steadily helping to achieve greater consistency of support. Enhanced use of electronic transfer of data is helping to improve communication. Asset management and aspects of support for special educational needs have also been improved.

11. Several services perform well. Financial, personnel, client and transport services provide good support to schools. Although not a major focus of the inspection, the schools library service is also valued.

12. The following functions are performed effectively:

- management of the national literacy and numeracy strategies;
- financial management, including allocation and management of resources, monitoring of schools' financial arrangements and co-ordination of external funding;
- advice to governing bodies;
- provision of school places;
- management of admissions appeals;
- provision of free home-to-school transport;
- ensuring health and safety of staff and pupils;
- ensuring minority ethnic pupils, including Traveller children, are able to access schools;
- monitoring and supporting improvement in the educational attainment of children in public care; and
- combating social exclusion.

13. Most other functions are performed satisfactorily. The following functions are not exercised adequately:

- monitoring, challenge, intervention in and some aspects of support for schools;
- support for Information and Communication Technology in the curriculum and for administration;
- identifying and securing timely improvement in schools with difficulties;
- policy making and planning of provision for special educational needs;
- assessing children with special needs and supporting schools in applying the Code of Practice and the principles of inclusion;
- promotion and enforcement of regular school attendance; and
- support to improve behaviour.

14. The authority has numerically more strengths than weaknesses and there is evidence of significant recent improvement. Nevertheless, there are areas of concern, as the LEA is aware, that need to be dealt with effectively. Although, for example, support for schools in difficulties is good, once others have identified the problems, the LEA needs to be better at

preventing decline rather than responding to it. The developments that have been noted across the authority need to be consolidated, sustained and built on. Areas of weakness need to be eradicated and greater consistency achieved in the LEA's support for schools.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

15. Devon schools are diverse, widely spread and serve mostly rural areas. In contrast, the LEA also covers the city of Exeter, and small market and seaside towns where there are pockets of social deprivation. Local government re-organisation in 1998 reduced the population served by Devon LEA by 40 per cent and cut its overall budget by a third. At the same time, the LEA's land area was reduced by only three per cent.

16. In January 2000, there were 54,531 pupils in the LEA's primary schools, 38,816 pupils in secondary schools and 802 pupils in special schools. There were 6,821 pupils aged under-five in LEA schools. The primary school population has reached a peak and is beginning a slow decline. Rolls are growing by a few hundred pupils each year in the secondary sector; a trend set to continue until 2004.

17. Educational disadvantage, expressed as the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (excluding nursery and sixth form pupils) is well below national figures in both primary and secondary schools. Only three of the eight districts of Devon fall in the middle range of the Department of Environment, Transport and Regions index of Local Deprivation (1998 figures). The percentage of adults with higher educational qualifications is above that for statistical neighbours and nationally, although these figures mask local variations. The proportion of ethnic minority pupils is around half that of statistical neighbours. Rates of pupil mobility are low.

18. In 1999, the percentage of primary-age pupils in special schools was slightly above statistical neighbours, but below the national average. At secondary level, the corresponding figure was above both statistical neighbours and nationally. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need was slightly above the national average for primary and well above for secondary schools.

19. The LEA has 374 schools:

Nursery	1
Primary	323
Secondary	37
Special	11
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	2

Forty-two of the primary schools have nursery classes. Of the 37 secondary schools, four were formerly grant-maintained, 19 have sixth forms and one is selective.

20. A third of Devon's primary schools have rolls below 100 and one in six has fewer than 50 pupils. The average size is about 25 per cent smaller than nationally. Secondary schools are larger than average, a third with more than 1,200 students. The majority of

pupils transfer to their local secondary school at age 11. In Exeter, however, there is a three-tier system, with transfer at age eight, 12 and to a tertiary college at 16.

Performance

21. Data collected by OFSTED show that the overall baseline attainment level of pupils beginning primary education is in line with that of statistical neighbours and the national average.

22. Schools perform in line with schools nationally and the targets for 2000 were broadly met in 1999. In Exeter, standards in reading and writing at Key Stage 1 are well below the rest of the county. At Key Stage 2, attainment throughout the county has improved since 1998, in line with progress towards 2002 targets. Again, the performance of Exeter schools is lower than it should be. At Key Stage 3, standards have fallen in English since 1998. In Exeter, standards are well below 1997 levels and falling. At Key Stage 4, attainment across most of the county has been steadily improving and is above the national average. In Exeter schools, however, attainment has been below average since 1996.

23. In 1999, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2 or above at Key Stage 1 was broadly in line with national figures for reading and writing, and above the national figure for mathematics. At Key Stage 2, the attainment of pupils was broadly in line with national figures in each of the core tests. At both key stages, all of the results were broadly in line with statistical neighbours.

24. At Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above was in line with figures nationally and for statistical neighbours across all core subjects. At Key Stage 4, the percentages of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-C and the average points score were also in line with both national and statistical neighbour figures. The percentage of boys gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C was well below statistical neighbours. The number of pupils who gained two or more A levels was also below that for statistical neighbours and nationally.

25. Provisional results for 2000 show a modest improvement at Key Stage 1 and further progress at Key Stage 2 in English and science. Improvement at Key Stage 2 was, however, not maintained in Exeter schools. Overall results at Key Stage 3 and 4 show no overall improvement and were disappointing.

26. Recent OFSTED data show the percentage of primary schools graded good or very good to be above statistical neighbours and nationally. Teaching grades improved between the first and second inspections in line with those nationally. In contrast, reports have continued to highlight adequacy of accommodation for effective delivery of the curriculum as a concern.

27. The percentage of secondary schools graded good or very good was below statistical neighbours and nationally. The quality of teaching has, on the whole, continued to be above average and has improved between the inspections broadly in line with national figures. The schools are not reported as having any outstanding features.

28. Attendance in Devon primary and secondary schools is slightly above national levels, but below that of statistical neighbours. Unauthorised absence in primary and secondary schools is in line with statistical neighbours and slightly below national levels. The level of attendance has remained static in the past three years and there has been a small increase in the number of schools where rates are unsatisfactory.

29. Permanent exclusion rates in primary schools deteriorated in 1997/8 and were above the average for statistical neighbours and nationally. Secondary school rates were in line with statistical neighbours although below the national average. Recent LEA data show the rates of permanent exclusions have fallen at both primary and secondary levels.

Funding

30. Planned expenditure per pupil in 2000/01 is below the national average, but adequate and broadly in line with statistical neighbours and county averages.

	Local Schools Budget per pupil
Devon	£2667
Statistical neighbours	£2709
English counties	£2692
All LEAs in England	£2817

Source: Section 52 analysis

31. Devon's Education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per school-age pupil for 2000/2001 is about five per cent below the national average reflecting the overall low level of social deprivation. The council has consistently spent at or very close to SSA on education. All of the increase in SSA for 2000/01 was passed on to schools.

	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
Education budget (£m)	227.6	243.3	257.1
Education SSA (£m)	228.7	243.8	257.1
Budget as percentage of SSA	99.5	99.8	100.0

Source: LEA Form 2 inspection return

32. The level of delegation is low at 80.5 per cent, compared with an average of 83 per cent for statistical neighbours, and 84 per cent for counties and nationally. The low figure results largely from the unavoidably high costs of home-to-school transport and the funding for special educational needs which schools control but which is not formally delegated. Expenditure on central administration at £52 per pupil is among the highest of county authorities, although well within the Government's target ceiling of £65 per pupil.

33. The funding formula is quite complex although the majority of schools are satisfied with the clarity of the rationale. A working group with representatives of headteachers is currently looking at all aspects of school funding including the scope for further delegation. This is an appropriate response that should help the LEA to move towards meeting new national delegation targets.

34. The council has been active and successful in securing capital receipts and grants from a variety of sources to support a sharply increased capital programme for school building improvements in 2000/2001. Good relations with district councils have ensured useful contributions from local developers. Two school building projects are currently being funded through modest public private partnership schemes and the LEA has also begun to explore this route for the major work required for the proposed school re-organisation in Exeter (see Section 5, under 'The supply of school places'). The council provides information to schools on external grant opportunities and runs a unit that successfully supports schools in writing bids.

Council structure

35. Liberal Democrats have run the county council since 1998. There are 29 Liberal Democrat, 15 Conservative, six non-aligned and four Labour members. The structure and operation of the council was 'modernised' in May 1999, with the creation of a single executive committee to take on the decision making powers and duties of previous sub-committees. The executive is supported by five scrutiny committees (including those for lifelong learning and joint children's services) and an appeals committee. The county council remains the overall policymaking body.

36. Although executive chairs provide good leadership, the executive model has not yet fully bedded down. Scrutiny committees are currently too large and smaller working groups are only now being developed. This should help to make the scrutiny process more effective. An advisory forum provides an opportunity for users of education services to express their views directly to members.

37. Education, arts and libraries is one of five Devon county council directorates. The directorate is divided into four branches: curriculum and effectiveness; services to individuals; lifelong learning; and policy and strategy. Each is headed by a second tier officer.

The Education Development Plan

38. Devon's Education Development Plan (EDP) identifies eight priority areas:

- challenging and supporting all schools and disseminating good practice, monitoring school performance and taking action to support schools causing concern;
- raising literacy and numeracy standards at each key stage;
- raising the standard of teaching and the level of pupils' attainment in ICT;
- improving the quality of teaching and management through securing professional development for staff and governors;
- improving standards reached by under achieving pupils – in particular by under achieving boys;

- improving pupils' achievement and personal development through key curriculum initiatives;
- raising pupils' attainment by extending inclusive education, particularly for pupils with special educational needs;
- extending pupils' participation in, and parents support for, education as a lifelong process.

39. Although some of the priorities lack a sharp focus, the EDP is satisfactory overall and was approved in April 1999 for three years. The audit is thorough and has been updated for 2000/2001. Monitoring strategies, time-scales, responsibilities and costings are provided for each activity. Plans and activities are clearly set out.

40. In contrast, too many success criteria do not include measurable outcomes. The EDP also includes too broad a range of activities, many of which are not justified on the basis of the audit. The supplement for 2000/2001 removes some activities from the EDP, but adds an equal number without any clear rationale. The 'target groups' for the activities are sometimes too wide and insufficiently focused on removing underachievement. Some activities are simply lists of actions and do not provide coherent strategies for improvement. Opportunities have also been missed to establish links between the activities. There are inadequate references to other statutory plans. The EDP also fails to address a number of issues related to inclusion concerning support for pupils with special educational needs.

41. The plan is feasible. Key Stage 2 targets were exceeded in 2000 although the targets for 2002 remain challenging. At Key Stage 4, targets for 2000 at five or more GCSE grades A*-C and average points score were also met. Achievement of those for 2001 and 2002 will require substantial improvement.

42. Most schools support the EDP and see it as relevant to their needs. Consultation was generally handled well, and many schools indicated that the LEA had responded positively to their earlier concerns. The EDP was found to be feeding through directly to school development plans in two of the schools visited, although very few schools were aware that the LEA expected them to identify links with the EDP in their own plans. Many schools were aware that they had participated in EDP activities, but were less clear how teachers and pupils had benefited from them.

43. Some progress on implementing the EDP has been made in all priority areas. Activities to address boys' underachievement have been received positively in primary schools, although they are at a very early stage in secondary. Work is taking place to support the emotional development of infant pupils, for example through 'nurture centres'. Considerable work has gone into implementing the National Grid for Learning initiative (NGfL) to install hardware and connect all schools to the internet. Modifications have been made to the criteria for LEA intervention to reflect the new OFSTED category of underachieving schools. An EDP review panel, involving headteachers, was set up in March 2000.

The allocation of resources to priorities

44. The allocation of resources to identified priorities is good. Elected members explicitly take account of agreed priorities and values, when agreeing budget changes. There are annual targets for efficiency savings in order to maximize front-line services and a lot of work is done each year to ensure savings are made where commitments are reduced. Maintaining the real value of individual school budgets by fully funding increases in pay, pensions and floor areas has been a high priority. Where growth money has become available it has been allocated in line with agreed priorities. Additional funding, for example, has been provided this year to help primary schools raise attainment in literacy and numeracy and to support inclusion.

45. Officers have appropriate discretion to redirect any savings within each service area to other priorities. Overspending in 1999/2000 on special educational needs, for example, was met from savings elsewhere in the education budget. An underspend across the council as a whole in 1999/2000 is being used to help reduce the backlog in repairs of school building and replacement. The council's priority to build strong local communities is clearly reflected in the protection the delegation scheme provides for small primary schools.

46. Co-ordination of external funding is also a strength. The LEA has made good use of its relatively limited opportunities to access external funding and has managed the funds secured well. The LEA consults schools on the use of the Standards Fund grant and has been appropriately selective in the activities to be funded.

47. Structures for the implementation of Best Value are in place and the Best Value Performance Plan has received a satisfactory audit.

48. A pilot Best Value review of the education welfare service was led by the assistant director and completed in March 2000. The review was thorough, conducted to a tight time-scale and provided a clear agenda for action. Consultation was wide although, mainly through lack of time and resources, did not extend to parents and pupils. Due to a lack of reliable benchmarked performance data, there was also only limited comparison with best practice in other LEAs. The lessons learnt from the pilot are now being used to inform future Best Value reviews.

49. The inspection confirmed the findings of the review that, although the service is provided at relatively low cost, its overall support for attendance is unsatisfactory. The action taken by the LEA following the review to devolve approximately 25 per cent of the budget to schools was a cautious outcome although it was generally welcomed, particularly by secondary schools. The LEA intends to monitor the impact of the devolved funding with a view to extending it in future. Although the current capacity of the service to bring about improvement without external assistance is doubtful, appropriate steps are being taken to address difficulties in the management of the service.

50. The significance of Best Value is well understood within the education directorate. The directorate has adopted the European quality foundation excellence model to support its work in service evaluation and improvement, and information on cost and performance generated in using the model is promoting a Best Value approach in all services. Groups of

services will be reviewed in line with the Fair Funding framework. A review of support services for schools is scheduled for 2000/01. Reviews of early years provision, led by the social services directorate, community education and transport provision, including school transport, are also taking place this year.

51. The delegation scheme includes a brief but clear statement of Best Value principles. However, the LEA provides very little information on alternative service providers and, so far, Best Value has had little impact on schools.

52. Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- determine and implement appropriate strategies to address the causes of the relatively low attainment of pupils in some Exeter schools;
- in collaboration with headteachers and governors, devise appropriate strategies to remove underachievement in secondary schools and secure improved liaison between primary and secondary schools to ensure better continuity of the curriculum and progression from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 to raise attainment at Key Stage 3;
- enhance the opportunities for members to contribute to the work of scrutiny committees, in particular in monitoring schools' performance and the progress of schools with identified weaknesses by developing the use of smaller working groups;
- sharpen the focus of the EDP by:
 - a) clarifying the rationale for various activities to better reflect the audit;
 - b) targeting activities more clearly at point of need;
 - c) improving the strategy for inclusion;
 - d) tightening up success criteria to include clearly measurable outcomes; and
- support schools in adopting Best Value principles by making more information available on alternative service providers.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

53. Through its satisfactory financial management, the council is contributing directly to supporting school improvement. Asset management is improving and thereby also contributing positively to improving pupils' learning environment. Client support services, the school library service and the provision of school transport are also positive features of the LEA's work.

54. Re-organisation of schools in Exeter is being planned in order to raise standards. Various partnerships have facilitated the setting up of a range of projects and these are contributing to enhancing pupils' learning opportunities. Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) are particularly well supported through training, conferences and regular local meetings. Good training and support packages are also making a positive impact on helping to alleviate bullying.

55. In contrast, the LEA's approach to inclusion lacks clarity. Policy-making and planning for special educational needs are under-developed. Expertise available in the special schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and the PRUs has not been successfully exploited through outreach arrangements. Support for attendance and behaviour are unsatisfactory. In all these areas, lack of support is working against the inclusion of pupils and is a potential barrier to school improvement.

Monitoring, challenge, intervention and support

56. This is an area where there are a number of weaknesses. Monitoring is comprehensive but inefficient, levels of challenge are unsatisfactory and support for schools causing concern is variable. The LEA's approach to monitoring, challenging, and supporting schools lacks clarity and its use of the terms is confusing. 'Monitoring' is seen as informing the LEA's 'ability to disseminate best practice' and 'inform school self-evaluation', while 'support' and 'challenge' are intended to support 'partnership with schools' and 'facilitate maximum progress and improvement'. LEA/school responsibilities in these areas are not well defined and few schools understand the relationships between the functions. In contrast, criteria for intervening in schools are defined in the EDP, have recently been further refined and are very clear.

57. Since September 1999, systematic monitoring visits by phase advisers have helped the LEA to improve its knowledge of schools. A focus on school self-evaluation and moves, albeit slowly, towards a differentiated approach, have been positive features. Better use of evaluation criteria and the moderation of reports have helped to achieve more consistent judgements. Chairs of governors have also welcomed access to reports on the reviews. In around a quarter of the schools visited where there was best practice, monitoring had identified fundamental management issues and reports had provided sharp action points. In two schools, however, monitoring had failed to spot management weaknesses that were identified shortly afterwards by OFSTED inspections. Monitoring of special schools had lacked rigour and urgently needed the attention it has recently received. Headteachers of small schools reported monitoring as having been accurate, precise and thorough.

58. The decision to include a statistician in the advisory team is a good one and the post-holder has provided useful direct support to schools in explaining how various data can be interpreted. Having now established a performance 'database' for schools across the county, the practice of the phase advisers visiting every school twice a year to monitor progress is no longer necessary. Changes to deployment are required so that the visits are focused on the schools with greater needs.

59. Courses provided by Devon curriculum services are carefully evaluated and responses from schools are largely positive. Good use is made of practitioners in delivering courses and coverage of the curriculum is mostly good. Many advisers are also involved in various curriculum projects. Good use is being made of a Beacon School through contribution to LEA courses and conferences. In-school support is also generally positive with advisers successfully tailoring training packages to meet schools' needs. Good practice is also effectively disseminated to schools through networks. The recording of examples of good practice in a directory for secondary schools is also a positive development.

60. Strategies to challenge schools to improve their performance are unsatisfactory with weaknesses in the LEA's approach to target-setting. A considerable number of schools initially set unchallenging targets and primary schools, in particular, were critical of what they saw as a determined but mechanistic approach to challenging these. In contrast, the LEA appears not to have vigorously challenged the targets set by secondary and special schools. The LEA's approach has recently become more sophisticated but has yet to make a significant impact on schools.

61. There are now clear procedures for identifying schools giving cause for concern, involving respective roles for advisers and divisional education officers (DEOs). Although the system is still settling down, the new indicators of the need for intervention are appropriate (see also under 'schools causing concern'). The system is helping the LEA to overcome previous difficulties, for example where the LEA failed to tackle teaching issues and failed to follow-up problems previously identified in monitoring visits.

62. Advisers have a key role in monitoring, challenging, intervening in and supporting schools. Their expertise is mostly good, but the inefficiencies in their current deployment are hampering effectiveness (see above). One-third of the advisory service budget is targeted for earning income and advisers' work is planned carefully. Performance management ensures a match between work done and EDP priorities and also helps identify advisers' individual development needs. Service-wide needs are met through briefings and additional training activities.

63. A small schools' adviser and a specialist consultant supporting the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies both have a good understanding of small school issues and provide specifically targeted support for these schools. The LEA's literacy and numeracy training programme has taken account of the needs of small schools and mixed-age classes. Schools are encouraged to share experiences and 'The Small Schools' conference is valued.

64. At £21 per pupil, the funding retained by the LEA for school improvement is broadly in line with the average for statistical neighbours, other counties and nationally. Inefficient monitoring, the lack of consistent challenge to schools and inconsistent support for schools causing concern, all raise questions as to whether the LEA is providing effective use of funds. Despite recent improvements, value for money provided by the LEA is at best just barely satisfactory.

The use of performance data

65. The quality of performance data and the support to schools in using the data are satisfactory, although less well developed than in many other LEAs. The range of data provided complements that available nationally and benchmarking helps the schools to compare themselves with others by gender, free school meals and prior learning. Analysis of performance against prior attainment is less well developed. The analysis of performance of underperforming groups of pupils is also at an early stage.

66. Most schools visited found the data provided helped in analysing their performance. Schools had used the data with varying degrees of effectiveness and small primary schools and special schools had found the data least relevant. Several of the schools had received good support from phase advisers or the LEA statistician in interpreting and using the LEA's data or in developing their own.

67. Secondary schools are provided with a useful comparative analysis of performance across subjects and the general findings of an analysis of 1999 results by subject across schools have been shared with headteachers. Plans are in place to use the emerging 2000 data to challenge underperforming departments.

68. The electronic transfer of data is well developed. Increasing use is being made of the internal e-mail system and the LEA's website, although there is scope to develop these systems further to collect and distribute performance data. There was some dissatisfaction with the transfer of information between primary and secondary schools, but steps are now being taken to address this.

Literacy

69. Support for literacy in primary and special schools is good. Implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) is managed very effectively. The literacy team is experienced and provides expert training, advice and written guidance. The quality of support is highly regarded, particularly by primary schools. Evidence from a small sample of schools indicates that it is effective in raising standards.

70. The LEA has a coherent strategy to support literacy extending well beyond the NLS. It includes reading recovery, family literacy, support for English as an additional language, Traveller education and support for raising the achievement of boys. There is also a close integration between literacy support and support for special educational needs. The LEA has been successful in its joint bid with a neighbouring authority to take part in the DfEE's pilot Key Stage 1 intervention programme. The selection of schools for intensive and medium support through the NLS is based on a thorough audit of needs. Schools are clear

about the level of support to which they are entitled. There is good support for non-intensive schools through training courses focused on specific aspects of literacy, one-day visits by literacy consultants and the dissemination of good practice. The LEA has responded effectively to the needs of small schools by producing support materials for planning in mixed-age classes. The English and literacy teams have also produced almost 40 primary folios on a wide range of topics. These, and the termly newsletter, are well received by schools.

71. The reading recovery scheme is well established and pre-dates the NLS. It continues to be an important activity in the EDP with an ongoing programme of teacher training. The LEA is able to demonstrate the success of the scheme through the good progress of the majority of pupils targeted for extra support.

72. The NLS is monitored thoroughly by the literacy consultants and phase advisers. The phase advisers have been trained by the literacy team and work to a standardised format. The quality of monitoring reports is good and schools receive effective feedback on their progress. There is good liaison between phase advisers and the literacy team. Schools are helped to analyse their performance in order to identify strengths and weaknesses and focus their efforts on particular aspects of literacy or groups of pupils. The development of more sophisticated data for individual pupils will assist this process further.

73. Support for secondary schools is less advanced and less well regarded than in primary schools. At Key Stage 3, the LEA has undertaken a number of useful initiatives to support schools. A seconded head of English and a SENCO from two different secondary schools have undertaken an audit of current practice in literacy at Key Stage 3. Two conferences on developing literacy in secondary schools have been held. Teachers in secondary schools have been encouraged to visit primary schools to observe the literacy hour. Initiatives have been developed to support specific groups of pupils such as boys and Travellers. While these are positive developments, the support overall lacks the coherence and consistency of that for primary schools. As yet, few secondary schools have clear strategies in place to support literacy.

Numeracy

74. Support for numeracy is good. The implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) is managed effectively and there is a coherent strategy including a range of initiatives, some of which pre-date the NNS. Primary schools value the quality of support and OFSTED monitoring visits confirm that it is effective in helping to raise standards.

75. The numeracy team has good overall subject knowledge and a high level of expertise. It has been effective in accommodating a wide range of schools, for example, by adapting guidance and materials to the needs of teachers with mixed-aged and mixed key stage classes. Schools are clear about the level of support to which they are entitled. Almost 40 per cent of schools have been targeted for intensive support during the first two years of the strategy. Schools not receiving intensive support are offered five days of training as well as a series of twilight sessions to address particular issues.

76. A good programme is provided to train and develop leading mathematics teachers. Support also extends beyond the NNS and includes family numeracy and work with specific groups of pupils. Support in secondary schools is still at a relatively early stage, although the LEA has supported pilot projects in five schools. Satisfactory structures are in place to monitor NNS implementation.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

77. Support for ICT in the curriculum is inconsistent and therefore unsatisfactory. Too much is dependent on individuals and the experience of one school is often very different from another on the same aspect of support. Over 60 per cent of secondary schools and 50 per cent of primary schools in the survey considered support to be inadequate. Support was judged as unsatisfactory in seven out of the 19 schools visited. OFSTED inspection data point to pupils in a high number of schools making insufficient progress. Although the proportion is lower than that nationally for primary, it is above for secondary schools. Recent inspection evidence shows no change in this pattern.

78. The strategy to support ICT is set out in the EDP. While the programme of activities aimed at improving the infrastructure is clear, strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise standards are less well articulated.

79. All schools have a fast connection to the Internet. The programme of improving computer facilities is on schedule and all schools have had access to initial training in the use of the Internet and e-mail. Schools gave very mixed reactions to how the implementation of NGfL (see under EDP) had been handled. Some were critical of the guidance offered on preparing the plans necessary to secure funding. Others felt advice about the location of Internet connections and the layout of computer suites had been inappropriate. In contrast, some schools felt they had received good advice on bidding for funding and most were satisfied with the training in using the Internet and e-mail.

80. Schools frequently criticised the technical support for the ICT curriculum. They cited poor response times, conflicting advice on the purchase of hardware and software, and a lack of expert advice on establishing computer networks. Some were also critical of the way in which purchasing support was packaged with other services they did not require. Some of the technical difficulties lay outside the control of the LEA and others were due to services being too thinly stretched to meet the demands. There were also examples where schools had received good technical support.

81. The LEA's evaluation of its courses to support ICT in the curriculum and the views of schools visited show that most centrally provided training is well received. However, a substantial proportion of the schools visited considered that the training available was not sufficiently tailored to meet their specific needs. A number also commented on what they saw as a lack of a clear vision about how ICT is to be developed in the curriculum. Some were uncertain about to whom they should go for support. The LEA is promoting the development of ICT through a range of subjects, including literacy and numeracy, but this work is still at a relatively early stage. Most secondary schools and about one third of

primary schools were undertaking training under the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) and the schools visited had adequate knowledge of training providers for this purpose.

82. A recent report commissioned from a consultant by the LEA concluded that the infrastructure now in place offers huge potential for the development of ICT in the curriculum. It also recommended that the LEA should review its management of ICT to ensure that support is of a consistently high quality. This inspection endorses these findings.

Schools causing concern or likely to do so

83. Judged over the last eighteen months, the LEA's support for schools with difficulties has been uneven. At the time of the inspection, three schools were subject to special measures. This is below the national average. However, four schools with serious weaknesses have been identified in the past year. In all, thirteen schools have been found to have serious weaknesses, with three more designated as underachieving.

84. Once schools have been identified as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses, the LEA has, in most cases, provided very good support. Officers and phase advisers have contributed usefully as members of steering groups and support has been efficiently co-ordinated by divisional educational officers. Phase advisers have also provided good support with the preparation of action plans. Personnel services have provided good support in helping to ease out weak teachers. Additional funding has helped provide extra non-contact time for headteachers. More recently, intensive literacy and numeracy support, use of OFSTED school self-evaluation courses for headteachers and governors, support from governor services, subject adviser support and support to release literacy and numeracy co-ordinators for classroom observation, have also been effective.

85. Although the LEA's criteria for intervening in schools are now very clear, its own attempts to identify schools with difficulties have been less successful. Three stages (categories) of schools giving cause for concern have been identified and clear procedures and responsibilities have been put in place for identifying schools. The criteria for triggering intervention are appropriate, but have not been consistently applied. In two examples, LEA monitoring failed to identify management weaknesses that were, soon after, identified by OFSTED. Failure to follow-up effectively difficulties identified in monitoring reports has also resulted in deterioration in schools that should have been prevented. The LEA has begun to address these issues and 44 schools have now been identified as needing closer monitoring and additional support.

86. There is still some inconsistency in the way schools are notified of the stage of concern in which they have been placed. Funds to assist schools are made available following the school's action plan for improvement being agreed. There is, however, a lack of transparency in the way these funds are allocated.

School management

87. Support for developing the management of schools is satisfactory. The LEA provides a good range of training for senior managers in schools and supports the Devon Association of Secondary Headteachers (DASH) which provides its own programme of professional development. As a substantial proportion of headteachers is due to retire in the next ten years, the development of staff for headship is considered a high priority.

88. A headteacher training plan has been approved by the new partnership board. The number of applications for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) is in line with the regional average and the recruitment to the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) is at the maximum. The LEA provides support for primary headteachers in their first headship through the Headlamp programme. It makes extensive use of the OFSTED course on school self-evaluation and works closely with local universities and other LEAs to support the professional development of senior staff. There is also a management programme for school administrators.

89. Training courses for senior managers are generally well received. There was evidence in several of the schools visited of the courses helping headteachers and other senior managers to improve the quality of monitoring and self-evaluation. Support for new and acting headteachers is generally good. There is a well-established mentoring system both for new headteachers and those experiencing difficulties. The percentage of primary schools judged to have good or very good management in OFSTED inspections has risen from 70 to 81 per cent. This is significantly above the national average. In contrast, the picture is less good in secondary schools where the comparable figure has fallen from 61 to 54 per cent. Schools reported having received good advice on difficult redundancy and competency cases.

90. Support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) is generally well regarded. The schools provide most of the support, and the LEA offers a limited range of courses, provides guidance to mentors and ensures that accurate records are kept. The quality of written guidance is good and the NQTs interviewed felt that they had been well supported during their induction year. The LEA is quick to respond when they are notified that an NQT is experiencing serious difficulties. However, there is insufficient checking of the quality of provision and moderation of judgements about the performance of NQTs.

Governance

91. Support for governors is good. Responses in the school survey were very positive and this was confirmed in the inspection through a meeting with a representative group of governors and visits to schools. Most schools buy into Devon governor services.

92. The LEA provides a comprehensive range of training for new and experienced governors and for clerks. There is an appropriate emphasis on developing governors' capacity to monitor and evaluate the performance of their schools. The evaluations of these courses are overwhelmingly positive and there was evidence from the school visits of their influence in improving the effectiveness of governing bodies.

93. The LEA is increasing its emphasis on training for the whole governing body and tailoring its support to individual schools or groups of schools with common needs. This support has also been well received. The LEA monitors OFSTED reports, governing body minutes and other forms of information to identify weaknesses in governing bodies, enabling it to target support more accurately.

94. The LEA produces good quality written guidance, including a useful set of resources for governors to use in evaluating their own effectiveness. Increasing use is being made of the LEA's web-site and e-mail to communicate with governors. The LEA also supports a strong governor network. Devon governor services produces material jointly with the Devon association of governors, including a very helpful checklist for chairs and clerks to remind them of actions needing to be taken.

95. Governors spoke highly of the support they receive from services such as personnel, and health and safety. They were able to cite difficult and sensitive situations where they had received prompt and expert advice. Only one governing body in the schools visited complained about delays in obtaining support. Governors welcomed the move to copy monitoring visit notes to chairs. Good support has been provided to governors in the selection and appointment of headteachers and other senior staff.

96. Schools expressed concern following the replacement of experienced LEA-appointed governors to accommodate shifts in the overall balance of elected members. In a very few cases, new appointments had been unsuitable. The LEA accepts the criticisms and is responding by reviewing its appointment procedures to bring them into line with those recommended in the Code of Practice for LEA-school relations.

Early years

97. Overall, the support for education in the early years is satisfactory. There is an effective Early Years Partnership in which the LEA plays a major part. It has successfully drawn together maintained, independent and voluntary pre-school provision and has a good system of communication, both centrally and at local level. Headteachers responding to the survey rated LEA support for early years below average. The school visits suggest that headteachers have felt somewhat disenfranchised due to the partnership's remit, and the strong emphasis of much of its work, extending beyond the school sector.

98. The LEA policy of standardising twice-yearly admission to reception classes has been helpful to schools. Resources are well targeted to needs. Courses to promote the new national early years curriculum are well underway. Helpful information is supplied to parents about early years provision, the funding of three and four-year-olds, special needs and the system in general. There is a satisfactory baseline assessment scheme that has been approved by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and adjusted in the light of comments from schools. It is well established in three-quarters of the LEA's schools.

99. Recommendations

In order to improve support for school improvement:

- define more clearly with schools the functions of monitoring, challenge and support and, for each function, review schools' entitlement;
- improve the level of challenge to schools, including through a more rigorous approach to target-setting;
- improve the monitoring of schools, in particular to ensure earlier and more consistent identification of schools in difficulty, by
 - a) sharpening the focus of centrally-funded monitoring visits, paying special attention to leadership and management issues;
 - b) employing these visits only where there is a clear need;
 - c) further differentiating the visit programme to take account of the needs and aspirations of individual schools;
 - d) making better use of performance data;
- improve the quality of Information and Communication Technology support, through rigorously applying Best Value principles in responding to schools' curriculum and technical ICT needs;
- further improve support for schools in difficulties by:
 - a) making more consistent the way in which schools are notified of the stage of concern in which they have been placed;
 - b) making more transparent the allocation of funds and additional support;
 - c) building on recent improvements; and
- improve the arrangements for moderating the judgements of schools on the progress of newly qualified teachers and ensure support arrangements are satisfactory.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

100. Strategic management is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. On major strategic matters, the authority does not communicate its intended outcomes sufficiently clearly. In contrast, financial decision-making is effective; clearly structured and consistent with agreed priorities.

101. The Devon county council strategic plan (1998-2001) sets out six primary cross-cutting corporate goals and related strategic objectives. While links between council and LEA objectives can be readily imagined, the plan does not make these explicit. Although targets are set out in the EDP, the strategic plan provides no detail of intended outcomes or how these are to be achieved, making monitoring of progress impossible. However, a leaflet entitled 'Promoting Effective Education in Devon: A Framework' does define the LEA's strategic role.

102. The education, arts and libraries directorate is required to contribute to each of the corporate goals and objectives. The directorate is also committed to three priorities of its own: raising standards, inclusion and lifelong learning. Key values are identified as partnership, equity and quality. The LEA's various own plans are broadly consistent, although again precise links are not always made between them. Weekly meetings of the corporate board have enabled the director of education to become more aware of the issues facing the other directorates. Knowledge of the emerging regional plan has helped set a broader context for educational development. Planning and review processes are all designed to encourage integration of corporate, Best Value and statutory plans.

103. Schools were comparatively critical of much of the LEA's work in their response to the school survey. Despite this, schools mostly have confidence in senior staff to turn things around. The director and his assistant have provided good leadership in many respects and have shown themselves willing to grapple with and seek workable solutions to difficult problems. Schools, trades unions and members also reported senior officers as being responsive and providing sound advice. This was reflected too in schools' praise for the LEA's attempts to improve consultation, although it was suggested that the impact on decision-making was often not apparent.

104. The LEA is attempting to tackle the issue of inconsistency. Performance monitoring is well established in the education, arts and libraries directorate. All staff attend performance management interviews and the process has appropriately been designed so that organisational and service targets can be translated into personal targets for staff.

105. Members have shown good leadership as far as ensuring that the real value of individual school budgets has been maintained. The education budget is fine-tuned to reflect changing demands and agreed priorities, thus promoting value for money. Central budgets are carefully monitored and well controlled. Unavoidable overspends on individual services in the recent past have been carried forward and appropriately addressed. Although there is no formal medium-term budget planning cycle, the council's intention to

continue to spend at education SSA has provided a sufficiently secure basis for planning the education budget.

106. Headteachers' representatives feel that their views inform the budget setting process. Schools are consulted through area meetings, receive draft budgets in February and final budgets following the county council meeting in March. Budget statements include forecast allocations for the next two years and these also assist school planning.

107. Due to the size of the county, communication with schools is an ongoing challenge. Academic councils provide an effective channel for passing on information and their role could be further developed to improve dialogue, collaboration and links with services. e-mail is available to all schools and is being used increasingly. The LEA's Internet web-site is developing well and has very good potential for communicating with schools, governors and the public. Creation of the new partnership board is a positive development, although the trades unions expressed concern about its narrow representation.

108. Crisis and emergency issues are satisfactorily managed.

Partnerships

109. At management level, there are strong links with health authorities, primary care groups, the careers service, the Training and Enterprise Council, colleges, independent schools and commercial bodies. Relations with Devon and Cornwall Police are also very good. The police are represented on many of the interdisciplinary groups. Their youth affairs officers administer a helpful personal and social education programme and the contribution of community officers was also widely praised in the schools visited. The Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) works well.

110. Many useful projects have been developed, such as *Fit to Succeed*, aimed at improving the physical education curriculum and pupils' physical fitness. The youth service is involved in several projects to support disaffected teenagers. A project at Exmouth College is aimed at raising pupils' attainment. A bridging project in Exeter is helping disaffected Year 10 and 11 pupils. A scheme in Ilfracombe involving the local college is helping to reduce exclusions.

111. Relations at school level between education, health and social services are also generally good, though there are still occasions when schools have to communicate separately with different bodies about the same problem, leading to delays and gaps in support for individual pupils. Officers are aware of the difficulties and are exploring alternative ways of working.

112. The LEA has built up good communications with parents, through strong support for PTA Devon, the early years partnership, and a range of informative publications, guides and directories. Jointly with PTA Devon, it has launched *Investors in Parents*, a three-year programme to raise parental involvement in education. However, important information distributed through schools sometimes does not reach parents and this occasionally leads to a breakdown in relations.

Support for school infrastructure: management services

113. The arrangements for buying back services are satisfactory but not as good as in many other LEAs. Information on the services available is contained in a convenient handbook. Schools wishing to subscribe to services do so by signing a single annual contract. In most cases, service descriptions lack detail, although more information is available on request. Only a few services publish specific standards such as target response times, although others are being developed as part of the Best Value review of all school support services. There is no information about alternative providers. Useful meetings are held twice a year, to review the overall support provided for each school by the various services.

114. Headteachers' representatives were fully involved and consulted on arrangements for delegation under Fair Funding. Amounts currently delegated to schools appear to represent the full cost of each service and are appropriately allocated through the lump sum and pupil-led elements of the formula. The very high buy-back rates in the first year of delegation have been sustained, suggesting overall satisfaction with the services. Schools particularly value the convenience and peace of mind offered by the insurance-type arrangements for personnel advice and property maintenance.

115. Advice on the management of **finance** is strong with schools able to tailor the level of service purchased to meet their individual needs. Finance staff know their schools well and work closely with personnel officers and the divisional educational officers in identifying and supporting schools with budget difficulties. The proportion of schools with large deficits and surpluses is small. Creditor payments and reconciliation of accounts is available on-line although some schools find this approach difficult. Helpful comparative data on patterns of school expenditure are published annually.

116. **Personnel** services are a strength. A comprehensive handbook of statutory duties and guidance notes is provided to schools. The subscription service also includes a help-line and access to a named, qualified officer for advice on most personnel issues. A supply teacher agency has recently been set up in response to growing difficulties in recruiting teachers. Most of the headteachers and governors interviewed praised the quality of the advice they had received in difficult redundancy and competency cases.

117. **Asset management** is improving and the processes are now satisfactory. A legacy of under-investment remains in the poor quality and suitability of much of the school building stock. Thirty per cent of pupils are taught in temporary accommodation, although targets have been set for improvement. OFSTED inspections of primary schools identify concerns about premises twice as often as the national average. All aspects of buildings services included in the school survey were rated lower than the average for other LEAs; reflecting the scale of the problem and the lack of transparency in prioritising building work in the past.

118. Progress on the Asset Management Plan has been satisfactory and has brought greater openness to the way the limited funds are allocated. The local policy statement makes explicit links with Best Value objectives and other plans. Diocesan interests are recognised, although the partnership is not as well developed as elsewhere. The condition

survey was completed on time. The suitability survey was based on schools' self-evaluations, the outcomes of which are being moderated by a small team of recently retired headteachers.

119. Using criteria clearly set out in the Asset Management Plan, recommendations for centrally funded projects are appropriately prepared by a premises board. The board includes members, officers, headteachers, diocesan representatives, property professionals and governors. Significantly, the commitment of a school to improving learning outcomes is taken into account when ranking priorities. Lists of successful and unsuccessful projects are published. The LEA has secured significant funding from the New Deal for Schools scheme, although it was understandably disappointed when the most recent allocations were made on the basis of numbers of pupils rather than need. A match-funding scheme is designed to maximize contributions from schools and grant providers.

120. Advice to schools about **buildings maintenance** and the management of projects by Devon Property Practice is satisfactory overall. Almost all schools subscribe to an insurance scheme so that structural repairs and maintenance are undertaken on the same basis as before delegation. The scheme was drawn up in close consultation with representative headteachers who have given it their full endorsement.

121. The use of **ICT for school administration** and communication, including the electronic transfer of data, is well developed. However, the service to support this area is unsatisfactory. It is stretched and too often ineffective. Technical support does not take sufficient account of the varying competence of schools' staff. In contrast, training courses are well regarded and useful support is provided through an active user group. Attempts are made to support a wide range of applications, but the packaging of services in three separate subscriptions is confusing for schools and requires them to buy additional services they may not need. Work on a central pupil database is only just beginning.

122. **Client support services** to support catering, caretaking, cleaning, grounds maintenance and waste disposal are good. The services are customer focused and schools receive clear information about the options available.

123. Other subscription services particularly valued by schools include legal services, the schools library service, and the council's media and public relations team.

124. The provision of **school transport** is effective, its high cost justified by the rural nature of the county. Although expenditure on transport is 58 per cent higher per pupil than the county average and 5.9 per cent of the total expenditure on schools, the policy on entitlement reflects the statutory minimum and the budget is very closely monitored. Firm measures have been taken to contain rising costs, including a flexible approach to procurement and the reluctant introduction of means-tested contributions for denominational transport. Procurement of transport is undertaken by the environment directorate, which effectively co-ordinates a complex network of routes serving both primary and secondary schools with public services. The special school network is well co-ordinated with the needs of other users such as social services and voluntary organisations. All the council's transport services will be subject to a Best Value review in 2000-01.

125. Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management:

- improve the framework for strategic planning so that all council plans covering education are consistent and contain clearly measurable outcomes, progress against which can be easily monitored;
- strengthen the role of academic councils in improving communication with and between schools and with services;
- work with schools to make the distribution of information for parents more reliable and give maximum publicity to where parents can find further information; and
- improve the consistency of support for the use of ICT in school administration.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

126. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs is unsatisfactory. The services and provision for meeting special needs are in a state of transition and the planning for change is in danger of becoming far too protracted. Consultation with schools on how to improve both the arrangements for the inclusion of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools and the quality assurance of special needs provision, has been handled well. An audit of special needs provision undertaken in 1998 resulted in a draft plan. This, however, failed to articulate the future shape of provision clearly enough. Recent proposals to set up working groups to consider the outcome of the previous draft plan and gaps in provision are too cautious and much greater urgency is needed.

127. Concerns about the strategy were evident from the low ratings given by all types of schools in the survey. Although inclusion has a high priority in the LEA's policy, visits found schools unclear about how it is to work in practice. In particular, schools are quite reasonably concerned about how sufficient expertise is to be made available and how transfer of resources will be achieved. They are also unclear as to the LEA's views on the limits of inclusion. Special schools and some of the support-centres are unable to visualise what their own provision will look like in future and how it will fit into the overall structure for special educational needs.

128. In contrast, and despite some difficulties, inclusion is well underway in schools. There have been some successful pilot projects with mainstream and special schools working co-operatively. Several pupils have successfully transferred from special to mainstream schools. Despite reservations, schools have largely accepted and endorsed the principle of inclusion. Furthermore, again despite initial difficulties, the LEA has recently made great strides in restructuring its own special needs administration and has made good progress towards a funding scheme and approach to supporting schools which will accord with national policy.

Statutory obligations

129. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations, although there are weaknesses in key areas. Discontinuity in the education psychology service, caused mainly by staffing difficulties, is delaying statutory assessments. There is good early identification of needs at the pre-school stage but sometimes a hiatus when pupils start school. The quality of statements is generally satisfactory, though some are not sufficiently specific in identifying the provision required. The LEA is encouraging schools to take greater responsibility for meeting pupils' needs at the early stages of the Code of Practice to avoid proceeding to statementing. It has not, however, prepared schools well enough for the change of emphasis by updating its procedural guidance with criteria and funding arrangements that would give them confidence in the system.

130. There has been a dramatic recent improvement in the rate at which statements are issued. In 1998/9, compared with the national average of 67 per cent, the proportion of statements issued within the Government target period of 18 weeks was 15 per cent. In

1999/2000, following various changes made, the issuing rate improved to 87 per cent. Better use of ICT is designed to secure further improvements in future. Views of headteachers and SENCOs are still coloured by the legacy of delay in issuing statements. Some parents also expressed serious concerns about the LEA's procedures. It is now vital that the LEA should sustain and build on the recent improvements.

131. Annual and transition reviews are carried out regularly. The LEA is represented in the more complex cases and it scrutinises reports and duly issues amendments where necessary. Appeals tribunals are appropriately supported and the outcomes of these are carefully monitored. Comprehensive guidance for parents is made available and standard procedures are in place so that their wishes are properly taken into account.

Support for school improvement

132. The LEA's support to improve schools' capacity to manage special educational needs is broadly satisfactory. There is a range of suitable specialist provision, although schools of all kinds have legitimate concerns about the moves to greater inclusion, especially, but not entirely, where emotional and behavioural difficulties are concerned. Mainstream schools are not sufficiently prepared to cope and, despite the successes already mentioned, a number of placements of pupils have not worked well. Although few in number, these have had a negative effect on attitudes.

133. The education psychology service and behaviour support service, while generally regarded as insufficient to meet all demands, are more often than not praised by schools for the quality of advice and support they give to teachers and pupils when time permits. Individually, educational psychologists try to be flexible in operating within a fairly strict timetable. The behaviour support team, when it cannot intervene directly, provides a useful telephone help-line. The special needs advisers make useful contributions, particularly in in-service training and where there are significant problems in a school. Some special schools, however, feel isolated and are in need of more external guidance and better networking. Links across special schools, support centres and mainstream schools are not strong enough and, except in some particular pilot projects, the sharing of expertise through outreach programmes is underdeveloped.

134. Special educational needs co-ordinators are well supported through training, conferences and regular local meetings. The pattern of biennial monitoring in schools has been established and is developing well. Annual review meetings in each academic council cluster help SENCOs moderate procedures.

Value for money

135. Costs are carefully controlled and resources are deployed to provide satisfactory value for money. There is a danger, however, that the position will deteriorate if the drive towards inclusion continues without thorough planning of the provision as a whole. The LEA quickly tackles overspending and funds are distributed to schools fairly according to reasonable criteria. Schools have criticised the complex formula for devolving funding for special needs. The system, however, is still new and the LEA is aware of the difficulties.

Small schools, which are outside the formula for devolved funding, have less freedom to make their own arrangements.

136. **Recommendations**

In order to improve support for pupils with special educational needs:

- set a firm timetable for producing a detailed inclusion policy and special educational needs development plan;
- strengthen the educational psychology service and review its deployment to minimise the disruption to schools;
- revise the guidance on procedures for statutory assessment and statementing to reflect the change of emphasis in the way the Code of Practice is being operated; and
- develop a detailed programme of training and support to prepare mainstream schools to include pupils with special needs, making best use of the expertise in special schools, centres and PRUs.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

137. The LEA's planning of school places has been improving and is now good. The number of surplus places in primary schools has been reduced and the funding formula has been adjusted to provide an incentive for schools to release surplus capacity. The percentages of unfilled places in both primary and secondary schools are now below the averages for county authorities and nationally. Appropriate steps are being taken to respond to steadily rising rolls in the secondary sector and reduce overcrowding at some schools. Forecast methodology is appropriate, with outcomes well within Audit Commission guidelines.

138. The school organisation plan was agreed after appropriate consultation. Useful, detailed analyses of population trends are included for the area served by each secondary school. The LEA has made good progress in reducing infant class sizes, so that at the time of the inspection only two schools had classes with more than 30 children.

139. The planned re-organisation of the school system in Exeter is intended to raise standards. Consultation is well underway but lack of a definite time-scale is causing uncertainty. Given the council's support for local communities and the high cost of transport, the policy of retaining small rural primary schools is reasonable. The LEA is aware of their high unit costs and has been right to investigate alternative approaches, such as federations.

Admissions

140. Admission arrangements have improved and are now satisfactory. Transfers to secondary schools are efficiently managed. Information booklets are well presented and meet Code of Practice guidelines in most respects. Some sections, however, are not written in plain English and there is no timetable for decisions and appeals. The council's web-site helpfully provides a searchable list of schools with links to DfEE performance data.

141. The admissions forum includes representatives from four neighbouring LEAs. Arrangements for determining first preferences when parents make multiple applications have been agreed. Progress has been made on a common timetable for primary admissions for which there are over 60 admission authorities. The diocesan authorities are properly consulted.

142. The timetable for secondary transfer is within Audit Commission guidelines for best practice, although some appeals are not completed until the second half of the summer term and the proportion is low compared to other LEAs, appeals are managed effectively. About 98 per cent of parents have their first preference met across the county as a whole, although there are local variations.

The provision for pupils who have no school place

143. Support for pupils educated other than at school is satisfactory. Around 300 children in Devon are educated at home. Detailed reports with useful guidance are issued to parents and the provision is monitored consistently by well-qualified supervisors. Pupils without a school place are referred promptly by schools, officers, social services and the education welfare service to a 'Pupils Out of School' team. This has good links with a range of other services. A named officer is appointed for each pupil and cases are regularly reviewed. The system is well understood by all concerned.

144. Home tuition is provided by the Link Education Service for school-age mothers and any excluded pupil for whom no alternative place is available. Whenever numbers are viable, group tuition is provided at local venues. At present, pupils may receive as few as five hours weekly tuition. The LEA has plans to increase this and to improve the training of tutors. The LEA also runs a hospital centre, providing outreach teaching for several hospitals.

Attendance at school

145. Support for attendance is unsatisfactory. The management of education welfare officers is poorly regarded, particularly by secondary schools. In contrast, schools praised the work of individual officers. Procedures for checking on the whereabouts of pupils who have come off register or are missing are satisfactory.

146. The education welfare service is the lead service for monitoring and improving attendance. It has recently been reviewed by District Audit and was also the subject of a pilot Best Value review. Both these reviews identified the low cost of the service and considerable levels of dissatisfaction with its performance. In the school survey, over half the secondary schools and almost one in five primary schools indicated that the support for attendance was unsatisfactory. Visits to schools and discussions with headteachers found these views to be justified.

147. The LEA lacks a clear strategy for improving attendance. The Best Value review revealed a lack of detailed data on trends and patterns of attendance within the authority. This makes it difficult to judge the success or failure of specific initiatives and hampers the shaping of strategy and deployment. Schools are not clear about the criteria for deploying educational welfare officers, the service is thinly stretched and some schools have experienced frequent changes of officer or periods without any named contact. Schools were also concerned that they had not been party to changes in the way officers were expected to operate, resulting in conflicting approaches being adopted.

148. Although some schools pointed to highly effective support from their education welfare officers, others had not been kept sufficiently informed about the outcomes of actions taken. Panels established in schools where there were concerns about attendance were generally welcomed. There were examples of good co-operation with other agencies such as the police, youth justice and youth offending teams in trying to reduce truancy. The LEA's leaflet to dissuade parents from taking their children out of school for holidays during term time was also regarded as useful.

149. There are currently gaps in the senior management of the education welfare service caused by long term illness and other difficulties. The LEA has taken steps to try and strengthen the management through a secondment from another authority. Despite this, the current capacity of the service to make improvements remains questionable.

Behaviour at school

150. Support for behaviour is unsatisfactory overall. In the school survey, over 40 per cent of headteachers rated the LEA's behaviour support as poor. The behaviour support service is over-stretched and unable to meet the demands placed upon it. The Behaviour Support Plan identifies relevant priorities, but only sets out suitable means of addressing them in general terms. Some of the data on which the plan is based are imprecise and not all of the targets are readily quantifiable. Since the plan was written, the programme of inclusion has moved on and the next draft will need to focus support for behaviour in that context.

151. Behaviour support in primary schools is well structured, based on three multi-disciplinary teams led by educational psychologists. Their contribution was generally praised in schools visited, although access and long waiting times cause difficulties. Secondary schools have funds delegated to set up their own systems. Some feel that this is not a complete answer as there are insufficient services available to buy-in, especially in rural areas. Good training and support packages and a useful policy for dealing with bullying have been provided. Adviser time is also available, but again is insufficient to meet the need. The expertise available in the EBD special schools and in two of the PRUs has not been drawn upon to any significant degree.

152. Arrangements for placing excluded pupils are broadly satisfactory. The LEA makes additional financial support available to receiving schools. Two PRUs provide places for permanently excluded students at Key Stage 4 and there are good links with further education colleges and other bodies for external courses and work experience. There is also reasonable temporary provision for younger pupils. Where cases of exclusion involve pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, schools are reluctant to attempt reintegration if adequate support is unavailable. This is working against inclusion.

153. The LEA is aware of the issues and is considering extending the behaviour support service so that its support may be purchased by secondary schools. There are plans to adapt one EBD special school to provide short-term placements and an outreach facility. However, to ensure support is countywide, such moves should be part of a comprehensive plan.

Health and safety, welfare and child protection

154. Support for health and safety, welfare and child protection is good. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory duties and liaises effectively with other appropriate bodies. A designated senior officer is responsible for the oversight of child protection and regularly attends the area child protection committee. The LEA provides comprehensive

and clear guidance to schools and ensures that appropriate training is also available. Procedures in place for monitoring children on the child protection register are satisfactory.

155. Responses in the school survey to questions on support for child protection were positive. These views were confirmed through discussions with headteachers and governors during visits to schools. All the schools have designated teachers for child protection and are well aware of the LEA's procedures. A number of schools were able to cite examples of the LEA reacting promptly and sensitively to child protection issues. Most, although not all, designated teachers have attended recent training sessions. The LEA does not monitor the extent to which schools are up to date with current procedures.

156. Schools were positive about the support they received from health and safety officers. The officers respond quickly to concerns and provide prompt and expert advice. Several new and acting headteachers spoke particularly highly of the support they have received.

Support for children in public care

157. Devon has a good strategy for raising the attainment of children in public care and is making good progress in implementing it. Members and service directors have taken a strong lead in establishing an effective interdisciplinary approach. A comprehensive database, including attainment measures, has been set up for the over 700 children concerned. Nineteen children placed outside the county are visited annually and their records regularly updated.

158. Guidance on the writing of personal education plans is good. A programme of training is in place to explain the education system to carers. Natural parents are encouraged wherever appropriate to help increase their children's motivation. Educational psychologists meet locally with social work teams to monitor developments.

Ethnic minority children, including Travellers

159. The LEA supports minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers children, well, fully meets the statutory requirements and contributes positively to pupils' achievement. The numbers involved are small, with the pupils scattered widely across the county.

160. Since submitting its last action plan, in a consortium with Plymouth and Torbay, the LEA has continued to develop its services. Helpful, quantifiable targets have been set and have helped to encourage improvement. Pupils' attainment is analysed by ethnic group at the ends of both primary and secondary phases.

161. The costs of supporting the small number of pupils from ethnic minorities are relatively high, but individual pupils and their teachers are well supported by the team of part-time language teachers and classroom assistants.

162. The movement of Travellers is predicted with considerable accuracy, well-targeted support is provided wherever there is a small concentration of Traveller children. Officers know the communities well and there is good co-operation between staff and parents.

During settled periods, children are supported at school. Good use is also made of well-designed distance learning materials when the children are on the move. During the last year, attendance among Travellers children improved from 76 to 82 per cent.

Gifted and talented children

163. The LEA provides reasonable support for pupils of very high ability or with particular talents. An adviser leads a team of eight staff, each of whom contributes a few days' support each year. External consultants with special expertise supplement the team in designing and delivering courses.

164. Training has been offered to all teachers of Key Stages 1 to 3 and there has been a particular focus on the early recognition of abilities. There is also direct support to pupils, with publicity on specific courses sent to all schools. During 1999/2000, a hundred weekend courses were offered. There were five summer schools, covering a variety of curriculum areas each catering for around 30 Year 6 and 7 pupils. There is good arts provision, for example, through the lottery-funded 'Arts in Schools Initiative', which employs artists in residence, covering a range of arts and music. The Devon youth orchestra and ensembles also provide opportunities for some of the county's most gifted young musicians. Last year, the LEA made grants totalling £1,375 from its gifted pupils fund for children to attend specialised events mounted by outside organisations.

165. A draft policy, closely aligned with a useful summary for parents and teachers, has been published on the LEA's internet web-site. A good handbook has also been produced for school co-ordinators. Each school is asked to maintain a register of gifted and talented pupils with accompanying records. These registers, coupled with the LEA's records of the take up of its courses and grants, have the potential to be a valuable addition to the LEA's indicators for monitoring school performance.

Combating social exclusion, including racism

166. The measures taken to combat social exclusion are generally effective. In response to the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, the LEA has contributed to a good and constructive publication in collaboration with other services. The chief executive is taking the lead in ensuring that agencies work closely together against racism. A system for the recording of racist incidents has been established and was well known to the schools visited. A prominent part of the work of the ethnic minority and Traveller support teams is in producing material to promote understanding among the wider population. There are also several local inter-agency projects aimed at young people at risk of being excluded.

167. Recommendations

In order to improve pupils' access to education:

- establish a clear timetable for the planned re-organisation of Exeter schools;

- increase tuition time for pupils with no school place in line with nationally recommended levels;
- improve attendance by:
 - (a) devising a clear strategy for improvement and sharing this with schools and other stakeholders;
 - (b) ensuring that the academic councils with devolved budgets for improving attendance:-
 - (i) have access to examples of best practice; and
 - (ii) establish rigorous systems for evaluating the use of the devolved funds;
- develop a comprehensive and integrated plan for behaviour support across the county, making best use of the facilities and personnel available; and
- improve support for gifted and talented pupils by:
 - (a) increasing data on individual pupils;
 - (b) upgrading the records on the support provided; and
 - (c) reviewing the outcomes of (a) and (b) when monitoring school performance.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- determine and implement appropriate strategies to address the causes of the relatively low attainment of pupils in some Exeter schools;
- in collaboration with headteachers and governors, devise appropriate strategies to remove underachievement in secondary schools and secure improved liaison between primary and secondary schools to ensure better continuity of the curriculum and progression from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 to raise attainment at Key Stage 3;
- enhance the opportunities for members to contribute to the work of scrutiny committees, in particular in monitoring schools' performance and the progress of schools with identified weaknesses by developing the use of smaller working groups;
- sharpen the focus of the EDP by:
 - a) clarifying the rationale for various activities to better reflect the audit;
 - b) targeting activities more clearly at point of need;
 - c) improving the strategy for inclusion;
 - d) tightening up success criteria to include clearly measurable outcomes; and
- support schools in adopting Best Value principles by making more information available on alternative service providers.

In order to improve support for school improvement:

- define more clearly with schools the functions of monitoring, challenge and support and, for each function, review schools' entitlement;
- improve the level of challenge to schools, including through a more rigorous approach to target-setting;
- improve the monitoring of schools, in particular to ensure earlier and more consistent identification of schools in difficulty, by:
 - a) sharpening the focus of centrally-funded monitoring visits, paying special attention to leadership and management issues;
 - b) employing these visits only where there is a clear need;
 - c) further differentiating the visit programme to take account of needs and aspirations of individual schools;
 - d) making better use of performance data;

- improve the quality of information and communication technology support, through rigorously applying Best Value principles in responding to schools' curriculum and technical ICT needs;
- further improve support for schools in difficulties by:
 - a) making more consistent the way in which schools are notified of the stage of concern in which they have been placed;
 - b) making more transparent the allocation of funds and additional support;
 - c) building on recent improvements; and
- improve the arrangements for moderating the judgements of schools on the progress of newly qualified teachers and ensure support arrangements are satisfactory.

In order to improve strategic management:

- improve the framework for strategic planning so that all council plans covering education are consistent and contain clearly measurable outcomes, progress against which can be easily monitored;
- strengthen the role of academic councils in improving communication with and between schools and with services;
- work with schools to make the distribution of information for parents more reliable and give maximum publicity to where parents can find further information; and
- improve the consistency of support for the use of ICT in school administration.

In order to improve support for pupils with special educational needs:

- set a firm timetable for producing a detailed inclusion policy and special educational needs development plan;
- strengthen the educational psychology service and review its deployment to minimise the disruption to schools;
- revise the guidance on procedures for statutory assessment and statementing to reflect the change of emphasis in the way the Code of Practice is being operated; and
- develop a detailed programme of training and support to prepare mainstream schools to include pupils with special needs, making best use of the expertise in special schools, centres and PRUs.

In order to improve pupils' access to education:

- establish a clear timetable for the planned re-organisation of Exeter schools;
- increase tuition time for pupils with no school place in line with nationally recommended levels;
- improve attendance by:
 - a) devising a clear strategy for improvement and sharing this with schools and other stakeholders;
 - b) ensuring that the academic councils with devolved budgets for improving attendance:-
 - (i) have access to examples of best practice; and
 - (ii) establish rigorous systems for evaluating the use of the devolved funds;
- develop a comprehensive and integrated plan for behaviour support across the county, making best use of the facilities and personnel available; and
- improve support for gifted and talented pupils by:
 - (a) increasing pupil data;
 - (b) upgrading the records on the support provided; and
 - (c) reviewing the outcomes of (a) and (b) when monitoring school performance.

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