



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
CORNWALL
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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April 2002

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

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999 insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the Local Education Authority (LEA) on Best Value. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (December 2001)*, which focuses on the effectiveness of the local authority work to support school improvement.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with LEA members, staff in the education department and in other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 282 schools. The response rate was 79 percent. The survey took place in September 2001, four months before the inspection itself

3. The inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through discussions with headteachers, governors, deputy heads and staff from 72 schools including the leaders of five of the centres for education other than at school. These conversations were held in small groups. Separate telephone discussions were held with the headteachers of three primary and three secondary schools. The discussions considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in challenging and contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools within the LEA was also considered.

COMMENTARY

4. Situated at the extreme south west of England, Cornwall's attractive and remote landscapes, extensive coastline and picturesque towns and villages are well known. However, this can obscure the below average socio-economic circumstances of a significant proportion of the permanent population and temporary summer residents. It is for these reasons that Cornwall has European Union Objective 1 status as a means of supporting economic regeneration.

5. The relative success of Cornwall's schools is demonstrated in the progress and performance of pupils. Primary aged pupils, in the main, reach standards that are equal to the national average, and during their secondary education, they attain good results that are above national averages. Pupils make progressive improvement and the schools add value. An early start was made with the Key Stage 3 curriculum strategy and sound action is now used to raise the level of boys' achievement.

6. The first inspection of the LEA in 1996 found much to celebrate in the work of the education service but also included recommendations on significant areas for improvement. The progress made with the recommendations has been good and developments in the school improvement services in the last 12 months have been effective. Advice and good practice in teaching and learning have been well disseminated through the Learning Forum: a partnership between teachers and the LEA. Good progress has been made in developing self-evaluation in schools as a support for management and governance. There is now greater choice in the post-16 curriculum and more co-operation between schools and with colleges. There has been sustained support for small schools but the key issue of the viability of the very smallest is a concern.

7. The LEA has long had a strongly held principle of inclusion for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and the strategic changes in the provision for SEN have been good. More broadly, the operational work to support some of the most disadvantaged and needy pupils reflects a clear commitment to social inclusion and the wide range of school and community activities are making a difference. Much of this success results from the very good climate of initiative and partnership that the LEA has nurtured over the years with schools, other council departments, external agencies and voluntary organisations. Officers give great attention to sustaining and developing the very good relationships between the LEA and schools.

8. Surprisingly however, the council has been slow to act in a number of areas linked to the inclusion principle. The six out-of-school education centres are not registered with the Department for Education and Skills and there is no policy for equal opportunities or for combating racism. The LEA has its sights firmly on future improvement and could get there more effectively with improved planning and robust performance management that is yet to be implemented as county policy.

9. Cornwall is a good LEA. Performance in all but a few functions is at least satisfactory and often good. There are very few weaknesses and none in key areas. The authority performs the following functions particularly well:

- the strategy for school improvement in the Education Development Plan;
- the definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools;
- the effectiveness of monitoring and challenge in schools and the use of performance data;
- the effectiveness of intervention in under-performing schools;
- support for numeracy;
- the support for raising standards at Key Stage 3;
- the support for school leadership and management;
- property, cleaning and grounds maintenance services;
- assuring the supply and quality of teachers;
- the effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN;
- the steps taken to meet statutory obligations for SEN;
- the value for money of the SEN strategy and provision;
- health, safety, welfare and child protection;
- the leadership of senior officers;
- the advice given to elected members; and
- the co-ordination of collaboration between several agencies.

The majority of the LEA's other functions are fulfilled satisfactorily, with two exceptions. These functions are unsatisfactory:

- the registration of the provision for the education of pupils who have no school place; and
- the council's measures for combating racism.

10. The good quality leadership of senior officers and secure direction given by elected members make the LEA a significant force for improvement. The authority takes a measured and pragmatic approach to development and is effective in giving the work a good local flavour. For the most part, this leads to effective, well-managed change. The recommendations of the first inspection report have been effectively addressed and overall progress in the LEA has many more strengths than weaknesses. The LEA's capacity to continue to improve and to address the recommendations of this report is good.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

11. Cornwall occupies the peninsula in the extreme south west of England. Its shape, landscape and limited road and rail network cause considerable rural isolation. The population of just under half a million is the most sparsely distributed in England and located in a scatter of small towns and villages. These factors have a significant impact on the LEA strategies for partnership and communication with schools.

12. The socio-economic context of the county has deteriorated since the first inspection of the LEA in 1996. A key feature is the continuing decline and closure of traditional mining, quarrying and fishing industries and the dependence on seasonal employment in tourism, agriculture and small craft businesses. These economic factors resulted in Cornwall being given European Union Objective 1 status in 2000. The socio-economic indicators that support this status are numerous. They include a gross domestic product (GDP) per head of population that is 65 per cent of the United Kingdom average and 89 per cent of the county's wards that are below the national median of multiple deprivation indices. Earnings are 26 per cent below the Great Britain average. In the 1991 census the proportion of adults with higher education qualifications was below the national average. In the areas of greatest disadvantage these factors manifest themselves in shortcomings in the experiences and language skills of some children when they start school.

13. The school population is approximately 74,000 of which the percentage educated in special schools is well below the national average, 0.4 per cent of primary aged pupils and 0.7 per cent of secondary aged pupils. By comparison, the percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational need is above the national average at 3.6 per cent in primary schools and 5.8 per cent in secondary schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is close to the national average.

14. Of the county's 245 primary schools the majority are for pupils aged five to 11, but include 14 junior and 15 infant schools. Sixteen per cent of primary schools overall are denominational. There are 31 secondary schools of which sixteen are for pupils aged 11 to 16 and the remainder for those aged 11 to 18. Seventy six per cent of pupils attend further education colleges when they reach 16. The county also maintains four special schools alongside 15 resource bases for special educational needs in mainstream primary and secondary schools. There are six centres for those pupils educated other than at school. Primary rolls are expected to decline by about 500 pupils per year over the next four years. Slowly rising secondary rolls are expected to peak in 2004.

15. There are 12 specialist colleges and 12 Beacon schools in the county and a large Education Action Zone (EAZ) covers the area of Camborne, Pool and Redruth, comprising thirty schools.

Performance

16. OFSTED inspections of schools indicate that the attainment of pupils on entry to primary schools is near the national average and this is supported by the LEA's baseline assessment data.

17. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is close to the national average in reading and mathematics but below the average in writing. Over the past three years, standards in reading and mathematics have been rising in line with the national rate of improvement. In writing standards have fluctuated and the rate of improvement is below that achieved nationally.

18. At the end of Key Stage 2, attainment in English, mathematics and science is broadly in line with the national average. Standards have been rising in English and science but fluctuating in mathematics. When compared with the national rate of improvement, English results are equal to the national average whilst those in mathematics and science have been either equal to, or below the national improvement rate.

19. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science is above national averages. In English and mathematics these standards have been rising, whilst in science they have fluctuated, as is the case nationally. The rate of improvement in English is above the national average, in science it is in line, and in mathematics below the national average.

20. At the end of Key Stage 4 the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades in GCSE is above the national average. Similarly those achieving one or more A* to G grades, and the average point score of candidates are above national averages. The rate of improvement in the percentage of five or more A* to C grades and the average point score is equal to the national rate but slightly below the national trend for the percentage of pupils gaining one or more A* to G grades.

21. The average point score for pupils taking two or more advanced level courses is in line with the national average and the rate of improvement is above the national figure.

22. OFSTED school inspection data indicates that the 83 per cent of primary schools are good or very good, well above the national average of 69 per cent and above the average in similar authorities of 77 per cent. Evidence from the schools that have been inspected twice indicates that improvements have been made in the quality of education and the management and efficiency of the schools. Only one per cent of primary schools are identified as requiring much improvement and there are two schools in special measures and one with serious weaknesses.

23. For secondary schools, OFSTED inspection data indicates that 86 per cent are good or very good which is above the average for similar authorities of 81 per cent and well above the national average of 66 per cent. The schools that have been inspected twice demonstrate improvements in their management and efficiency but there has been a decrease in the proportion of schools that offer overall good quality

education. No secondary school is identified as requiring much improvement and there are none in special measures or with serious weaknesses.

24. Attendance in primary and secondary schools is broadly in line with the national average. The rate of unauthorised absence is in line with the national rate in primary schools and well below the national average in secondary schools.

25. Permanent exclusions in primary schools are below the national average and have been falling since 1997. In secondary schools the figure is well below the national average.

Funding

26. Cornwall's Education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per school-age pupil for 2001/2002 was four per cent below the national average. The council has moved, over the last five years, from spending a little less than SSA on education to spending above SSA.

	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02
Budget (£m)	178.9	191.6	201.4	210.1
SSA (£m)	179.4	189.8	199.6	207.4
Budget as percentage of SSA %	99.7	100.9	100.9	101.3

(Source: LEA Form 2 return for the inspection)

27. The LEA also received significant funding from the Standards Fund so that the Local Schools Budget (LSB) per primary pupil in 2000/01 at £2,492 was above the average for comparable LEAs (£2,355 for statistical neighbours¹ and £2,324 for counties), and broadly in line with the national average of £2,484. Planned expenditure per secondary pupil of £3,083 showed a similar pattern (£2,942 for statistical neighbours and £2,891 for counties), but was a little below the national average of £3,141.

28. Cornwall's high level of social deprivation and Objective 1 status provide access to a range of grants and other funding, many of them for community-linked activities. LEA staff and schools have been active and successful in bidding for such grants. The LEA's success in increasing funding further through participation in a range of national pilot projects and in the development of an ambitious PFI scheme, is referred to elsewhere in this report.

Council structure

29. Cornwall County Council has established a cabinet structure with a council leader. The executive committee comprises the leader of the council and eight councillors, all of whom have a portfolio responsibility. The council has no party in overall control and there are 79 members; that includes 35 Liberal Democrat, 25 Independent, nine Labour, nine Conservative and one Liberal.

¹ Cornwall's statistical neighbours include Devon, Somerset, Norfolk, East Riding of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Dorset, North Yorkshire, East Sussex, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

30. Council business is carried out through the executive committee that is informed and supported by four cross-service policy development and scrutiny committees covering community life, individual well being, lifelong learning and resource management. Their general and specific roles are clearly defined. They include policy and development recommendations to the executive committee and scrutiny of the decisions and performance of the executive, of councillors and of chief officers.

31. The council's duties for education fall within three portfolios, lifelong learning, individual services to adults and individual services to children. There is a clear definition of responsibility for each portfolio area. The lifelong learning policy development and scrutiny committee is chaired by a non-executive member and covers all aspects of lifelong learning, irrespective of executive portfolio.

The LEA strategy for school improvement

32. The LEA has a good strategy for securing school improvement that is articulated clearly through its Education Development Plan. At the time of the inspection, the Education Development Plan 1999/02 (EDP 1) was nearing the end of its cycle and the LEA was in the process of preparing the next Education Development Plan 2002/07 (EDP 2) for submission. EDP 2 was, however, insufficiently advanced to enable judgements to be made about the quality of its activities and actions.

33. The priorities for EDP 1 were derived from a detailed audit of the LEA's performance and chosen carefully to reflect national priorities and the needs determined by the local context. The priorities are to:

- improve the quality of leadership, management and governance;
- enhance and extend pupils' learning;
- raise standards of literacy;
- raise standards of numeracy;
- develop the provision for children with special educational needs or specific requirements;
- address specific areas of significant underachievement; and
- improve schools with weaknesses.

34. The LEA has kept EDP 1 under close review. Actions in the first version of the plan were too broad and insufficiently targeted on specific groups of schools or pupils. For subsequent years there was considerable improvement. Year 3 action plans have sharply defined purposes and target groups. There are now achievable actions, directly related to measurable performance indicators and other success criteria. Resources are carefully quantified and deployed, and are transparent. There are good links between EDP 1 and other statutory plans such as the behaviour support plan, (BSP) the early years policy and plans, the special educational needs plan and the EAZ action plan.

35. There are effective systems for monitoring the implementation of EDP 1 appropriately involving elected members and schools. Responsibilities are well defined and timescales have been met. Evaluation has been refined and improved

and is now targeted effectively at identifying what has worked well and what action is needed to improve future practice.

36. Progress in implementing EDP 1 activities is at least satisfactory in all priority areas. Good progress is being secured with school self-review, in enhancing pupils' learning and in providing support and challenge for under-performing departments in secondary schools. High quality and sustained support has been given to schools causing serious concern. Overall, sound progress has been made towards meeting targets for improving attendance, for reducing permanent exclusions, raising attainment of the more able pupils and for tackling boys' underachievement.

37. Challenging targets have been set for Key Stage 2 and GCSE in 2002. The LEA met its 2000 targets in mathematics at Key Stage 2 and at GCSE. Targets for 2000 English tests at Key Stage 2 were exceeded and subsequent targets in this subject area were sensibly revised. Results for 2001 tests indicate that the LEA has not met its interim targets in either English or mathematics at Key Stage 2 and given the current rate of improvement in these subjects, the LEA is unlikely to meet its 2002 targets. GCSE targets for 2002 remain challenging but attainable.

The allocation of resources to priorities

38. The allocation of resources to priorities is satisfactory with few weaknesses, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. Council spending is well linked to the priorities set for education in the EDP. The aim of promoting high levels of attainment is reflected in the protection that school budgets received during earlier periods of budgetary constraint and the current funding of the service above SSA. There is a commitment in the medium-term financial plan to continue to transfer future increases in education SSA to schools. The council's policy of supporting rural communities is reflected in the high level of financial protection afforded to small schools.

39. The council has a good record of financial management. Directors have appropriate discretion to redirect any savings within their own service area and are expected to manage overspends within their total allocation. Previous overspends on SEN and school transport are being brought under control. Firm action is currently being taken to address the rising cost of provision for pupils out of school. Planned expenditure in 2001/02 of £35 per pupil on central administration was below the national average (£46 per pupil) and well within the government's indicative limit of £55 per pupil for LEAs outside London.

40. Representative groups of headteachers are fully involved and influential in the allocation of resources through the funding formula. Evidence from focus groups confirms that the low level of delegation in 2000/01, 79.8 per cent, was a response to the wishes of schools rather than an LEA wishing to retain unnecessary control. Further delegation, including the cost of support for SEN statements, helped increase the proportion of the LSB delegated in 2001/02 to 85.8 per cent (compared with 86.5 per cent nationally), in line with the current 85 per cent minimum requirement.

41. Effective action is now being taken, with the help of a seconded deputy headteacher, to simplify the formula. However, even after the proposed reduction from 59 to 25 factors, the formula will remain complex. A review of the age weightings and further simplification, planned for next year, is timely.

42. Bidding for external grants is well co-ordinated at both corporate and directorate level. An external funding officer in the Education Directorate provides clear advice to schools, training in bid writing, and is active in developing the partnerships needed to access many of the grants. Primary schools placed Cornwall in the top quartile of LEAs in the school survey for this activity.

43. Schools' expenditure is appropriately monitored through quarterly returns. There are good working relations between link advisers and the business units that provide finance and personnel support to schools. As a result, only three schools have deficits greater than 2.5 per cent, all of which have clear recovery plans. Schools with large reserves were a concern at the time of the last inspection and remain so. Despite firm guidance and a requirement to identify the reasons for carrying large balances, half of the secondary, 90 per cent of primary and all the special schools have surpluses in excess of five per cent. A £4 million addition to school balances in 2000/01 reflects, in part, increased income generation by schools and the late addition of direct grants. The distribution of balances is related neither to the size, the type of school nor to the standards achieved in schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve schools' financial management:

- clarify the reasons for schools holding large unallocated reserves, and agree action to reduce them to reasonable levels.

Structure for achieving Best Value and continuous improvement

44. Structures for the implementation of Best Value are satisfactory. The first two Best Value Performance Plans (BVPP) received unqualified audits, although the auditors made a number of recommendations, particularly in the area of performance management, to which, after a slow start, the council is now taking appropriate steps to respond. A procedure for reporting key performance data to the executive has now been agreed. A performance management system which links the existing personal appraisal system more directly to objectives in business plans is also being introduced.

45. The education directorate's existing arrangements for fundamental reviews have been successfully integrated into the Best Value regime. The criteria for selecting services for review were appropriately applied in determining the education reviews in Year 1 and are being reviewed in the light of experience. Future reviews are, rightly, likely to be more cross-cutting than those already completed. The possibility of having to address issues flowing from this inspection has been sensibly anticipated by leaving space in the Year 3 programme.

46. Two completed reviews were presented for inspection by the OFSTED team, one on the management of school improvement, the other on the work of the schools section in supporting schools and governors. The timetables for both reviews were a little delayed and the written reports are constrained by the rather rigid format required for all council reviews. Despite improvement plans that lack precision and measurable targets, both reviews have had positive outcomes that have impacted on the quality of services. Formal evaluations of the reviews are attached at Appendices 2 and 3.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Summary of effectiveness of LEA's support for school improvement

47. The overall effectiveness of support for school improvement is satisfactory with significant strengths and few weaknesses. The service has made progress since the previous inspection and particularly in the last 12 months. Despite some staffing difficulties the clear vision, direction and quality of the services provided have been consistently maintained and improvement has been steady. Changes made since the Best Value review of the services (see Appendix 2) have been clear and effective. However, not all the potential of the service has been fully developed and deployed and its impact in raising standards is still to be proven. The services to support the management of schools are at least sound and often good.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

48. The LEA's approach to monitoring, challenge and intervention is good. There is a clear definition of monitoring and challenge that is mainly based on a thorough analysis of performance data. The LEA's work in schools is effectively differentiated in relation to need. Secondary schools have developed, with the guidance and challenge from the school improvement officer, a rigorous approach to data analysis and target setting. More recently the LEA's use of good data on primary school performance has led to closer monitoring and challenge. The procedures are now very effective and well positioned to further raise standards.

49. Schools have been fully involved in the development of the procedures for monitoring, challenge and intervention particularly through management partnership groups. The framework is clearly set out both in an improved definition of criteria for monitoring and challenge recently issued to schools, and in revisions of the EDP. Intervention is based on clear criteria and programmes are well matched to schools' needs. The allocation of LEA resources is clear, as are the time scales and expected outcomes. As a result school staff express confidence and trust in the contribution the LEA makes to school improvement.

50. Overall schools are clear about the purpose of the annual monitoring and target setting visit and their entitlement to support. The basis for support to secondary schools has been clear for some time and a wide range of departments have been targeted to good effect. Apart from the annual visits to agree targets, additional support is purchased by schools, unless the LEA can demonstrate a need for intervention, either on a school or departmental basis. Primary schools, though clear about the procedures, are still adjusting to recent arrangements that ensure resources are focussed on greatest need. The appointment of officers with primary school management experience has sharpened the monitoring of primary schools, and it is beginning to operate effectively. The primary networks being developed and sustained by the LEA offer plenty of scope for schools to buy in expertise to support school improvement.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools

51. The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools is good, as is the use of data for monitoring and target setting. Revisions to the first EDP have helped the LEA to target its support more effectively. Since the Best Value review of school improvement services, resources have been better co-ordinated and consistency has improved. The LEA is effective in targeting support on areas of greatest need, and the allocation of resources is transparent and fair.

52. The LEA has a clear commitment to the principle of self-managing schools. It has played a strong role in training headteachers and governors in the interpretation and use of performance data. When the LEA challenges a school or provides support, it does so, in partnership with headteachers and governors, in a way that encourages self-evaluation and autonomy. This includes effective initiatives supported by the school development service and the use of high quality data supplied by and analysed with the school improvement team.

53. Monitoring has been effectively refined and gained more precision over time. The small team of monitoring inspectors uses a rich database, including financial information, to identify strengths, weaknesses and trends in performance. Officers are aware of the need to make more effective use of the information on particular groups of pupils, such as high attaining and minority ethnic pupils, in order to raise standards. The very good data, shared with schools, contributes well to their self-evaluation.

54. The circulation of performance data is timely and presented in a helpful and accessible format enabling schools to benchmark against a good range of comparators. Data provision is supported by effective training for schools in its interpretation and application. The LEA is successful in encouraging schools to go beyond the statistical analysis of performance data to the interpretation of what it means for classroom practice and curricular targets, such as improving boys' writing.

55. When annual target-setting visits are made inspectors have a thorough grasp of recent performance trends and information relevant to the cohort, enabling them to help set realistic but challenging targets. When schools buy support or are targeted by the LEA for additional support, the provision is relevant, timely and appropriately resourced. Electronic transfer of data to schools works effectively and the transfer of information when children change schools is well managed.

56. The LEA can readily point to examples of school improvement as a result of challenge in leadership, management, teaching and learning. In most secondary schools and in a few primary schools, there has been considerable impact on raising standards. Much work has been appropriately focussed on schools with below average performance. However officers acknowledge that schools that perform above national averages are not sufficiently challenged to improve on their previous best.

Recommendation

In order to raise standards :

- use data and suitable strategies to raise attainment in writing at Key Stage 1 to continue to improve attainment throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 and to raise the attainment of able pupils.

57. Detailed reports of school monitoring visits go to headteachers. They are based on close observation of teaching or the impact of management arrangements on pupil performance and make clear recommendations. However it is not the LEA's practice to include governors routinely in the circulation of notes of visit, except when there has been formal notification that the school is causing concern.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools

58. The LEA's work with under-performing schools is good and the use of performance data is very good.

59. Cornwall has a very low percentage of under-performing schools. No secondary schools are in special measures or have serious weaknesses and only 10 per cent are on the LEA's register of schools causing concern. Two primary schools are in special measures and one has serious weaknesses. These schools have received positive progress reports from HMI and appear to be on track for removal from the categories within a two-year period. A fourth primary school, identified as under-achieving, is to be closed. Intervention and support for the nine per cent of primary schools that cause the LEA concern have improved and are now of good quality. No schools have been designated as needing special measures or as having serious weaknesses since November 2000.

60. The LEA's systems for identifying schools causing concern are made clear through documentation, briefings and officer contacts. The school improvement team's procedures are thorough, consistent and transparent and school development advisers are kept well informed. The curriculum development service also contributes to the process but their information is not routinely sought in relation to all schools. Important prompts can be missed.

Recommendation

In order to improve the monitoring of schools causing concern:

- clarify the sources, and ensure that all information from officers, relevant to the improvement of schools, is recorded.

61. When inspectors identify shortcomings through data monitoring and other sources, an improvement action plan is rapidly negotiated, making best use of schools' and governors' contribution. Advisory resources are provided appropriately to support the improvement plan. Headteachers interviewed were consistent in saying that the support is clearly focussed on what needs to be done, expectations of outcomes and deadlines are specific and the school is expected to take things forward autonomously as the planned contribution ends. Progress from the first point of contact is carefully monitored and reported to senior managers. In addition governors report a prompt and efficient response by the LEA when unforeseen circumstances arise.

62. Some schools are not fully aware of the extent of the good range of services that can be purchased to support further improvement. However the LEA is effective in directing EDP resources and standards fund grants to provide programmes that will sustain improvement that include networks of expertise located in schools. The knowledge of these resources is growing.

63. Elected members are kept up to date on school improvement issues and receive clear reports from officers. The LEA has occasionally used its statutory powers to appoint additional, experienced governors together with other suitable strategies such as secondments into schools and, when necessary, the use of staff competency procedures.

Support for literacy

64. The LEA's support for literacy was not a focus for this inspection and it was not covered in the previous inspection. Monitoring by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) has identified, with the LEA, the areas of effective practice and those requiring improvement in relation to the management, teaching and training for the national strategy. Standards in reading at Key Stage 1 and in English at Key Stages 2 and 3 are securely in line with national averages. However, attainment in writing at Key Stage 1 has been below the national average for the past two years and the rate of improvement is now less than that achieved nationally. The LEA is very aware of this issue and has developed a range of suitable improvement strategies for use in schools. These include a writing improvement programme targeted at the large cohorts where attainment is lowest, and an assessment project with a focus on writing tasks. In addition, there is guidance for the teaching of writing, an analysis of Key Stage 1 writing tasks to inform teaching strategies and improvements in the use of data for identifying individual and group needs.

Support for numeracy

65. The LEA's support for numeracy was not a focus for this inspection and was not covered in the previous inspection. Standards in mathematics in Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 have been consistently at or above national averages since 1995. Evidence from HMI monitoring of the implementation of the national strategy indicates that it has been well managed and the teaching in schools is predominantly satisfactory or good.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

66. LEA support for the development of curriculum information and communication technology (ICT) has some strengths and few weaknesses. It was not covered in the previous inspection report. The LEA has a sound plan for developing ICT and for enabling schools to raise standards progressively. In the first year of implementation of its ICT development plan, priorities over-emphasised the provision and allocation of resources. The increase in the size of the support team in September 2000 has permitted a much clearer and appropriate focus on supporting curriculum developments. Useful guidance has been given to schools to help them produce ICT development plans.

67. The LEA carefully analyses the data submitted for tests and examinations at Key Stage 4, the results of teacher assessment at Key Stage 3 and the findings of OFSTED inspections. This enables areas to be identified where curriculum guidance and training are needed and where intensive support should be offered. A start has been made to support the use of ICT in other subject areas and provide appropriate advice and support on the assessment of pupils' work. The LEA acknowledges that teacher assessments in ICT vary widely between schools but to date limited attention has been given to their moderation.

68. The National Grid for Learning (NGfL) grant and New Opportunities Funding (NOF) are integrated appropriately within the LEA's wider strategy and are being administered well. Good progress has been made towards achieving nationally set targets for ICT resources. For example, the ratios of computers to pupils in both primary and secondary schools have already met the August 2002 target. The LEA is also well on track to achieve the targets set for broadband connections. Secondary schools are developing their Key Stage 4 courses to include ICT skills accreditation and nearly half of them have moved towards offering a GNVQ IT option. However, despite this, the proportion of students offered accredited ICT courses remains lower than the national mean and is rightly an area for further improvement.

69. The LEA's support for NOF training is good. It has offered objective advice to enable schools to select a provider for the training and a much higher percentage of teachers than nationally have completed the courses. Most schools opted for a locally designed training model pioneered and implemented by the south-west regional consortium which includes staff from the LEA. This NOF training has been well received by schools. The courses are praised for the highly differentiated modules and for the use of good classroom practitioners to provide additional support to schools across the county.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

70. Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is a strength of the LEA; the provision is good. A range of well-founded strategies, based on the national framework, are supporting improvement. The quality of what has been achieved is very good and there are ambitious plans to build on this foundation as the strategy develops.

71. Management of the initiatives is effective because the LEA had positioned itself well by anticipating the introduction of the national strategy. Target setting at the end of Key Stage 3 had been encouraged and supported before it became a requirement. Contact was made with pilot authorities to share experiences with officers, headteachers and heads of departments. Visits to observe good practice in primary schools were encouraged and significant discussions and exchange of ideas occurred in Learning Forum meetings. By listening to headteachers' reservations about initiative overload and demonstrating careful co-ordination, training was well attended. It was reported that the strategy has had considerable impact on teaching and learning. The LEA's determination to model key skills as a cross-curricular matter is appropriately reflected in cross-curricular appointments in schools.

72. Tracking of attainment by the end of the Key Stage and analysis of value added from the end of Key Stage 2 is well established. Working from this database, DfES specifications, Section 10 reports and consultation with headteachers, the LEA has effectively identified the first wave of schools for additional support.

Support for minority ethnic groups including Travellers

73. The support for minority ethnic and Traveller children has more strengths than weaknesses. It was not covered during the previous inspection. The service, which is part funded centrally and part delegated to schools, has undergone a recent re-structuring. This has brought the service under the management of the school improvement team and the quality of service has improved.

74. The LEA has a very small number of minority ethnic pupils compared with its statistical neighbours and nationally. The modest grant for English as an additional language (EAL) work enables the LEA to fund a part-time instructor and to employ learning support assistants (LSA) in schools. Given the very small numbers it is to the LEA's credit that the need to establish an accurate database has been a priority. Effective use is made of the national language line to provide a translation service for schools. There is a strong commitment to raising the awareness of school staff on bilingualism. However, the appropriate development of precise criteria to identify SEN language needs as distinct from those represented by the need for EAL is very recent.

75. Schools are clear about the level and nature of support that is available and value the work of the support service, which has beneficial links with the literacy team. The support is strategically deployed and offers good levels of expertise and enthusiasm to the work in schools, although a few schools report difficulties in finding the expertise they need. The majority of EAL pupils make good progress and attain high standards. Good procedures are in place to support new arrivals and the service provides effective training for teachers and LSAs based in schools. There is no monitoring of the attainment and progress of minority ethnic pupils but the recently introduced individual tracking system for all pupils gives the LEA the capacity to do so.

76. The traveller education service (TES) is small with 2.6 full time equivalent teachers and one permanent LSA. Since being re-structured, the majority of their

time is focused on work in schools and bridging the gap between school and home. The strategy of establishing LSAs with flexible contracts to provide for Traveller children is good. It results in their hours being boosted when new Traveller children are admitted to schools and this is a creative and effective model of support. Data gathered from the annual survey is used well to inform planning to improve the service.

77. The TES is effective in reducing exclusions and supporting improved attendance by Traveller children. The level of satisfaction with the support for pupils and schools is improving. The recent shift of emphasis to setting learning objectives for Traveller children has begun to impact on raised standards in reading and writing.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

78. Early progress made in this area was limited but provision is now satisfactory. Although guidance was produced for schools, there were no arrangements for monitoring its impact. However, summer schools have been well subscribed and enjoyed some success. The LEA has recently established a wider brief for gifted and talented pupils, involving a number of advisory staff, including literacy and numeracy teams and a specialist consultant. The LEA now appropriately distinguishes between pupils capable of high attainment and those that are gifted and talented. Improved support for pupils with this ability spectrum is planned in EDP 2 under the creativity in Cornwall priority.

79. The Learning Forum, where good practice is exchanged and developed, contributes to the strategies and these are well used by schools. Good connections with the University of the First Age are established. Literacy and numeracy consultants, alongside leading teachers, are extending their work with schools to include strategies for more able, gifted and talented pupils. Officers recognise the requirement to provide more for this group and the need to track the impact of initiatives, particularly extra curricular events, on pupils' subsequent progress in school.

Support for school management

80. The LEA provides very good support for school leadership and management and satisfactory support for efforts to achieve Best Value in schools. Overall the quality of support is good and has improved since the previous inspection.

81. There is a strategic vision of career-long development with a very sound infrastructure in place to support it. A management training partnership with other LEAs and higher education has been rated highly in a recent OFSTED inspection and participation in the national programmes for senior management is high. The LEA supports schools' self-evaluation well through training and joint work on improvement projects. Officers use secondments constructively, deliberately enhancing the experience of the secondee as well as assisting the placement school and the LEA. The locus of control for management development is transferred, as far as possible, to schools, for example, head teachers organise the headlamp programme.

82. The LEA's successful bid for participation in a DfES 'Pathfinder' initiative is typical of its keenness to be at the forefront of actions supporting innovative management, curriculum development and approaches to teaching and learning. 'Pathfinder' will develop coherent provision and access to subject specialisation for pupils and staff. A seconded headteacher is mapping specialist and beacon initiatives to inform joint planning by schools and the LEA. The learning forum organises conferences and opportunities to share good practice, which has inspired change in many schools and is reported as having significant effects in some. The LEA also supports action research by staff to improve teaching and 250 teachers have qualified as NOF tutors in ICT.

83. Schools are supported in adopting Best Value principles by the provision of financial and other data so that they can compare their outcomes with similar schools and take suitable action to secure good practice. Opportunities to consult about best practice are well supported by LEA arrangements and self-evaluation enables schools and governors to develop internal challenge.

Support to governors

84. LEA support for governors has improved since the previous inspection and the Best Value review; it is now highly satisfactory with few weaknesses. The size of the administrative unit to deal with briefing, recruitment and induction has been increased. The LEA no longer offers a clerking service, but it does support informal networks of independent clerks through a newsletter. Governor recruitment is effective and vacancy levels are average.

85. Governors are represented in consultation about policy development through a management partnership group, the governors' council and regional meetings. The LEA supports governors well in making senior appointments; and officers respond promptly and effectively to unforeseen crises. The training provided is well informed and rigorous, particularly for new governors, for data interpretation and target setting. The LEA assists governors in their monitoring role through training and in some instances has been assiduous in pointing out slow improvement and under-performance. Not all reports of officers' monitoring and support visits are forwarded to governors, though reports are always sent to governors in the case of schools causing concern.

86. The LEA intervenes effectively when help is requested, and does consider the effectiveness of the Governing Body when a school is causing concern, but although minutes are archived, there is no monitoring of the evidence to gain an overview of the quality of individual schools' governance.

Recommendation

In order to develop the strategic role of governors:

- ensure that chairs of governors receive copies of appropriate notes of visits to schools.

Support for early years

87. The inspection report of 1996 recommended that improvements should be made in the provision for children who are under five. These included developments in the curriculum, improvements in assessment and changes in teaching and classroom organisation. Development, in conjunction with the priorities of the early years Development and Childcare Plan (EYDCP) has resulted in good progress with these recommendations.

88. Baseline assessment of all children in the foundation stage is well established and moderated with representatives from schools and early years settings. Outcomes indicate that children have average levels of understanding and skill at this age but the range of attainment is wide. There are areas where low attainment, particularly in language skills, is a common feature. The LEA is developing an entry profile for use when children begin statutory schooling which will enhance the baseline data and the LEA's already good information on Key Stage 1 standards. This promises to provide very good information for more effective targeting of future support.

89. Of the 32 per cent of children who do not attend a LEA nursery or nursery class many, but not all, attend non-maintained nurseries. Officers recognise that, in some locations, needs are not fully met, although a good range of provision exists through programmes such as Sure Start, Home Start, community nurseries and early excellence centres. Early years activities were introduced into EDP1 part way through its implementation but planned developments are clear in EDP2. Actions are appropriately based on staff training for the foundation curriculum and its assessment, but lack any emphasis on further extending the access to early years provision.

90. Recent curriculum developments have rightly been informed by national initiatives, baseline assessment evidence and the expressed needs of staff. A wide programme of training has offered generic and age-specific courses for teachers and support staff together with successful annual conferences. Priority has been given to teaching methods and the organisation of learning, supported by good quality guidance in the footsteps curriculum and advice on mixed aged teaching. The analysis of recruitment and training is impressive, as is the staged evaluation of its impact. Inspections of early years settings already show some measures of improvement in the quality of provision.

91. Recent and appropriate action on 'inclusivity' is taking place through a cross agency working party. Its purpose is to establish a wide interpretation of the issue, identify the groups concerned and develop a self-assessment tool for use in schools and early years settings.

Support for small schools

92. The LEA's support for small schools in the 1996 inspection was judged to have very positive features but also areas for further development. Strengths included the

effect of the high level of support that enabled pupils to achieve good standards. However, insufficient guidance was provided to improve the teaching of mixed-age classes. School clustering, though helpful in reducing isolation, lacked adequate co-ordination and evaluation.

93. The provision has retained former strengths and development points have been addressed successfully. Materials to support planning in mixed age classes have been well received and a number of OFSTED inspection reports of small schools inspected in 2001/02 have confirmed this view. Standards in small schools remain in line with, or better than, LEA averages.

94. The LEA continues to provide additional funding to small schools for curriculum and staff development purposes and there are several well-developed networks that enhance collaboration. The successful Penryn Partnership is such an example where several small primary schools work with a secondary school using a shared development plan supported by joint training and mutual curriculum and extra curricular activities. The LEA has in place appropriate co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation of arrangements for all small school cluster activities. The annual conference for headteachers of small schools also provides a valuable opportunity for the development of new ideas and the dissemination of good practice.

95. There are increasing difficulties in recruiting headteachers to small rural primary schools and teacher absence in the LEA has risen over the last two years at a higher rate than the national increase. Although these absences are by no means confined to small schools, the LEA has identified significant levels of stress amongst those working in, and managing, below average-sized schools. The LEA has several pilot studies looking at ways of alleviating stress and making the leadership role in small schools more manageable. Although it is early days, the initial evidence suggests that these initiatives are proving beneficial to those schools involved.

Support for post-16 education

96. The recommendations in the inspection report of 1996 required the LEA to develop a clear post-16 strategy, to use management information more effectively, to provide guidance to schools on good practice post-16 and give advice on courses to schools and students. These issues have been addressed effectively in the context of national developments in the 14–19 curriculum. The progress has been good.

97. The attainment of the 24 per cent of Cornwall's pupils who remain in school after 16 has risen gradually since 1996 and is broadly in line both with national averages and national improvement rates. The high quality of the LEA's analysed data now provides attainment and value added information which is closely monitored by the secondary inspector. It is used to identify and disseminate areas of good practice and to inform strategies for improvement in teaching and the curriculum.

98. The council's post 16 policy is firmly based on the maintenance of sixth forms in schools, including two that have fewer than 100 students, and suitable plans for rationalisation where possible. The strategy for greater quality, range and choice of courses through collaboration between schools and with schools and colleges of further education is making progress. Early action was taken in 1997 to establish,

with the LEA's principal partners, the Post 16 forum that has now become the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Learning Partnership. Subject training for teachers, post-16 conferences, newsletters and management guidance have raised the expectations of post-16 education.

99. The work of this partnership has addressed the concerns raised in the first inspection. Most schools have increased the range of post-16 courses offered, particularly in vocational areas. Work with the Education Business Partnership (EBP) is successfully developing and accrediting key skills and supporting projects relating to enterprise and economic development. Through the Connexions service, there are plans for enhanced careers advice through electronic information, free-phone services and one-to-one guidance. The vision of an electronic 'Learning Network' promises to provide on-line group learning for low demand subjects. Accredited courses are being developed for students with SEN on their transfer to college. An innovative project offers targeted and closely monitored maintenance allowances to 1360 students.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

100. As at the time of the last inspection, most traded services for schools are effective. The 2001/02 arrangements for buying back management services are well co-ordinated and provide a satisfactory infrastructure for schools. Services provide good value for money overall. Buy-back rates are high reflecting both the general satisfaction with the quality, cost and convenience of most services, and schools' wish to remain as partners with the LEA.

101. Services are offered on a realistically costed subscription or pay-as-you-go basis by school-focussed teams within business units. Most schools see the council as the provider of first resort, but will actively seek alternative suppliers if the service falls below expectations. Headteacher representatives operate an effective brokerage role on behalf of schools, holding service managers firmly to account. The headteacher group also negotiates changes to service level agreements and ensures that services respond quickly to changing needs.

102. Information about most, but not all, services is conveniently contained in a single "Services for Schools" folder and simple order form, that are also available on-line. Partly in response to requests from headteachers to minimise documentation, there are concise service descriptions rather than formal SLAs. This means that specifications are basic; it is not always clear, for example, what would continue to be provided if the school did not subscribe. Few of the descriptions include service standards, complaints procedures, start dates or penalty clauses. There is no advice about possible alternative providers although headteachers confirm that service managers provide impartial advice on request.

Recommendation

In order to help schools adopt and use Best Value principles:

- make service specifications more explicit.

103. **Financial services** are satisfactory with a number of strengths and were of a similar quality at the time of the previous inspection. The corporate finance business unit has dedicated education specialists who effectively support both schools and service managers. All schools subscribe to the standard service that provides cost-effective telephone and appropriate on-site advice on budget setting and monitoring. Originally intended as a way of reducing the administrative burden for the smallest schools, the enhanced and effective travelling bursars service undertakes all routine financial transactions, and is now purchased by about one third of schools.

104. Finance officers support school autonomy through light touch monitoring. All schools have bank accounts and are required to make expenditure returns only four times a year. Finance staff also support schools through user groups for school secretaries and bursars.

105. Budget information is given to schools during the second half of the spring term; this timing is agreed with representative headteachers. The current simplification of the formula provides a good opportunity to improve the presentation of individual school budget calculations. Schools receive periodic benchmarked financial data, but there is no annual finance manual with, for example, salary tables to help schools set their own budgets. Internal audit reports are comprehensive and clear, leaving governing bodies in no doubt about any action that needs to be taken. Finance officers have not, however, been sufficiently influential in containing the growth in overall school reserves.

106. **Personnel services** are satisfactory with areas for further improvement, as was the case at the time of the previous inspection. All schools subscribe to the personnel advice and payroll services. The unit has a clear business plan that appropriately identifies future developments including, for example, the impact of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme. Personnel officers work effectively with link advisers and finance staff in responding to the needs of schools causing concern or those with falling rolls. There is a comprehensive and up-to-date handbook with service-specific guidance and a range of helpful model policies.

107. Earlier problems with payroll administration have been addressed after service managers were called to account by the headteacher representative group. The service is currently being improved by the introduction of electronic forms for on-line notification of new employees, although inconsistencies remain, particularly for secondary schools that placed all aspects of the service in the bottom quartile of LEAs in the school survey.

108. **Property services** are good and this aspect was not covered in the previous inspection. Services are comprehensive and well differentiated, although the options in the "Services for Schools" folder lack some clarity. The basic subscription provides good telephone advice on all aspects of governors' delegated maintenance responsibilities. The enhanced service provides access to a qualified surveyor who knows the school and who will undertake site inspections, specify work, place orders and supervise construction.

109. About two-thirds of schools subscribe to the property maintenance partnership which offers an effective insurance scheme for major breakdowns. It is managed by a board with headteacher and governor representation, that prioritises structural maintenance and ensures, for example, that schools are redecorated externally on a five-year cycle. Schools report that the maintenance service is prompt and efficient. Effective crisis work ensured a secondary school could re-open quickly after a major fire.

110. The service provides good advice on the use of devolved capital. Surveyors assist governors to develop schemes which optimise the use of grants and effectively link schools' own priorities with the LEA's asset management plan. There is an informative termly newsletter for schools that can be viewed on-line and the web site includes a helpful interactive flow chart to help schools determine the appropriate funding route for different types of buildings-related expenditure. The council's architectural team are winning national recognition for their design work for Cornwall's "Classroom of the Future" project.

111. Support for **ICT in school administration** is satisfactory overall, but with many good features. Electronic communication with schools is a real strength, as is the electronic transfer of data between schools and the LEA. Support for schools' management information systems is also effective. The weakness lies in the unsatisfactory technical support previously offered by the corporate information services group that has driven many schools to seek alternative providers and is only now being resolved.

112. The council's corporate ICT strategy has been criticised by Best Value inspectors, but the development plan for schools is satisfactory. A well-used Intranet has entirely replaced the weekly mailing to schools. The Intranet also contains a good range of up-to-date administrative and policy documents together with links to other council sites and beyond. The council's web site provides a good range of public information such as advice on admissions to schools and related policies, school performance tables, and links to other education sites including OFSTED, the DfES and those of individual Cornish schools. The council consults the public using interactive questionnaires.

113. **Cleaning** and **grounds maintenance** were the subject of light touch inspection. About two-thirds of schools purchase these services from the in-house provider. The services were rated in the top quartile of LEAs in the school survey. The external **catering** contractor is well monitored although the quality of the meals remains a concern for many schools. Service managers provide client advice on alternative providers on request, but the initiative rests with schools. The council's in-house contractors have won the sub-contract to provide cleaning, grounds maintenance and catering for the 32 schools in the PFI scheme.

The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

114. Arrangements for assuring the supply and quality of teachers are good. A major strength is the way the authority makes productive use of data to anticipate medium to longer-term needs. Members are aware of the problems in recruiting and

retaining teachers and have established a single-issue panel to investigate the issues and consider further strategies and solutions.

115. The LEA does not currently have significant problems of recruitment and retention of teachers but the above average numbers of teachers in Cornwall that are due to retire in the next few years, suggest that the situation is set to worsen. Recruitment pressures are already growing in schools. The LEA has an appropriate range of strategies to support schools with the recruitment of good quality staff. These include working closely with local higher education establishments to promote, deliver and quality assure graduate teacher training programmes with higher education, school-centred initial teacher training courses and a research project exploring routes into teaching for teaching assistants. Data also suggests that the LEA has growing problems in retaining staff but as yet is without the robust information needed to identify the underlying causes. Officers are working closely with schools to investigate the issues.

116. It is the coherence of the programme designed to help to retain teachers that makes the LEA stand out from others. There is a sensible move to provide training that offers a better match between individual and school-based needs and individual development opportunities. The current programme is effective in bridging and complementing the national training courses. Appropriate opportunities are on offer for newly qualified teachers, for teachers in their first few years of teaching and for sustained development opportunities designed to enhance the leadership and management potential of young teachers. There is also a very good staged continuum of development for teaching assistants. Induction arrangements are designed effectively to aid the retention of newly qualified teachers and new headteachers.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

117. The effectiveness of the support for school improvement has many strengths and few weaknesses. Its costs are comparable with similar services in other LEAs and the value for money is highly satisfactory.

118. The leadership has gained momentum, particularly over the year preceding the inspection, it is satisfactory with strengths and few weaknesses. The school improvement team's monitoring of schools is well focussed and consistent. The autonomy of the school development service to support initiatives and broker new partnerships has led to an impressive network of arrangements to foster good practice. The development of the data unit has been particularly successful in providing management information to the LEA and schools. Headteachers have been appropriately encouraged to contribute to the direction and sometimes the co-ordination of resources for school improvement and the LEA's relationships with schools are good. No areas of school improvement have significant weakness and further improvement is planned with the introduction of the partnership officer role.

119. The new arrangements for monitoring and support reflect the priorities of the LEA and are welcomed by schools. The recent reorganisation promises to be very effective, but has not had time to demonstrate its impact on school performance. Operational links between the monitoring and support branches are sound and

regular meetings take place to report back through lead officers. Although the strategic plan for school improvement has evolved slowly, individual service plans now have suitable objectives, they are effectively implemented and well understood by schools. However, arrangements for evaluation in these plans lack clarity because success criteria are not sufficiently precise in all cases.

120. Although the LEA had been slow to move away from its previous practice based on regular contact with all schools, the necessary change, to achieve intervention in inverse proportion to success, has been managed without forfeiting the confidence of head teachers and governors. Resources are now targeted effectively, informed by a consistent objective of continuous improvement and specific, time-limited plans.

121. Arrangements for performance management are satisfactory but with some important weaknesses, although recent developments have begun to address them. Appraisals have usually occurred on an annual basis, but without a close alignment to service plans. Performance indicators have been more closely defined recently, but no evaluation has yet taken place to test these definitions against the impact of officers' work in schools. Work records, though monitored and reviewed from time to time have not prevented unduly heavy demands upon many officers' time. There is a general commitment to gaining expertise, but induction programmes and mentoring arrangements are not standardised. While inspectors, advisers and consultants are well briefed and take opportunities to attend educational events outside the county, there is a lack of overall co-ordination of training linked to personal targets.

122. Officers have a good range and level of expertise to support school improvement that often includes recent school management experience. Despite recruitment difficulties, the LEA has in place a well-qualified team, which commands the sustained respect of schools and governors. Judicious use of seconded senior managers and good practitioners has assisted in covering gaps in the LEA, whilst enhancing the connection between the service and schools.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's SEN provision

123. Since the last inspection, the LEA has built on the strengths of its inclusive SEN provision and effectively tackled weaknesses in funding arrangements, management training for special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), and deployment and co-ordination of support staff. Provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties has also improved. Through good consultation the LEA has addressed the weaker aspects of provision and gained the strong commitment of schools. The revised arrangements have contributed to improvements in, the way statutory obligations are managed, reductions in the overall numbers of statements issued and a clearer funding mechanism for schools. Financial management and control is effective, overspends are reducing and the planned expenditure for 2001/02 is on track to be within budget. Schools receive effective support, training and advice that assists pupils with SEN to make good progress.

Strategy

124. The LEA has a good strategy for SEN that relates well to the national agenda and the code of practice for SEN; very effective progress is being made with its management and implementation. The policy retains a clear focus on inclusive provision that is well established. A high level of inclusion has been achieved with just 0.6 per cent of pupils currently educated in special schools. Recent developments in policy and strategy have been informed by an effective review of LEA provision and an audit of needs. Schools contributed to the review and they have, along with councillors, governors, agencies, parents and voluntary groups, been fully consulted. As a consequence, there is both good knowledge and understanding of the key outcomes of the review and of the next steps in the SEN plan. It is an annual plan that describes appropriate tasks shows continuity with the previous year and reflects the LEA's incremental approach to development. However it lacks a statement of the long-term targets the LEA expects to achieve and how the many initiatives might enable a desired set of outcomes to be reached.

125. Since 1999/00, the significant overspend on SEN has been halved and in 2001/02 the expenditure is on line to be within budget. A focus on accurate financial planning has resulted in more appropriate systems and very effective arrangements for monitoring budgets at least termly. Monitoring by the SEN standing panel of the executive committee has been successful in reducing projected overspends. The inclusion strategy has the ultimate intention to provide for pupils with severe needs within the county, closer to their community and at a reduced cost.

126. In April 2001 funding delegation to schools was increased, based on the allocation of resources for additional needs through clear indicators using national Key-Stage assessments. It has provided schools with greater flexibility to meet the needs of pupils with SEN more promptly. In parallel, the LEA restructured its special classes in primary and secondary mainstream schools into 15 area resource bases in order to increase and improve the provision for pupils with severe and complex needs. These inclusion initiatives are well known and widely supported by schools.

127. LEA monitoring of SEN provision is generally strong but evaluation is still at an early stage of development. There is a growing database of evidence that includes information from annual reviews, customer surveys, professional audits of specific practice and case study analyses that are used to determine the impact of the strategy. However, although there is good evidence of the progress of pupils with a statement of SEN there are no specified targets for non-statemented pupils with SEN against which their progress and the effectiveness of the policy can be systematically evaluated.

Recommendation

In order to further improve the strategy and provision for SEN :

- establish a long-term plan that includes the targets for SEN, how they will be achieved and how the plan will be evaluated in terms of pupils' progress.

Statutory obligations

128. The LEA has made good progress in meeting its statutory obligations since the previous inspection. While the proportion of pupils with statements is still high at 4.2 per cent, this is a reduction of 0.8 per cent on the previous year. Arrangements for completing statutory assessments within prescribed time scales have also improved from 25 per cent in 1996 to almost 90 per cent. This has been achieved by using a detailed, time-lined and rigorous tracking system that all administrative staff have been trained to use. Where delays arise, they are allowed exceptions such as missed appointments or delays in receiving advice from the health and social services.

129. Revised criteria for assessments and statements are consistently implemented and rigorously monitored and reviewed. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of statements. They are well written and specify clearly the pupils' targets and the required teaching arrangements, so that progress is easier to track and the provision more amenable to evaluation. Officers are appropriately involved in annual reviews and revisions of statements.

130. The LEA makes good efforts to provide and obtain parental advice for assessments. They work sensitively to give guidance and to conciliate where disagreements have arisen. However, there have been 11 tribunal cases in the past 18 months. The new rigour with which the LEA's criteria for statutory assessment and review of statements are being applied is thought to be the reason for this rise in tribunal cases. The LEA has recently established an independent parent partnership that is a positive step to support conciliation for parents. The group providing the service is knowledgeable and resourceful and, when linked effectively with LEA decision makers, plays an influential and effective role.

School improvement

131. The provision and support for SEN in schools has many strengths and few weaknesses. Changes in delegated funding since April 2001 have been effectively linked through a moderated audit of needs using the new descriptors and criteria. As a consequence, the level and band of individual needs in school is identified and funding is allocated to reflect the need. The systems for moderation are rigorous and include views from both officers and head teachers. Schools understand the need for a robust system, and despite some pain, there is a commitment to working with it because it is fairer, more transparent, reflects pupils' needs and is likely to change with them.

132. The LEA successfully supports pupils with a wide range of severe and complex needs in mainstream classes. The effective reorganisation of the learning support services has established a wide range of services, of differing size, that schools may access. However, with some justification, schools are doubtful that the current arrangements for access to these small services will provide sufficient support to meet the range of pupils' needs. All services are well on the way to consulting with schools on SLAs, the purpose of which is to provide an allocation based on need, assessed through key stage test outcomes. The SLA also aims to address the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection in relation to the deployment of educational psychologists and support staff and in this regard progress has been slow.

133. The quality and sufficiency of advice from the educational psychology service are satisfactory overall, but variable and exacerbated by recent staffing difficulties. The size of the service is smaller than that of some similar authorities and there has been no growth in numbers since the last inspection. As a consequence the role, in the main, is narrowly focused on statutory assessments.

134. Overall support services have good expert knowledge and their contributions to school improvement through in-depth training, effective advice on planning for individual educational programmes and monitoring the progress of individuals with statements is good. Targets for non-statemented pupils are largely set and monitored at school level with the LEA taking an overview of school level data. The carefully planned training provided for special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) is extensive. It reflects good progress since the last inspection. This training has not only provided access to accredited programmes but has also supported these teachers in their management roles. Their expertise is now well developed.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for pupils with SEN:

- review the role, deployment and sufficiency of the educational psychology service in the context of pupils' needs.

Value for money

135. SEN services have a regular commitment to monitoring and evaluating their impact through the use of data and systems of self-review. These include supervision, appraisal, structured professional assessments, monitoring through review of cases with schools, surveys and audits of specific practice, such as that of the psychologists' statutory advice. The LEA makes increasing use of its professional links with Exeter and Bristol Universities to assist with evaluation.

136. The total SEN allocation as a proportion of the LSB is broadly comparable with that of statistical neighbours and below national averages. In 2000/2001 the cost per pupil, of provision for pupils with statements in mainstream schools was well above similar authorities reflecting the LEA's inclusion practice. The monitoring of SEN budgets in schools is not yet systematic except for those schools where a self-review has been triggered or through the annual review of statements. Plans are in place to develop more systematic monitoring of school expenditure. Taking account of the inclusive provision, the range and quality of services, the improved effectiveness of financial systems and management, the satisfactory progress for all pupils with SEN and the broadly comparable costs, SEN provision now provides good value for money.

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

Summary of the LEA's effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

137. The LEA and schools have a strong commitment to the principles of social inclusion and are particularly aware of this issue in the context of rural isolation. Close work with local communities and formal partnerships with a wide range of agencies and voluntary providers are very effective in piloting and developing provision to counter isolation, disaffection and disadvantage. It is surprising therefore that the council has no equal opportunities or inclusion policy to support its guidance on equality issues, although a policy on dignity in work is in place. The very recent development of new guidance through the diversity group is a good move forward but the level of advice and monitoring with schools is unsatisfactory.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

138. Measures taken to promote social inclusion are satisfactory; there are more strengths than weaknesses. A cross directorate approach is developing and elected members have provided guidance on equalities issues but the council has no policy for equal opportunities and social inclusion. LEA officers are members of Cornwall's Council for Racial Equality and the authority's working group on diversity embraces many organisations. It has a secure footing in the needs identified by local communities and promises well for future leadership and strategy. Provision for inclusion through the services of the LEA is often good but this is not yet consistent in the work with other directorates.

139. Inclusion is a key priority in the SEN strategy as it is in the recent proposals for the education of pupils without a school place, the behaviour support plan and developments related to 'inclusivity' in the early years. Projects have been developed that include provision for pupils with behaviour difficulties who are at risk of exclusion and a guidance project for 'young people in trouble'. In-school programmes, in partnership with the police and social services, deal with minor offences and action on drug abuse. Liaison with the police, social services and health providers is good at a strategic level, but some schools indicate that scarce resources result in unsatisfactory support from social services over individual casework. Partnerships within and beyond the council generate strong initiatives that are having an impact and the education directorate is central to this work.

140. Additional funding is enthusiastically and successfully sought. There is clear leadership and management of social inclusion initiatives in education that ensure their coherence. The LEA has good data on pupil performance and uses it effectively to monitor the progress and attainment of identified groups such as those excluded from school, and those in public care. For pupils from minority ethnic groups and those for whom isolation leads to social exclusion, individual data is not sufficiently used to identify actions that might promote greater inclusion and raised attainment.

Recommendation

In order to improve the strategy for social inclusion:

- bring together, and extend, the good social inclusion work in the county within a clear policy and coherent framework.

The supply of school places

141. This area was not covered in the previous inspection. The LEA's planning of school places is satisfactory overall, although many secondary schools are overcrowded and firmer action is needed in response to falling rolls in small primary schools. Roll forecasts have proved very accurate and well within Audit Commission guidelines. The LEA and schools have a good understanding of the position in each locality. The infant class size plan has been implemented efficiently; there are now no children in classes of 31 or more.

142. The School Organisation Plan meets minimum requirements, but lacks the detail necessary for it to be a useful planning document. The plan is silent about a number of key policy areas, including the strong commitment, evident elsewhere, to the retention of small village schools. The next revision of the plan could also refer to policies in relation to post 16 provision. The School Organisation Committee, which helpfully includes representatives from district councils, meets regularly although it has had only a few school re-organisations to consider. Local consultations on two recent amalgamations and a primary school closure were very thorough and clearly reported. The Dioceses are well consulted on primary places and have confidence in the work of the officers concerned.

143. Although the proportion of primary schools with more than 10 per cent surplus places is broadly in line with the average for statistical neighbours and nationally, the proportion with more than 25 per cent surplus is much higher. In many cases the surplus accommodation is being used imaginatively to enhance facilities for the school and the community, making good use of partnership funds. Whilst the LEA is rightly encouraging groups of small schools to work together, the difference in delegated funding per pupil in the largest and smallest primary schools has widened significantly since the previous inspection.

Recommendation

In order to respond to falling rolls in primary schools:

- keep under review the quality implications and the costs of maintaining high levels of support in small schools.

144. Using the current measure of capacity, which assumes that all pupils with SEN statements require additional space, Cornwall's secondary schools are amongst the most overcrowded in the country, about half have rolls above their 'more open enrolment' capacity. The new "net capacity" measure gives a less problematic picture. No secondary schools have more than 10 per cent surplus places. The LEA is using suitable short-term measures, such as temporary classrooms, to address the overcrowding in the light of expected roll reductions after 2004.

Admissions

145. Admission arrangements are satisfactory and improving; this was not covered in the previous inspection. The Best Value review of services to schools and governors (see Appendix 3) successfully identified reasons for problems in the management of admissions. Changes to the structure of the admissions team have been implemented and are already leading to an improved service. Given the straightforward organisation of schools in the county, all 31 secondary schools are mixed community comprehensives, the number of appeals resulting from casual admissions, and the proportion found in favour of parents has been much higher than expected. The new arrangements will provide better advice to parents at an earlier stage and should reduce the total number of appeals lodged.

146. The timetable for secondary transfer is within DfES minimum requirements. Secondary admission appeals in 2001 were completed in early June, in good time for pupils to be inducted into their new schools. The parent information booklets are satisfactory and generally in line with the Code of Practice, although in places the explanation of some complex issues could be improved. However, responses to the parental questionnaire, that is helpfully included in each booklet, indicate a high level of user satisfaction. Primary schools rated Cornwall in the top quartile of LEAs in the school survey for the handling of admission appeals.

147. The Diocesan representatives feel well consulted on admission issues. Separate admissions fora for primary and secondary schools meet regularly. There is good co-ordination of admissions with neighbouring LEAs. The division of responsibilities for home to school transport between the admissions team and corporate transport work effectively.

Asset management

148. Asset management planning is satisfactory with few areas of weakness. It is an area that was not covered in the previous inspection. The local policy statement is concise, with brief references to other plans and curriculum developments. However, practice on the ground is better than the documentation suggests. The condition survey is developed from an existing buildings deficit audit using a clear points system of prioritising schools' needs. Cornwall schools now have no urgent priority 1 repairs outstanding, one of the best records in the country. However, the balance of expenditure is heavily weighted towards reactive maintenance reflecting previous under-investment in building work.

149. The capital team in the education directorate, with corporate property specialists, has been successful in optimising the use of capital funds from different sources. There is a clear three-year capital programme. The involvement of headteacher representatives in recommending priorities is appropriate. The elected members who take property related decisions are well informed through site visits and clear reports from officers.

150. The council has a good record of innovation and benefits from participation in pilot projects. The council part-funds a university research team that has provided the scientific basis for a number of building design features. Council buildings, including most schools, have remotely controlled energy and water management systems. A large education PFI scheme started in September 2001 under which £35m of credits will be used during the first two years to bring four split site secondary schools onto single sites, and to undertake refurbishment at their 28 feeder primary schools. The LEA has good in-house expertise in the operation of PFI projects and is currently developing two further schemes for schools.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

151. The statutory arrangements for registration of the provision made for pupils educated other than at school are unsatisfactory. However the overall curriculum provision for all pupil groups is at least satisfactory and gives sound value for money. This is an improvement on the limited access afforded to pupils at the time of the previous inspection.

152. The six education out-of-school (EOS) centres are not registered with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Average teaching time is 19 hours per week. Although a firm target in the BSP, there is no written plan or development strategy to indicate how all pupils excluded for more than 15 days will have 25 hours of weekly tuition by September 2002. The LEA has no re-integration panel for excluded pupils and so no timed exit strategy is initiated at the point of entry into an education out of school centre. Although not registered as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), the record of re-integration of pupils from the EOS centres back into mainstream schools within a year is below the national average and that of similar authorities.

Recommendations

In order to improve the provision of education otherwise than at school:

- as a matter of urgency register the education out-of-school centres with the DfES; and
- ensure a costed plan to secure 25 hours per week of tuition for all students permanently excluded from school by September 2002.

153. The revised behaviour support plan outlines the strategy for pupil referral units (PRU) to support excluded pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 and throughout Key Stage 4. An innovative approach is being developed and it is proposed that each PRU will have a placement panel that includes headteacher representatives. The proposed strategy is good and has an appropriate focus on supporting pupils at risk of exclusion in mainstream schools. Discussions with officers and centre staff together with scrutiny of LEA monitoring reports indicate that the quality of provision for pupils in the existing EOS centres is at least satisfactory. Effective links have been established with Connexions, colleges, the youth service and voluntary organisations to provide quality experiences in sport, the arts and work related activities. The majority of Year 11 pupils educated in these centres attained good GCSE results in 2001.

154. The LEA has a satisfactory system for referral, which is well understood by schools. The monitoring of the progress of excluded pupils is satisfactory overall but insufficient use is made of their prior attainment to inform planning to raise standards. A good joint protocol with partner LEAs has been developed by the joint consultancy team to ensure that excluded pupils are identified quickly to maintain continuity of education. A co-ordinated inter-agency approach enables records to be readily available on pupils' welfare and attendance. The quality of personal support plans is satisfactory.

155. The support for pregnant schoolgirls is satisfactory both in their schools until six weeks before the birth and for twelve weeks afterwards. The multi-agency teenage pregnancy strategy partnership provides access to education and training for all teenage parents. Support is available for childcare through the individual solutions budget and the education maintenance allowance. The new criteria for identifying school phobic children have led to improved planning to meet their needs and the provision is good. The numbers have decreased and the LEA has a successful record of re-integrating them back into mainstream schools. For sick children the provision is also good. Where pupils are too sick to attend the centre teachers provide five hours of home tuition and good links are maintained with the child's school. Those pupils who attend a centre receive tuition in relation to their needs and condition. The hospital school makes a valuable contribution to the education of sick children. Home tuition is well planned overall.

156. The LEA has a satisfactory system to monitor the quality, suitability and planned progress in the curriculum for pupils whose parents have chosen to educate

them at home. There is an above average number of children educated at home and the LEA provides sound advice to parents.

Attendance

157. Support for attendance is satisfactory, all statutory requirements are met and it gives sound value for money. This area was not covered in the previous inspection. Cornwall has one education welfare officer (EWO) for every 5,063 pupils which is well below that of some statistical neighbours. The educational welfare service (EWS) supports the authority's drive to promote social inclusion and the criteria for time allocation are explicit in the service level agreement.

158. The LEA has been successful in keeping rates of unauthorised absence in both primary and secondary schools below the national average year on year. However, it failed to reach its targets for unauthorised absence in 2001 but is optimistic that it will meet the targets for 2002. Authorised absence in primary and secondary schools in 2001 was higher than the national average and for the first time attendance fell below the national average in both primary and secondary schools. A rigorous investigation by the LEA indicated that some difficulties in using the electronic system for recording absences had skewed the data. As a result, individual schools have been targeted with suitable support and challenge over their procedures.

159. The EWO team has a wide skills profile and all officers have the opportunity to work towards a professional qualification. Each secondary school has an attached EWO who visits twice a week and support in primary schools is targeted according to need. This targeted support is leading to improved attendance. Monitoring procedures are effective and the information well used to prioritise work consistently in schools. A survey involving schools, students and parents has enabled the service to target further improvement.

160. The EWS team works effectively with children at risk of exclusion and also those who have been bullied, resulting in higher attendance and improved learning for these vulnerable children. It also works successfully with other agencies, particularly health providers and the police to develop, for example, a truancy patrol scheme. The service gives sound advice on the use of the pupil retention grant to employ an attendance officer who makes first day absence calls to parents/carers. The LEA uses prosecution as the ultimate sanction where absence is condoned and protocols for the implementation of parenting orders are in place. There are effective procedures for work between the EWS and Connexions, which benefit students in Key Stage 4. Good support is provided on an individual basis for children causing concern at the transition from primary to secondary school.

Behaviour support

161. Support for behaviour is satisfactory with a number of good features and it gives sound value for money. In the previous inspection report provision was described as lacking specialist support. Good progress has been made to improve the provision.

162. The LEA's strategy is outlined with precision in the revised BSP which clearly explains the proposed levels of provision, and the complementary roles and responsibilities of the LEA and schools in meeting pupils' needs. A number of actions in the BSP are running ahead of schedule. The strategy focuses on support for pupils with challenging behaviour in mainstream schools. There is a good plan to establish multi-agency PRUs, strategically positioned, throughout the county to support excluded pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4. The use of the emergency solutions budget to work with primary-aged children with very challenging behaviour has been very successful, resulting in 93 per cent of the targeted cohort successfully remaining in mainstream schools without a statement of SEN.

163. Figures for permanent exclusions are below national averages but there was a very significant rise in the number of permanent exclusions during the year 2000/01 and the LEA failed to meet its ambitious target to reduce the number of exclusions in that year. A few schools were responsible for this increase and a robust response of support and challenge to these schools has seen a very marked reduction in the number of permanent exclusions in the current year. The LEA has bid for and successfully established four learning support units in schools that require support to manage challenging behaviour.

164. The child and family service provides a co-ordinated package of support to schools that is well organised and managed. The behaviour support service is effective in working with schools to support pupils at risk of exclusion, the behaviour support workers being a very significant asset in this success story. Their collaborative work with school staff to develop inclusive provision has led to a drop in the number of referrals. Inter-agency work to support pupils with behavioural difficulties is effective. There is outstanding work carried out in partnership with voluntary organisations to help prevent permanent exclusion, particularly 'Scallywags', Dreadnought and the 'Pyramid Trust'.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

165. Procedures for health, safety, welfare and child protection are very good and provide excellent value for money. This area was not covered in the previous report. There is an effective and well-developed strategy that pervades all plans and services, based on a thorough analysis of need. The quality of training for schools is of a very high standard. It enables governors to fulfil their statutory responsibilities with confidence.

166. There are robust systems in place to ensure that both the LEA and its schools comply with statutory requirements. The documentation provided for schools on health and safety matters is comprehensive. Schools are alerted to new legislation through the Intranet. Advice is relevant and timely, enabling schools to develop policies and ensure their effective implementation. There is excellent guidance for schools on how to write risk assessments. County health and safety officers conduct an annual risk assessment in all schools and issues that emerge are reported back to the LEA. In partnership, the LEA supports schools in addressing these issues.

167. The LEA is proactive in tackling drug-related issues. It has formed a very effective drug and alcohol action team to support schools and a very good curriculum programme has been developed. Almost all schools have a drug action policy and there is a target to ensure one in all schools by December 2002. In addition, a protocol has been established for interagency working amongst parents who misuse drugs.

168. The authority gives an exemplary lead on child protection. The proportion of children on the child protection register is higher than the national average. This is a priority across all agencies and the joint consultancy team ensures a very high level of cohesiveness. Its wide representation and clear brief ensures an immediate response is made to education specific recommendations of the area child protection committee. The LEA is a pilot for the DfES initiative to consider allegations against teachers and has also contributed funding to establish a specialist assessment and support service to work with children who sexually abuse other children. Procedures for reporting and tracking missing children are very effective.

169. The strategic partnership between education and social services is very good and has led to the successful implementation of effective protocols for staff employed in schools. These protocols have been adopted across the county for all adults who come into contact with children. The multi-agency approach to training teachers and governors is very good. All schools have a designated child protection co-ordinator and a majority have a designated governor. The training programme is rigorously monitored for quality and attendance. Training is updated to meet needs and delivered regularly. The LEA has put plans in motion to develop benchmarking procedures through its regional work.

Children in public care

170. The LEA makes satisfactory provision for children in public care and the value for money is sound. This area was not covered in the previous inspection. The strategy is coherent and jointly established protocols with social services and health providers are based on identified need. Corporate parenting is taken seriously. The elected member with a portfolio for child care and senior officers in education and social services make the needs and achievements of children in public care a prime responsibility. Elected members give priority to vulnerable children when allocating grants. However, they do not receive regular reports on the progress made towards the targets set for children in public care.

171. The LEA is making satisfactory progress towards meeting challenging performance targets on improving attendance and increasing the percentage of pupils gaining one and five GCSEs or more. Children in public care attained very good GCSE results in 2001 compared with their peers nationally. Permanent exclusions fell between 2000/01 but there was a very significant rise in the number of fixed term exclusions during the same period. Robust but realistic targets have been set to reduce exclusions in 2001/02. The LEA has recently appointed an officer who works closely with schools, residential care homes and social services. The training programme for designated teachers, social workers and foster carers is thorough and managed jointly by education and social services.

172. Satisfactory monitoring procedures are in place at LEA and school level to ensure the exchange of information between all parties. The children's service group monitors the corporate parenting undertaken by the authority but, although it has wide membership, staff from residential homes are not formally represented. There is no formal procedure to monitor children's morale but an objective for this has been set in the action plan for children in public care.

173. Care review procedures for monitoring those children educated out of county are secure and the joint consultancy team ensures that children in the care of other authorities, who are educated in Cornwall schools, are identified quickly and information is shared. Personal educational programmes have been successfully trialled in schools in the Kerrier District and the satisfactory practice established is beginning to be disseminated through Cornwall schools. The voices of the children are heard; they are involved in decision making about their care and education. They have been active as joint trainers for staff and have participated in national conferences.

Measures to combat racism

174. The council's measures to combat racism are unsatisfactory. This issue was not covered in the previous inspection. Corporate action to respond to the Macpherson Report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence has been too slow. The council has no coherent, corporate strategy to combat racism. There has been no action plan or training programme for elected members and senior officers, following the report's publication. The LEA lacks an action plan to support schools in combating racial harassment.

175. Recent action has included the development of a diversity incident form to be used in schools to log racist incidents, together with guidance to support schools on the development of anti-racist policies. This is good work, done in consultation with representatives from minority ethnic groups and the police. The LEA has not planned a training programme to support schools needs in using the incident form or in developing their own policy.

176. Schools have been given constructive support with curriculum packages to promote cultural diversity. The standing advisory council for religious education (SACRE), through its agreed syllabus working party, has emphasised cultural diversity through the syllabus. The Healthy Schools Scheme has been promoted successfully and this challenges racism through the curriculum but not all Cornwall schools subscribe to this programme.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for combating racism:

- establish a corporate strategy to combat racism and an action plan to achieve the recommendations of the Macpherson Report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence;
- ensure a training programme for all schools to support them in the effective use and monitoring of the diversity incident form ; and
- build on the satisfactory work done to raise the awareness of cultural diversity through the curriculum.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction to corporate issues

177. A key feature of corporate planning in Cornwall is the overall effective operational work of the education directorate but this is not always reflected in the detail of planning documents. Elected members provide secure leadership and are developing their confidence in challenging the quality of services. The senior officer team provides good leadership and services are mostly well managed. The LEA's work with its partners is very good, resulting in improved provision and outcomes for education.

Corporate planning

178. Corporate planning has more strengths than weaknesses. The vision, core values and aims of the council are effectively articulated in its overall objectives and these are well reflected in the BVPP. Cornwall adopts a measured and pragmatic approach to development and change. The community plan will be in place by April 2002 and discussions are underway in directorates, with district councils and the LEA's partners, to secure the details of the strategic partnership plan. Cross council work is particularly effective in relation to child protection, work with vulnerable children and for private finance initiatives. Communication between council directorates and education are well established and productive. Operational strategies are often good but corporate plans fail to do justice to the effective work in hand.

179. Elected members give a clear sense of direction for education and have a growing knowledge of the key issues. This corporate direction is clear to officers but less so to schools, despite the effective meetings and procedures used for consultation. Best Value review processes are well established but the council has been tardy in establishing performance management systems. They will be introduced in April 2002 and build upon existing appraisal procedures. In education the first Best Value reviews have been suitably planned to deal with the most pressing issues and they are satisfactory, or better, in their outcomes.

Recommendation

In order to secure robust quality assurance for school improvement:

- implement, with some urgency, the county's performance management procedures, including a framework for professional development linked to the objectives and targets of the service.

180. The EDP is the basis for planning in education and is well reflected in other plans, especially those for behaviour support, SEN development and pupils educated other than at school. There are similarly appropriate matches with the EYDCP and the children's services plan. In the BVPP, the statutory education

targets of the council are clear but the educational aims are less explicit. Business plans in education are consistently based upon a sound framework of guidance. There is variability in their quality and the use of outcome targets in each service. However there is clear evidence of good practice in those plans that have clear time-lines, measurable targets in their success criteria and explicit links with the EDP and other LEA plans.

Recommendations

In order to improve the coherence of planning:

- improve the match between the content of strategic plans and the activities in the LEA services; and
- include in all plans measurable targets as part of the success criteria.

181. Accountabilities in education are established at all levels through an annual line management appraisal system that currently indicates some slippage. Assistant directors carry out termly professional reviews with staff and the deputy director monitors the work of each department at a weekly meeting. Annual service reports are presented to the policy development and scrutiny committee for lifelong learning. The move to performance management will require some modifications to the current system to ensure that targets and outcome indicators are effectively used to link staff performance to the objectives of the directorate.

Decision making

182. Decision-making procedures have some clear strengths and few weaknesses. Elected members, with officers, use a range of procedures with schools to inform their decisions, these include consultation meetings, heads' management partnership groups, written or electronic questionnaires, best value reviews and single issue panel reports. The LEA's consciously measured approach, particularly over difficult decisions, often secures time for good consultation and a clear understanding in schools, but this could be at the cost of timely action when needed. Nevertheless, in cases such as the implementation of strategies following the SEN review, there is prompt action that is well articulated to schools. Committee reports and appendices are used to record actions related to major decisions. Delegated powers to the director of education, arts and libraries are specified by the council, they are appropriate, and decisions are normally timely.

183. The speed and transparency of financial decision-making are good. The LEA has a clear perception of educational needs and has budgeted effectively to support its priorities. The corporate medium term financial plan clearly identifies likely service pressures over the next three years. The budget setting process runs to a published timetable with opportunities for stakeholder input at each stage. The policy development and scrutiny committees can influence and shape the budget before final recommendations are made. Headteachers and governors have a good understanding of the broader financial situation and they are invited to make

representations about the budget direct to the relevant committee and the portfolio holder.

184. The council has a clear rationale for its central services that is based on the limited alternative market available, the rurality of the county that discourages external providers and the strong support for LEA services from many, but not all, schools. Schools' needs are clearly identified through the analysis of data and discussion with headteachers and governors. The resources allocated to support the activities in the EDP are clear to most schools, and well used by them.

Leadership of officers and elected members

185. The leadership provided by senior officers is good. There is a strong sense of direction towards corporate objectives and a continuous striving for new strategies to improve education, that are making a difference. The director of education, arts and libraries gives clear leadership and challenges poor performance. Activities are securely managed and monitored by the deputy and assistant directors. The strategy for school improvement has developed significantly in the recent past and the need for school intervention is limited and reducing. Relationships with schools are a strength of the LEA and headteachers report a sense of genuine involvement in consultation, discussion and development.

186. Elected members provide secure leadership and demonstrate their commitment to education. They recognise the responsibilities on the LEA to develop effectively self-evaluating and autonomous schools. Their role is well understood, they work closely and appropriately with officers and the boundary between strategic and managerial decision making is clear. Through their work on the policy development and scrutiny committee for lifelong learning and the single-issue panels, elected members have a level of knowledge that enables growing confidence and a healthy degree of challenge to officers and to schools.

187. Members receive reports on education services through the monitoring and evaluation group, via the policy development and scrutiny committee, and through their membership of LEA working groups. These reports are increasingly well informed by the high quality and range of LEA data now available. Routine officer reports are helpful and well structured with options and related evaluation when appropriate. Members' visits to schools also serve as a general monitoring opportunity to gather information and views from headteachers and staff.

Partnership

188. There is a very good strategic approach to partnership in education led by senior officers of the council and particularly by an assistant director of education. There is no doubt that education priorities are shared across council directorates, with outside agencies and with independent providers. The operational outcomes are impressive and the strategic framework for the future is good and recently agreed. It will use the children and young people's strategic partnership as the core group to ensure that a holistic view of pupils' needs can be efficiently addressed. To this end a development plan is being formulated to ensure effective operational work and a more creative use of funding sources. A specific partnership exists with the

education action zone (EAZ) enabling effective and growing co-ordination between the work of the LEA and that in the 30 schools in the EAZ. The longstanding partnership with the dioceses is strong, consultation is good both on strategic and curriculum matters and the LEA is sensitive to the issues of church schools.

189. Partnership work with schools is also very good. It covers curriculum projects and provision to support the most vulnerable and disaffected young people in the county. The creative partnership and youth/music action zone provide opportunities for young people to participate with professionals and excel in these areas. The classroom of the future, in partnership with the EAZ, promises to be an outstanding full time community resource for learning. The existing learning partnership and the learning forum are similar strengths. Developments with colleges and higher education for post-14 provision plus teacher and staff training, together with the medium term proposal for a peninsula university demonstrate a clear vision for raised expectations and greater achievement within the county. A number of good operational partnerships with the police, health providers, social services and voluntary organisations have been described in earlier sections of this report.

APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes a number of recommendations for further improvement which are as follows:

In order to improve the provision of education otherwise than at school:

- as a matter of urgency register the education out of school centres with the DfES; and
- ensure a costed plan to secure 25 hours per week of tuition for all students permanently excluded from school by September 2002.

In order to improve support for combating racism:

- establish a corporate strategy to combat racism and an action plan to achieve the recommendations of the Macpherson Report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence;
- ensure a training programme for all schools to support them in the effective use and monitoring of the diversity incident form; and
- build on the satisfactory work done to raise the awareness of cultural diversity through the curriculum.

In order to improve the strategy for social inclusion:

- bring together, and extend, the good social inclusion work in the county, within a clear policy and coherent framework.

In order to improve the coherence of planning:

- improve the match between the content of strategic plans and the activities in the LEA services; and
- include in all plans, measurable targets as part of the success criteria.

In order to secure robust quality assurance for school improvement:

- implement, with some urgency, the county's performance management procedures, including a framework for professional development linked to the objectives and targets of the service.

In order to raise standards:

- use data and suitable strategies to raise attainment in writing at Key Stage 1, to continue to improve attainment throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 and to raise the attainment of able pupils.

In order to further improve the strategy and provision for SEN:

- establish a long-term plan that includes the targets for SEN, how they will be achieved and how the plan will be evaluated in terms of pupils' progress.

In order to improve the support for pupils with SEN:

- review the role, deployment and sufficiency of the educational psychology service in the context of pupils' needs.

In order to improve schools' financial management:

- clarify the reasons for schools holding large unallocated reserves, and agree action to reduce them to reasonable levels.

In order to improve the monitoring of schools causing concern:

- clarify the sources, and ensure that all information from officers, relevant to the monitoring of the schools, is recorded.

In order to develop the strategic role of governors:

- ensure that chair of governors receive copies of appropriate notes of visits to schools.

In order to help schools adopt and use Best Value principles:

- make service specifications more explicit.

In order to respond to falling rolls in primary schools:

- keep under review the quality implications and costs of maintaining high levels of support to small schools.

APPENDIX 2

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

1. School improvement services were subject to a Best Value review that began in October 2000 and reported in June 2001. The scope of the review was very clear covering five key services, the advice and improvement service, the education development centre and three business units for outdoor education, music service and the education business partnership.
2. Overall service aims were explicit, well matched to corporate objectives and driven by the priorities of the EDP. Nonetheless there was rightly a concern that schools were unclear about the different responsibilities of each team in relation to the code of practice for LEA/school relations. Although changes had been made since the LEA inspection in 1996, none were fundamental and there was a recognition of the need to consider radical alternatives. The 1996 inspection report described the LEA as providing broadly satisfactory support for school improvement.
3. The review team comprised headteachers, LEA officers and an 'objective' officer from the transport and estates department whose role was to challenge the status quo and the range of evidence used. The data and materials used were thorough but they were not suitably referenced as an appendix to the report. Consultation was wide and included staff in schools, governors, pupils, trade unions and service business managers. There were over 300 responses to a questionnaire placed on the LEA's Intranet. The outcomes were both positive and critical and gave a clear steer to the review team about what needed to be improved.
4. A reasonable attempt was made to use comparative data from other LEAs, to consider general descriptors of provision in similar LEAs and to use schools' performance data. The review failed to use CIPFA national data, nor the school improvement criteria from the OFSTED inspection framework. Although not explicit in the report, it is clear that the review did focus on questions about best quality provision and the feasibility of outsourcing some or all of the services. A balanced account was taken of the limited market provision and the relative inaccessibility of many areas of the county.
5. Of the five options presented the executive committee agreed one and this has resulted in considerable structural change. It has brought together interdependent services, for example statistics and governor support with school improvement and also clarified the monitoring role of inspectors from the support and development role of the amalgamated advisory services. The three business units remain unchanged but under review.
6. Elected members are committed to the outcomes of the review. It has resulted in improved and more challenging work in schools. It bodes well for higher standards in the future. The action plan is manageable and the actions are well under way. The intention to explore alternative providers and broker external services in the future is explicit. However, the plan has no quantifiable indicators or targets for future service objectives; for example in relation to intervention in schools and the dissemination of good practice, and this is a significant shortcoming.

7. The services for school improvement are fair with considerable strengths and few weaknesses, the **implementation of the proposed action promises further improvement.**

APPENDIX 3

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS AND GOVERNORS AS PROVIDED THROUGH SCHOOLS SECTION

1. At the start of the review Schools Section comprised 21 full time equivalent staff organised in seven multi-skilled teams delivering a diverse range of services for a number of different client groups. These included admissions, transport appeals and welfare benefits for parents and pupils, the appointment and induction of governors, the planning of capital projects for the LEA, long-term sickness and other insurance schemes for schools, and administrative support for partnership groups including the influential associations of Cornwall primary and secondary headteachers. The review was rightly prompted by a deteriorating service which was attributed mainly to a growth in admission and appeals work drawing staff away from other tasks.
2. The elements of challenge, comparison, competition and consultation were applied to each element of the section's work separately. It was quickly realised that this approach addressed only fragments of a bigger picture and that, with hindsight, cross-cutting reviews extending beyond the section would have been preferable.
3. The review team, that included an "objective officer" from another directorate, applied the corporate Best Value toolkit that uses a series of generic questions plus member representation to provide the challenge. Considerable effort was put into consulting all stakeholders, including parents. However, the exercise was primarily a user satisfaction survey rather than a consultation on specific options for change. Comparisons with other LEAs yielded useful examples of alternative approaches, but little data on performance standards. The one area where there is competition from alternative providers (sickness insurance) was not fully explored.
4. The improvement plans, constrained by the corporate format, are brief and lack precision. There are few success criteria or specific or measurable targets. In one case (the option of organising primary admissions centrally) the idea resulted from the consultation process rather than from the review itself, which would have been preferable.
5. Nevertheless, in reality, the impact is greater than the documentation would suggest. One immediate outcome has been a restructuring of the section into specialist teams and the transfer of some functions elsewhere. The admissions team has been enlarged and is already providing better advice to parents which should reduce the number of appeals, although the basis for the targeted five per cent reduction is not clear. A transport appeal policy should also reduce workloads. The previously fragmented support for governors has been brought together within the school improvement team to provide a more coherent service. Financial weaknesses in the insurance schemes have been exposed and are being addressed.
6. Overall, the services are **fair** and the **prospects for further improvement are promising**.

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