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APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act, 1997. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999 insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
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 discussions 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 all schools. The response rate was 83 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to six secondary, two special and eight primary schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Cambridgeshire is a predominantly rural county. Overall, it is relatively prosperous but, as in most counties, there are pockets of social deprivation. Unemployment is low and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is almost half the national average. Cambridgeshire has relatively few pupils of minority ethnic heritage but has one of the largest populations of Travellers of any county. Standards in primary and secondary schools are generally well above those found nationally and in line with similar authorities. The rate of improvement in key stage tests and GCSE examinations has been similar to the national trend. These averages mask under-performance and low achievement in a significant minority of schools. There is a relatively high proportion of small schools in the authority. Just over one third of secondary schools and 2.4 per cent of primary schools were formerly grant maintained.
5. There is much which the LEA does competently: it meets its statutory duties; corporate planning is sound; there is cross-party agreement on the priorities for education; many of the services supporting school improvement and access to education are effective. Members and officers give good support to individual schools. The professional leadership of the LEA has worked effectively with members to ensure that education is given a high priority in Cambridgeshire and to develop the corporate planning framework. However, the LEA has provided insufficient leadership in two important respects. First, there is too wide a variation in performance both within and between services. This is due to weaknesses in service planning, quality assurance and performance management arrangements.
6. Second, the LEA has also been relatively slow to respond to, and prepare schools for, the full implications of Fair Funding and aspects of the Best Value regime. Cambridgeshire is poorly funded when compared to similar counties. However, in recent years, the LEA has delegated a relatively low proportion of its budget to schools, although it has met DfEE minimum targets. There has been insufficient forward planning for delegation and its implications for the future relationship between the LEA and its schools. Schools are not always given sufficiently detailed cost information about services or comparative information about other providers. This lack of transparency about service costs and the underdevelopment of the client role means that schools are often ill placed to make informed judgements about whether LEA services are providing value for money.
7. The LEA's revised education development plan (EDP) has some strengths but also a number of important weaknesses. The strategy for intervening and supporting schools where there are concerns is a notable strength. Elsewhere, there is considerable scope for targeting support more precisely to meet local needs and for improving the coherence of some of the strategies. The audit for the EDP rightly identifies low achievement in the Fenland area as well as elsewhere. However, following the unsuccessful bid for an Education Action Zone in Wisbech, the LEA does not have a coherent and convincing alternative strategy in place for tackling the under-performance that is a feature of Fenland and other areas within the county.

8. The LEA's strategy for monitoring, challenging, intervening and supporting schools is clearly articulated but its success in implementing it is variable. The LEA has not always been effective in challenging targets and intervention has sometimes been too slow. However, good support is given once schools have been identified as causing concern. Most schools welcome the support they receive from their assigned inspector but it is questionable whether the more successful schools still require the level of centrally funded visiting they currently receive.
9. The following functions were exercised effectively:
 - support for literacy and numeracy;
 - support for schools identified as causing concern;
 - support for governance;
 - personnel and property services;
 - the planning of school places and admissions;
 - support for individual pupils with special educational needs;
 - support for behaviour and attendance;
 - support for pupils in public care, and the health, safety and welfare of pupils;
 - support for Traveller pupils and pupils of minority ethnic heritage.

The following functions were not adequately exercised:

- forward planning for some aspects of delegation;
 - support for schools in purchasing services;
 - service planning, quality assurance and performance management arrangements;
 - support for information and communication technology (ICT);
 - aspects of strategic planning for SEN;
 - payroll;
 - provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school.
10. Overall, strengths outweigh weaknesses and, though the weaknesses are significant, the LEA has the capability to address them. It needs, above all, to be clearer about its future role and what this means for its relationships with schools. The quality of support for schools is often good, but it could and should be more consistently so. This is a considerable challenge for the political and professional leadership of the LEA but an attainable one. OFSTED and the Audit Commission will wish to check the LEA's progress in implementing the recommendations made in this report within two years.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

11. Cambridgeshire is a predominantly rural county with a population of 533,800 (mid-1996 estimate). The main centres of population are: Cambridge City, Whittlesey, Wisbech, Huntingdon, March, St Neots and St Ives. It has the fastest growing population in the country. Peterborough, one of six district councils, was established as a unitary authority in April 1998.
12. Overall, the county is relatively prosperous. As in most counties, however, there are areas of quite severe social deprivation. These are located mainly in the north and east of the county. Unemployment is below the national rate and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals in primary and secondary schools is almost half the national average. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities (four per cent) is low but Cambridgeshire has one of the largest populations of Travellers in England and Wales.
13. In 1998/1999, 2.1 per cent of pupils up to the age of 19 had statements of special educational needs (SEN) which was in line with national and county averages.
14. There are 77,196 pupils in LEA maintained schools. There are six nursery schools, 207 primary schools, 31 secondary schools, 11 special schools and one pupil referral unit (PRU). Five primary schools and 11 secondary schools were former grant maintained schools. Eleven of the secondary schools have sixth forms. There is one 11-14 school, one 9-13 school and one 14-18 school. Just under 12 per cent of primary schools have less than 100 pupils and 48 per cent have less than 200 pupils. Four secondary schools have less than 600 pupils. The proportion of pupils attending independent schools is approximately three per cent higher than the national average.

Performance

15. The performance of schools is good and in line with that of statistical neighbours¹. OFSTED inspection data show that the proportion of primary and secondary schools where the quality of education is good or very good is in line with similar authorities and significantly above national figures. The proportion of schools where the quality of education is unsatisfactory is below the national average. Grades for teaching in primary and secondary schools are above national averages.
16. OFSTED inspectors judged attainment on entry to primary schools to be good in 29 per cent of schools, compared to 23 per cent nationally, and poor in 21 per cent of schools, compared to 33 per cent nationally.
17. Attainment in tests at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics is above national averages and in line with statistical neighbours. The

¹ The statistical neighbours are a group of LEAs with social and economic characteristics similar to Cambridgeshire.

proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C is well above national averages and similar to statistical neighbours. The proportions achieving one A*-G and five A*-G passes are similar to national figures. Children in public care achieve relatively good GCSE results compared to those in other authorities. The average points score for post-16 advanced courses is slightly below the national average.

18. The overall positive picture masks the very wide variation in the performance of schools. For example in 1999: the proportion of pupils attaining level 4 and above in English at Key Stage 2 varied from less than 30 per cent to 100 per cent; the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C varied from 23 per cent to 67 per cent.
19. Rates of improvement between 1997 and 1999 in key stage tests and higher grade GCSEs are similar to national rates. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*-G GCSE passes has shown a relative decline compared to national figures.
20. The level of attendance in primary and secondary schools has been almost static for the past three years and is currently slightly above the national rate and slightly below that of similar authorities. Permanent exclusions are significantly below national rates.

Funding

21. In 1999/2000 the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) funding allocation for Cambridgeshire was lower than both the county average and the average of similar counties. Whilst the annual percentage increase in the education SSA for Cambridgeshire has been slightly above the national increase, the LEA received the eleventh lowest education SSA amongst the English Counties in 1999/2000.
22. In 2000/2001 Cambridgeshire anticipates spending two per cent above its SSA for education, 12 per cent above its SSA for social services and 10 per cent above the SSA for other services. This is broadly in line with the pattern of expenditure for the previous year.
23. Within the overall education budget, allocation to the phases varies from the SSA education sub-block allocations. For 2000/2001 the most significant variation relates to expenditure on post-16 education which is 15 per cent above SSA. This possibly reflects the rural nature of the LEA and the need to maintain a number of small sixth forms. Expenditure on under-fives and primary aged pupils are respectively five per cent and four per cent above SSA. Expenditure on pupils aged 11-15 is three per cent below SSA.
24. In 1999/2000 the LEA's local schools budget (LSB) was £2,463 per pupil, £27 below that of similar LEAs and £53 below the average for shire counties. In the past, the LEA, with the agreement of the majority of its schools, has delegated a relatively low proportion of funds to schools. In 1999/2000 it delegated 76 per cent of the LSB to schools, compared to the shire county average of 83 per

cent. In 1999/2000 the individual schools budget was £210 per pupil below the shire county average for primary schools and £200 below for secondary schools.

25. For 2000/2001 the LEA delegated 15 new budget areas to schools, including the budget for statements of SEN. This enables the DfEE target of 80 per cent delegation to be exceeded by 1.7 per cent. However, in the short term, the timing of the delegation meant that most schools had little option but to buy back LEA services. The authority has met the additional targets to increase the Standards Fund devolved to schools by at least six per cent per pupil and to increase the value of the age weighted pupil unit by at least 2.5 per cent. The LEA has not developed a clear view with its schools about where it is trying to get to in terms of delegation. The proposed Schools Resources Policy Review Panel, comprising of councillors, headteachers, governors and officers, will undertake a fundamental review of delegation and its implications for roles and responsibilities. This is sensible but not before time.
26. Central expenditure on strategic management for 1999/2000 was in line with the county average of £43 per pupil and the authority anticipates expenditure of £44 for 2000/2001, which is again in line with similar authorities.
27. In 1999/2000 18 per cent of the Cambridgeshire LSB was spent on SEN, against the shire county average of 15 per cent. Overall expenditure in terms of pounds per pupil was 17 per cent higher than the shire county average. The LEA's centrally retained expenditure on SEN was £101 per pupil above the shire county average of £152. The 2000/2001 delegation of SEN budgets for statemented support will impact significantly on the amount of SEN funding centrally retained for 2000/2001, but not on the overall level of expenditure on SEN, which remains high compared to both similar authorities and national averages.

Council Structure

28. Cambridgeshire County Council consists of 59 members: 33 Conservative, 16 Liberal Democrat and 10 Labour. Despite several changes in political leadership over the past decade, a high level of collaboration and consensus has been maintained. This is particularly evident in the way officers and members work effectively together. Corporate structures have already embodied many of the principles of the government's modernising agenda.
29. The Education Libraries and Heritage (ELH) committee is supported by five sub-committees and six service advisory groups (SAGs) whose membership includes officers, members, school staff and representatives from the Diocesan authorities. The LEA's senior management has recently been restructured to provide more effective arrangements for tackling inter-service issues and to facilitate greater delegation of responsibilities to service managers. The corporate structure and ELH management are evaluated in section 3.

The Education Development Plan

30. The LEA's first EDP was approved by the DfEE subject to the conditions that year two of the plan should include better targeting of activities and greater clarity about which priority each activity was to address. The revised EDP has now been fully approved by the DfEE.
31. The EDP priorities are to:
 - i. raise standards of achievement and enhance curriculum provision in English, including literacy;
 - ii. raise standards of achievement and enhance curriculum provision in mathematics, including numeracy;
 - iii. raise performance in underachieving schools and subjects in which there is underachievement;
 - iv. improve and develop strategic leadership and management in schools, including monitoring and evaluation by governors, headteachers and senior managers;
 - v. improve educational access, participation and motivation.
32. The revised EDP has some strengths but also a number of important weaknesses and there is considerable scope for improving its coherence and sharpening its focus. While some activities are clearly targeted, others remain too general. Elsewhere, the criteria for identifying schools for targeted support are not always made sufficiently explicit.
33. Priority (iii) includes too wide a range of activities. It includes: support for schools in special measures, support for schools with serious weaknesses or otherwise causing concern; support for modern foreign languages, design technology, science and ICT; increasing the proportion of pupils obtaining accredited qualifications at Key Stage 4; developing support for post-16 provision. The strategy of supporting, from centrally funded resources, all schools where weaknesses have been identified in specific subjects is questionable. The effective development of self-evaluation and the improved use of performance data, promoted through priority (iv), should mean that schools are capable of identifying weaknesses in subjects and putting in place appropriate strategies to raise performance. This may, or may not, involve purchasing support from the LEA. The job of the LEA is to challenge schools to achieve this, monitor performance against agreed objectives, and intervene only where schools demonstrate they are incapable of achieving this for themselves.
34. A thorough audit of needs was undertaken for the original EDP. One key finding of this audit was the relatively low level of achievement in the Fenland area. The bid for an Education Action Zone in this area was unsuccessful. The revised EDP identifies an 'intervention strategy for targeted clusters of schools'

as part of priority (iv). At the time of the inspection this lacked detail and did not provide a convincing alternative strategy for tackling the underlying causes of low levels of achievement in the Fenlands and other areas of the county. There is also considerable scope for making the strategies for reducing differences in performance between areas more explicit throughout the EDP action plans. The ELH committee has, however, taken the positive step of allocating £350,000 to about 30 schools serving the areas with the greatest social disadvantage to use in a variety of ways to raise standards.

35. There is variation in the quality of the strategies which support the priorities. For example, the strategies for supporting schools in special measures and for supporting literacy and numeracy are appropriately sequenced and coherent. This is less true of some of the strategies to support leadership and management in schools, for example, the promotion of a positive ethos and effective relationships. The coherence of some of the strategies is also weakened by a failure to make connections between related activities, for example, between the support for children in public care, the support for Travellers and improving the proportion of pupils gaining qualifications at Key Stage 4.
36. The LEA has appropriately challenging and realistic targets for Key Stage 2 English, GCSE and children in public care. However, the Key Stage 2 targets for mathematics now look modest in the light of the 1999 test results. The aggregation of schools' targets for Key Stage 2 English gives a figure substantially below the LEA's target and results in 1999 indicate that a considerable number of schools set insufficiently challenging targets. The LEA has renegotiated higher targets with 19 schools but a considerable gap still remains between the LEA's target and the aggregated schools' targets.
37. Consultation on the EDP has been thorough and the schools visited were broadly aware of the EDP priorities and were generally in agreement with them. Headteachers and governors were able to identify aspects of the EDP which had been modified in the light of their comments. However, few schools visited had a strong sense of ownership of the plan or saw it as a key influence on their own development plans.
38. The EDP is clearly linked to other corporate and statutory plans. There are appropriate systems in place to monitor and review progress in implementing the actions supporting the priorities. The actions have been fully costed and the plan is feasible. Reasonable progress has been made in implementing the first year of the EDP. Aspects of the EDP are evaluated in detail in sections 2, 4 and 5 of this report.

The Allocation of Resources to Priorities

39. In Autumn 1999, the Council consulted widely on its medium term service priorities. These form the basis of a three year financial planning strategy which makes provision for increased expenditure on education, particularly in schools. The Council's medium term plans are based on projected council tax increases to achieve this end.

40. The medium term funding strategy is effective in allocating growth to schools' budgets in line with agreed priorities. The distribution formula for school funding has been regularly reviewed but further work is required to better align resources to needs.
41. The revised EDP has been fully costed using the Fair Funding categories and the costs of implementing each of the priorities is detailed.
42. The LEA has a Best Value performance plan (BVPP) which reflects statutory education targets and Best Value performance indicators. Services such as ICT and school meals are under review and aspects of SEN and other services have had best-value-style reviews. Other services are to be reviewed during the lifetime of the plan. However, weaknesses in the performance monitoring framework and in clear quality assurance processes, applied consistently across all services, limit the LEA's current capacity to demonstrate best use of the resources available to it. The lack of transparency in service costs and absence of comparative information about alternative providers also leaves schools ill-placed to make informed judgements about whether services are providing value for money. This is exemplified by the payroll service where, despite considerable dissatisfaction with the quality of the service, the LEA was slow to secure improvements or to provide information about alternative providers.
43. The District Auditor has certified the Council's BVPP 2000/2001 without qualification. It is the District Auditor's view that the Council has made a good start to implementing Best Value but needs to address a range of issues including: adopting a more consistent approach to the outcomes of Best Value reviews; improving performance management; and ensuring that the criteria of challenge and competition are more effectively met. These issues are in accordance with the findings of this inspection.

Recommendations

In order to improve the EDP:

- target activities more precisely on under-performing schools, groups of pupils and geographic areas;
- strengthen and make more explicit the strategies for reducing regional differences in performance;
- ensure that all strategies are coherent, consistent and sequential;
- encourage greater understanding of the EDP by schools.

In order to improve the allocation of resources:

- evaluate and develop proposals for changing the school funding formula, with particular reference to its impact on schools of different sizes and phases.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of Other Functions

44. The EDP sets out the strategy for school improvement. The strengths and weaknesses of the EDP have been analysed in the previous section of this report. The implementation of the actions identified in the EDP is discussed in the rest of this report but there are important aspects of the LEA's support for school improvement which are outside the scope of the EDP.
45. The provision of school places and admission arrangements are performed well. Property and personnel services provide good support. There is generally effective support for individual pupils with special educational needs and in ensuring access to education.
46. There are, however, shortcomings in the way the LEA performs some of its functions that weaken its school improvement strategy. Senior officers need to provide a stronger strategic lead to ensure better service planning and better quality assurance arrangements, leading to greater consistency in the LEA's support for schools. There is too wide a variation in the quality of management services, particularly with regard to payroll services and aspects of administrative ICT. There are also weaknesses in the strategic planning for SEN and the provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school. These functions are more fully evaluated throughout the report.

Monitoring, Challenge, Support, Intervention

47. The LEA's role in monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools is clearly defined in its EDP and elsewhere. The role embraces the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations and is generally understood and accepted by schools. There are generally productive relationships with former grant maintained schools, although the level of delegation remains a particular concern to several of them.
48. The assigned inspector is the linchpin for monitoring, challenging and intervening in schools. Each school receives a minimum of three days of visits from the assigned inspector to monitor and challenge performance, set targets and review progress on national initiatives, such as literacy and numeracy. Additional days are allocated to schools where there are concerns or where schools face particular difficulties, such as an amalgamation or frequent changes of headteacher. Centrally funded time is also provided for the appointment of senior staff, observing newly qualified teachers and following-up OFSTED inspections.
49. Assigned inspectors spend about half their available time supporting schools causing concern. However, it is questionable whether the LEA's many successful schools continue to need the level of visiting they currently receive. There is a distinct danger of creating or reinforcing a dependency culture. The increasing quantity and quality of performance data, together with the support for self-evaluation, should reduce the need for monitoring visits. Schools do not

currently have the option of purchasing extra support from the inspection service. A reduction in visiting schools where the LEA is confident of their progress would allow more time to be allocated to schools causing concern.

50. Written comments in the school survey indicate that the work of the assigned inspectors is generally well regarded. Visits to schools found that assigned inspectors generally fulfilled their role effectively but there was some variation in quality. There are examples of inspectors making good use of data to challenge the performance of schools and intervening where necessary. In contrast, in a small but important minority of schools, the assigned inspectors provided insufficient challenge to current performance and the targets for improvement. The key documents in this process are the assigned inspector's notes of visit and the annual review. The annual review is intended to comment on the progress the school is making, evaluate plans for improvement and identify any current issues. Notes of visit and annual reviews are copied to headteachers and chairs of governors. They are written to a standard format but vary in quality. At their best, they contain a sharp analysis of current performance, a rigorous evaluation of the strategies to raise standards and an agreed set of any actions to be taken by the school and the LEA. Weaker reports are too descriptive and are of little help in moving schools forward. Most fall somewhere between these extremes. The nature and focus of annual reviews for schools which have recently had an OFSTED inspection need reconsidering and more emphasis given to schools' own self-reviews in the process.
51. The work of the assigned inspectors is monitored by the head of inspection through an analysis of diaries and written reports to schools, feedback from schools using a questionnaire, and external evaluation. Better use needs to be made of this evidence, together with staff development and the sharing of good practice, to ensure that the quality of work is more consistent and brought up to the very high standards of the best.
52. Curriculum support for schools comes mainly from the advisory service. This is purchased by schools, except where the LEA has established an intervention strategy as part of its support for schools causing concern. There is a good take up of courses and other training, particularly by primary schools, and evaluations indicate that they are generally felt to provide good value for money. There is also evidence of effective support from the advisory service in schools causing concern. Extra support is purchased by the advisory service when it cannot meet needs but it does not formally provide advice to schools on alternative providers.
53. The LEA's intervention strategy in supporting schools where there are concerns is generally effective. This is evaluated in paragraphs 71-74 of this report.

Collection and Analysis of Data

54. The LEA provides schools with comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date performance data but there are weaknesses in the target setting process and the transfer of data between schools. Schools do not always make the most

effective use of the data to identify areas of under-performance and devise strategies for improvement.

55. The data complements that provided by the DfEE, OFSTED and the QCA and is analysed by gender, ethnicity, special educational needs and socio-economic indicators. The data enables schools to compare their performance against other schools in the LEA with similar pupil intakes. The LEA is at a relatively early stage in developing pupil level, value added data but it has successfully promoted the use of YELLIS and has a strategy in place to develop the use of unique pupil numbers to track performance. The LEA's baseline assessment scheme has been developed in conjunction with schools and is approved by QCA. This is increasingly providing schools and the LEA with individual pupil data to support evaluation and target setting processes.
56. Responses in the school survey and visits to schools indicate that schools generally found the data useful but required more individual support in its interpretation and use. Training courses provided by the LEA on data analysis were generally well received by headteachers, governors and senior managers. Schools also welcomed the LEA's guidance on using the data provided by the DfEE. However, better presentation of the LEA's data, including an analysis of the apparent strengths and weaknesses in each school, would help schools and assigned inspectors make more consistent and effective use of it.
57. The LEA's performance data are used in conjunction with other data to validate and challenge the statutory targets set by the school. The LEA has provided guidance on the process of setting targets but this does not establish a common methodology for building in an element of challenge. This was reflected in the different approaches used for target setting in the schools visited. In a quarter of the schools there was either confusion about the difference between a target and a projection or the target agreed was insufficiently challenging. The lack of challenge already referred to in Key Stage 2 English targets also reflects a lack of a consistent methodology for target setting. In contrast, some schools made highly sophisticated use of a range of data, including their own, to analyse performance and set targets. This good practice is worthy of sharing more widely and should complement the work already in train to achieve greater consistency and better data analysis.
58. Responses to the school survey and visits to schools indicate dissatisfaction with the arrangements for transferring data and other information between primary and secondary schools. Much of the problem is caused by a lack of a standardised system resulting in primary schools having to complete several different secondary transfer forms. The LEA has established a working party to look at this problem and produce recommendations in line with QCA guidelines.

Support for Literacy

59. Support for literacy is identified as a separate priority in the EDP. The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has been implemented effectively in Key Stage 1 and 2 and a start has been made on extending it into secondary schools. All schools have been issued with a NLS support file which includes a detailed literacy

action plan for 1999/2002. The action plan is based on a thorough audit of needs and sets out a coherent strategy for improving literacy in all key stages, with a particular focus on raising the achievement of boys.

60. The LEA has set a target of 85 per cent of pupils in Key Stage 2 achieving level 4 and above by 2002. This was within the DfEE's agreed band of 83 to 88 per cent. Progress towards meeting the target has been good, with 75 per cent reaching the expected level in 1999, an increase of seven per cent over 1998. Good progress has also been made in narrowing the gap between the performance of boys and girls at Key Stage 2.
61. The school survey rated the support for literacy in primary schools significantly below the mean for other LEAs, although 38 per cent of schools rated it as good or very good and only 9 per cent rated it as unsatisfactory. In the eight primary schools visited where literacy was a focus, the LEA's support was judged to be satisfactory or good in seven. All of the schools visited had made some improvements in the quality of provision and in the levels of achievement in English since the NLS was first introduced. Schools provided with intensive support for literacy have made most progress and this has resulted in the LEA reducing the level of support to 34 of the original 66 schools.
62. Secondary schools also rated support for literacy below the mean for other LEAs but 81 per cent rated it as satisfactory or better. The literacy strategy is still in its early stage of development in Key Stage 3 and there was limited evidence of its impact in the schools visited. Schools were generally well informed about the NLS and the LEA's plans to develop literacy, and some had arranged visits to their feeder primary schools to see the NLS in action. The LEA acknowledges that more needs to be done to improve the organisation and effectiveness of the literacy summer schools. The two special schools visited were making use of elements of the NLS but both felt the need for more specialist and more coherent LEA support.
63. Although recent changes of personnel have affected the continuity of support for some schools, the quality of the training is generally satisfactory and the support in school, consistently good. Monitoring is carried out by assigned inspectors and their evaluations are acknowledged to be making a valuable contribution to the schools' management of the strategy. Primary schools, in particular, value the contribution of the Cambridgeshire Schools' Library Service to improving literacy.

Support for Numeracy

64. The raising of standards in numeracy at all key stages is a separate EDP priority. The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) has been effectively introduced in Key Stage 1 and 2 and a programme of training for secondary phase managers and subject specialists has begun. The NNS action plan for 1999/2002 is clear and comprehensive and is based on a thorough survey of current practice in schools and an audit of needs.

65. Attainment in mathematics is significantly above national averages and in line with statistical neighbours at all key stages. The rate of improvement is generally in line with the national trend. The LEA has set a target of 79 per cent of pupils at Key Stage 2 achieving level 4 and above by 2002. In 1999, almost 73 per cent of pupils achieved level 4 and above. This exceeds the 2000 target of 71 per cent and makes the year 2002 target appear modest.
66. Support for numeracy in primary schools was rated significantly above the mean for other LEAs in the school survey, with two in three schools rating it as good or very good and none rating it as unsatisfactory. In the seven primary schools visited where numeracy was a focus, the LEA's support was judged as effective in all of them. Training provision was universally considered good and the schools in receipt of intensive support had benefited from high quality support in school. Schools reported that the written guidance on the NNS, the dissemination of good practice, and the leading maths teacher scheme were all proving beneficial. Progress in implementing the NNS is being effectively monitored by assigned inspectors.
67. Eighty-five per cent of secondary schools rated the support for numeracy as satisfactory or better. The numeracy strategy is still in its early stages of development in secondary schools but a programme of three-day conferences for secondary headteachers, governors and heads of mathematics departments is in place. Initial responses to this support have been positive and the LEA is using this opportunity to improve the links between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. The LEA is already providing some effective support in secondary schools through its intervention strategy. The LEA supported a pilot summer school in 1999 and there are plans to support two in 2000.

Support for ICT

68. Evidence from OFSTED inspections indicates that progress in ICT is currently in line with national averages at Key Stage 1, marginally better at Key Stage 2, and significantly better at Key Stage 3 and 4.
69. Support for ICT was identified as a major weakness by both primary and secondary schools in the school survey. A considerable number of headteachers expressed their dissatisfaction during the inspection with the implementation of the National Grid For Learning (NGfL) and the quality of technical support for hardware and software. In year two of NGfL the LEA, through consultation with schools, retained 20 per cent of the resources centrally. Schools with strong expertise in ICT now claim, with considerable justification, that they could have made better use of the funds if they had been delegated. The LEA is fully aware of these concerns and has recently made staff changes. However, this is yet to impact in schools and the LEA has much ground to make up if it is to restore the confidence of headteachers in the ICT service.
70. There was evidence of improvement in standards in four of the seven schools visited where ICT was a focus. The improvements in two of these schools were due largely to their own efforts. In another, the improvements were attributable

to support purchased from the advisory service and tailored to the needs of the school. All of the seven schools acknowledged that they had benefited from the NGfL and New Opportunities Fund (NOF) initiatives but reported that the related support was frequently piecemeal. However, it was also apparent that there were often weaknesses in aspects of schools' own planning for ICT. Schools valued the LEA's series of four advice booklets on ICT developments in NGfL. A few of the schools had adopted the recommended action planning framework but the self-monitoring process for charting progress in implementing the NGfL was much less in evidence.

71. The quality of the training for ICT coordinators and the LEA support through network meetings was considered satisfactory. There were also examples of good support being provided through different subjects of the curriculum. Advisory personnel were often considered to provide effective support but were frequently in short supply. Schools often needed more support in taking full advantage of the opportunities for learning provided by the developments in electronic communication.
72. The LEA's broad intentions for ICT are clear. There is evidence that an authority-wide vision for ICT in the curriculum, in concert with that for administration, is evolving. The four year NGfL strategy and plans for professional development, including NOF training, are appropriate. The revised EDP better reflects schools' needs in ICT and sound links are made with the strategies for literacy and numeracy. The recent initiative to collect and analyse data on attainment in ICT is a necessary prerequisite to improving the level of support to schools and maximising the effectiveness of a relatively small advisory resource. However, the LEA currently makes insufficient use of the considerable ICT expertise already in existence in its schools.

Support for Schools Causing Concern

73. At the time of the inspection there were two primary schools, one special school and the PRU in special measures. A total of eight schools have required special measures since 1993. This is a relatively low proportion of schools. The first school to be placed in special measures was removed after three years, the rest were removed in less than two years. OFSTED monitoring visits to the schools currently in special measures indicate they are making either satisfactory or good progress towards being removed from special measures. In addition, eleven schools have been identified since September 1997 as having serious weaknesses. The LEA has identified a further 25 schools where there are concerns about standards or management.
74. The LEA has learnt from its early experiences and has refined and improved its strategy for supporting schools causing concern. This is clearly set out in the EDP. Once concerns have been identified, either through an OFSTED inspection or by the LEA itself, an intervention strategy is negotiated with the school. This involves: the coordination of support from services across the LEA; a clear set of actions to be taken within an agreed time scale; the identification of personnel responsible for implementing the actions; arrangements for monitoring progress.

75. Evidence from OFSTED monitoring reports, and visits made during this inspection, indicates that the LEA's support to schools causing concern has generally been good. In two of these schools, the LEA was initially slow in addressing weaknesses. Effective actions include: appointing new headteachers and governors; supporting senior managers and governors and supporting specific areas of the curriculum. The LEA has been successful in achieving the difficult balance between intervention and providing support, without diminishing the authority of the headteacher and governors.
76. One of the difficulties faced by schools causing concern is the potential for additional plans adding to the burden faced by managers. The LEA is aware of this danger and of the need to work with schools to integrate these plans.

Support for Governors

77. Governor Support is a responsibility of the School Management and Governance Team which is closely linked to the LEA's support for school improvement. A Governor Support Unit, currently headed by a member of the Education Officer team, is responsible for all aspects of support to governing bodies, including the appointment of LEA governors and the maintenance of a governor database.
78. Support for governors is very good. Ninety-six per cent of governing bodies buy the full support package provided by the LEA and it is considered good value for money. Induction and other training, including training for clerks to governing bodies, is reported to be of a good quality. There were examples in the schools visited of effective training for the whole governing body. Support in the appointment of headteachers, and in dealing with disciplinary matters, is highly valued. Advice to chairs of governing bodies on personnel, legal, financial, organisational and administrative issues is considered to be very good, with personnel being singled out for particular praise.
79. A good flow of information is provided to governors through termly consultation meetings, newsletters and information sheets. The newsletters are well produced and provide a useful synthesis of new legislation and other changes affecting schools. Recently circulated information sheets on the new performance management and threshold assessment arrangements for teachers and on the self-evaluation of governing bodies have been well received. The regional consultation meetings with senior officers are welcomed but the need to impart a large quantity of information limits the opportunity for discussion on key issues. However, chairs of governors generally considered that there were sufficient other opportunities to make their views known to officers and members. Governing bodies are kept well informed about the work of assigned inspectors in their schools through copies of notes of visit and annual reviews.

Support for School Management

80. The LEA's support for management in schools is generally sound. Four of the six activities within EDP priority (iv) relate directly to the professional management of schools. The activities are supported by appropriate key tasks, success criteria and monitoring procedures.
81. Shortcomings experienced in the past in the induction and mentoring arrangements for newly appointed headteachers have now been rectified and recent newcomers have been well supported. There has been a good take up of LEA courses to develop school self-evaluation and the provision has generally been well received. However, self-evaluation is still at an early stage of development in many schools and there is still some way to go before it is firmly embedded in their culture.
82. Education officers are acknowledged as playing an important role in the support of senior managers in schools, particularly in dealing with complaints from parents and issues concerning admissions and school places. There were examples in the schools visited of assigned inspectors providing good support in helping schools draw up and monitor post-OFSTED action plans and school development plans. Classroom observation by inspectors and advisers was generally well regarded and supported senior managers' work to improve the quality of teaching.
83. An analysis of school development plans by assigned inspectors enables the advisory service to identify training needs. Headteachers also felt able to influence the pattern of inservice course provision. However, the time taken to travel to some courses is a particular issue in the Fenland area and there is scope for brokering courses from the neighbouring authority.
84. The recently established LEA strategy for supporting newly qualified teachers (NQTs) is clear but the setting up of support for induction tutors in the current school year has been slow. The monitoring of NQTs and liaison with induction tutors is the responsibility of assigned inspectors and there was evidence of them fulfilling this role effectively in a sample of the schools visited. The induction of NQTs was regarded as satisfactory overall in the school survey but take up and responses to LEA courses for NQTs varied in the schools visited. This was often because NQTs felt adequately supported by the schools' own provision. However, there were examples of effective support being given by the LEA to individual NQTs. As a result of headteacher concerns, savings during the year in the Standards Fund have been used to increase the funds targeted towards NQTs.

Support for Post-16 Education

85. Eleven of the LEA's thirty-one secondary schools have sixth forms. Two of these are part of the Cambridge Collegiate Board arrangements where school sixth forms have been maintained to provide a choice of post-16 arrangements which include sixth form colleges and a college of further education.

86. The average point score (APS) in LEA schools for two or more advanced subjects in 1999 was 16.3, compared to the national average of 17.8. When the results of the two sixth form colleges in Cambridge are added to those of the authority's schools, the APS rises to 19.8. There is wide variation between the performance of schools and between subjects. There is a relatively small provision of vocational courses in the school sixth forms.
87. Activities to support post-16 education have been included under priority (iii) in the revised EDP. This is appropriate, given the variations in performance and the current changes taking place nationally in the arrangements for post-16 education. It is also supported by an audit of needs.
88. Initial work has been undertaken on curriculum and performance analysis and a programme of secondments and associate adviser appointments has been put in place. The LEA spends above its SSA allocation on post-16 provision and a significant increase in funding for sixth forms has been agreed for 2000/2001. This is to take account of the costs involved in the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these developments.

Early Years

89. Early years education is identified as an activity supporting priority (v) in the EDP. The LEA has drawn up a clear Care and Education Plan which meets government requirements. The current level of provision for three-year-olds across the LEA is variable, both in nursery schools and private provision. It is most limited in the Fens where the LEA is contributing to a Sure-Start project designed to improve playgroup provision.

Able and Gifted Pupils

90. In 1995 the LEA published guidelines and advice on working with high ability children. The LEA is aware of the need to revive schools' awareness of these issues and is currently updating its policy and has applied for three summer schools for able children this year. Support for able and gifted children is included as an activity within the revised EDP.

Recommendations

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

- ensure greater consistency in the work undertaken by assigned inspectors, bringing general performance closer to the best;
- rebalance the amount of centrally funded support between effective schools and those experiencing difficulty or causing concern.

In order to improve the collection and analysis of data:

- improve the presentation of performance data and include an analysis of each school's strengths and weaknesses;
- further develop a common methodology for setting targets;
- improve the arrangements for the transfer of pupil data and other information between primary and secondary schools.

In order to improve the support for literacy:

- improve the quality and coherence of the support provided to special schools.

In order to improve the support for ICT:

- consult with schools more widely on the delegation of funds for ICT;
- institute more effective systems for monitoring and improving the quality of services supporting ICT so that they more closely match the needs of schools.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

91. Cambridgeshire County Council has developed a strong and effective Corporate planning framework. The 1998/2001 Corporate Plan establishes the Council's strategic objectives, the consultation process for deciding priorities and the link between service priorities and medium term financial planning. Education is a key corporate priority within the service priorities and features prominently in the local performance plan as well as the 2000/2001 programme of Best Value reviews.
92. The ELH departmental plans do not establish a clear vision for the education service and its new role resulting from the implementation of the government's agenda for education. The ELH Service Development Plan for 1998/2001 sets out the structure and form of the departmental management processes and puts the priorities for ELH within the context of the mission and values of the Council. However, the 2000/2001 Service Development Plan is little more than a summation of the statutory plans relating to the ELH department's functions. This lack of a strategic overview has contributed to management being insufficiently proactive in the face of change. This is reflected, for example, in the lack of preparedness for the impact of further delegation and the confusion that has accompanied SEN funding arrangements.
93. Planning by services within ELH has not kept pace with the improvements in corporate planning. The reorganisation of the ELH department in 1999 aimed to provide a more effective basis for performance management and the implementation of the department's service development plan. The new structure is more streamlined and redefines the role of the assistant Directors. However, the reorganisation deliberately minimised changes to the structure and function of individual service units and agencies. There are few service plans, the priorities of individual service units and agencies are not clear and performance management processes are, with a few exceptions, weak. These deficiencies inhibit the capacity of the LEA to change the way it delivers services and support to meet the challenges of Fair Funding and increased school autonomy. While it is anticipated that the Best Value review programme will result in improvements in management processes within the ELH department, senior management has so far been insufficiently proactive in tackling this deficiency.
94. The streamlined member and officer structures and the corporate planning processes provide an efficient overall framework within which policy can be developed and decisions made. In particular, the SAGs provide an effective mechanism for the analysis and refinement of ELH priorities. As a result, reports are well argued, clearly structured and include well framed recommendations. However, current arrangements do not sufficiently support members in their role of challenging and evaluating LEA performance. The imminent replacement of the performance review panel with a more focused and powerful scrutiny panel should strengthen this role. Nevertheless, the work of the scrutiny panel would be further enhanced if more effective and

systematic performance management arrangements were established within ELH.

95. While, in their responses to the school survey, schools indicated general satisfaction with the openness, speed and effectiveness of LEA decision making, many were unhappy with the way the LEA handled decisions relating to the budget for 1999/2000. A combination of factors meant that some schools' final budgets were significantly less than the indicative budgets. Decisions on the 2000/2001 budget were late and the impact on individual schools of the funding formula was not always thought through.
96. Headteachers and school governors value the commitment of members to raising achievement and improving resources for education. School visits and discussions with headteachers and governors provided evidence of the often effective leadership shown by LEA officers and members in supporting individual schools. However, the LEA has been less successful in translating this commitment into a clear overall vision for its future role and what this means for its relationship with schools.

Partnership

97. The LEA has successfully promoted good links with other partners and agencies and there are sound consultation procedures. The LEA shares its evaluations of joint initiatives with partners in an open and transparent way. Consultation and liaison arrangements with the Diocesan authorities are good. The LEA is working in close collaboration with other post-16 providers in a 'Framework for Community Education' project in the Fenland area. The LEA's vision for developing community education across the authority is considered by its principal partners to be particularly well formulated. Cooperation with the TEC, the police and the privatised careers provision is good. The LEA is cooperating effectively with the Health Service to promote health education and there has been a joint development of a framework for sex education in schools. The LEA is building effective corporate links with Social Services but responses in the school survey and from the schools visited were often critical of the quality of liaison between the two services at an operational level.

Management Services

98. There is wide variation in the performance within and between management services and this is reflected in the results of the school survey. The variation in quality is true both for directly managed services and for those purchased from internal or external providers. The authority is aware of the need to improve contracted services and strengthen the client role and has started to address this in relation to payroll, SEN transport, ICT and personnel services. Much of the inconsistency in performance is due to the lack of systematic monitoring and effective mechanisms to obtain customer feedback, as well as insufficient performance management information. The cost of management services is in line or below the shire county average.

99. The weaknesses already referred to in service planning and the performance management framework reduce the effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements and weakens the LEA's ability to take early action when services under-perform.
100. The quality of information provided to schools on management services is also variable. A Schools' Services Booklet has been introduced this year, but the level and content of the information are not consistent for all services. Not all services have provided schools with detailed service level agreements (SLAs) and there is a lack of a consistent format to the way information is presented. There is also scope for selling services in ways that would better meet the different needs of schools

Personnel

101. Support for personnel in schools and the discharge of the LEA's personnel functions are good. Most of the personnel services have been provided by a private contractor since 1993. The contractor also holds individual contracts with schools. A high proportion of schools rated the quality of the personnel service as good or very good in the school survey and this was supported by evidence from meetings with headteachers and governors. The lines of demarcation between the external contractor and the rest of the service based in ELH are clear. Model policies, regularly updated, are available to schools, and the training for headteachers and governors on personnel issues is well regarded.

Payroll

102. Payroll services have been contracted out since 1993. The service to schools is unsatisfactory, with the majority of schools rating it as poor or very poor in the school survey. It is also clear from a number of earlier reviews that the service has been unsatisfactory for a number of years. During this inspection schools reported frustrations and extra work caused by delays and inaccuracies in making payments. The LEA has recently put in place a process for the central logging of complaints to gauge the scale and nature of the concerns and is about to pilot electronic timesheets as a way of trying to reduce inputting errors. A Best Value review is also programmed for June to August 2000.

Financial Services

103. While the majority of schools in the survey rated as satisfactory consultation on the budget, the planned level of delegation and the clarity and fairness of the funding formula, a significant minority rated these aspects as poor or very poor. Schools valued the support they receive on the management of Standards Fund but raised concerns about late changes in budget information for 1999/2000 and 2000/2001 and rated support for schools with deficits as unsatisfactory. Despite extensive consultation procedures, schools did not always appreciate the full implications of budget decisions before implementation.

104. In 1999/2000, nine secondary schools had budget deficits greater than 2.5 per cent. For 2000/2001 it is expected that 12 secondary schools will have deficits, although four of these are expected to be less than 2.5 per cent of the budget, a number are anticipated to be substantial. Two special schools are also expected to have large deficits in 2000/2001. The deficits arise mainly from a combination of grant maintained schools protection, the nature of the funding formula and the timing of budget information. The authority has provided schools with detailed information on the requirements of their local management scheme and arrangements for the elimination of the deficits over a maximum period of five years. All schools with agreed deficits have recovery plans in place. However, the number and level of deficits remains a cause for concern.

Administrative ICT

105. The LEA acknowledges that support for administrative ICT has been variable in the past and this was reflected in schools' evaluations and comments in the school survey. The main concerns included a lack of flexibility in meeting the different needs of schools and poor technical support and advice. A Best Value review has been undertaken and a range of improvements have been put in place from April 2000. The service has been restructured with new service managers for both client and provider functions, a more detailed SLA has been developed, revised procurement arrangements and procedures have been issued and the ICT steering group, with representation from all school phases, is in the process of being re-established. It is too early to measure the full impact of these changes on schools but there was some evidence of improved satisfaction with the service in the schools visited.

Property

106. This is a good service that schools rightly value. A high proportion of schools rated the range of property services as satisfactory or better in the school survey. Foundation schools rated the service even more highly than community schools. There were several examples amongst the schools visited of major building projects being very well managed by the LEA. Technical services have recently been overhauled following a Best Value review, bringing an increased rigour to performance management and to checking competitiveness against the market. Variability in the performance of individual property managers is being tackled.

Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance

107. Schools rated the contracted cleaning and grounds maintenance service as satisfactory in the school survey but expressed dissatisfaction with the in-house cleaning provision in the secondary sector. Performance management in this service relies heavily on feedback from the termly meetings between each school and its area cleaning manager. There is little opportunity for higher level discussions with schools and there is a lack of effective procedures for dealing with ad hoc complaints. The termination next year of the competitively priced central cleaning contract will give an opportunity for greater flexibility.

School Meals

108. A Best Value review of the service was partly complete at the time of the inspection. This has included broad stakeholder consultation, concentrating particularly on pupils. This looks set to produce greater flexibility and choice for schools and pupils.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management:

- establish a clear vision for the future of the education service, including clear descriptions of respective roles, responsibilities and expectations;
- improve performance management arrangements for service units and agencies within ELH and establish new departmental standards, consistent with the best within other parts of the Council;
- strengthen the client role of schools by providing them with better information on the costs, service specifications and performance standards of LEA services;
- use the results of the Best Value review of payroll to put in place a time limited action plan to improve the quality of service to schools;

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

109. The LEA's current strategy for special educational needs is not articulated clearly enough and it is not sufficiently robust to effect change. In particular, the strategy does not identify clearly the areas in need of development, the authority's proposals for the reorganisation of special schools or the time-scale for these developments. The strategy identifies an intention to move towards greater levels of inclusion but the definition of inclusion and the structure of support to help schools implement it are not clear to schools. The LEA also needs to increase the pace of change and improve its monitoring and evaluation of how the strategy for inclusion is currently being implemented in schools.
110. A relatively high proportion of children with SEN are educated in mainstream schools with the 11 special schools providing places for those with the most significant need.
111. The revised EDP gives greater emphasis to SEN by including it as a specific activity to support priority (v) and integrating it in other activities. The LEA has identified a challenging agenda for the SEN Best Value review, scheduled for summer 2000. It is to address funding, provision and resources. It will also pay particular attention to the inclusion of children with SEN in response to the government's *SEN Programme of Action*. The review is timely but requires a more detailed and time limited action plan if it is to effect change at the pace required.
112. The review of special schools has been lengthy but has now been completed for Huntingdonshire, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire. The provision in Cambridge City has yet to be reviewed and there is yet no timescale for a resolution. This is causing considerable uncertainty and makes it difficult for schools to plan effectively.

Statutory Obligations

113. The LEA complies with its legal obligations, including equal opportunities and disability legislation. The statutory responsibility to issue statements within 18 weeks is mainly fulfilled but the 92 per cent claimed includes 24 per cent allowable exceptions. Better communications between the LEA and contributors to statementing procedures are needed to ensure that advice is readily available. Annual review procedures for statements are sound, with the LEA triggering the dates for each school and making personnel available to attend meetings as necessary.

Improvement and Value for Money

114. Schools rated the support for SEN as satisfactory in the school survey. This was reflected in the visits to schools where individual services were often well regarded and found to be effective. There was evidence of support for SEN

making a sound contribution to school improvement. Schools were generally positive about the quality of support they received from the psychological service, the sensory impaired services, the speech and language service and the behaviour support service. Schools were sometimes dissatisfied with the amount of support they received and the criteria for allocating it. Most schools commented favourably on the primary support service but a number felt there was an overemphasis on classroom management rather than help with appropriate packages of support. Support for literacy and numeracy for pupils with SEN was regarded as satisfactory in mainstream schools but special schools indicated a need for more support in modifying and implementing the strategies.

115. There has been a period of 15 months during which the LEA has experienced change in the senior personnel with responsibilities for special educational need and this has had an adverse effect on the professional support for schools. The recent appointment of an inspector with considerable expertise in SEN is helping to address this shortcoming. SEN coordinators find the group meetings established by the LEA useful and special school headteachers welcome the opportunity to meet as a forum. These arrangements are helpful in supporting new appointees and in disseminating good practice.
116. The LEA spends a higher proportion of its budget, and considerably more per pupil on SEN than the shire county average. The proportion of pupils with statements in both primary and secondary phases is above similar authorities and has increased from 2.7 per cent to 3.5 per cent in four years. Expenditure on transport, independent school places and out of county places is broadly in line with similar authorities. The increased delegation of funds for 2000/2001 will not, in itself, reduce this high level of expenditure which is set to increase further.
117. Despite the high overall level of spending on SEN, staffing levels in special schools are set 15 per cent below the recommendations of Circular 11/90 and this is impacting on administration and the ability to release staff for professional development. Two special schools are predicting substantial deficits for 2000/2001, while others are holding substantial surpluses.
118. The LEA has delegated a proportion of the funding for learning support assistants to schools. This funding has two elements: funding for existing statements and funding for new statements. All primary and secondary schools, regardless of size and need, receive the same sum to support the cost of meeting new statements. Many of the schools visited were confused about these delegation arrangements.
119. The LEA cannot establish that its support for SEN is providing good value for money until it has revised its SEN strategy in the light of national changes and can demonstrate that the outcomes compare favourably with those found nationally.

Recommendations

In order to improve special educational needs provision:

- use the Best Value review of SEN to revise the strategy for SEN, including clear principles, timescales, success criteria and resource analysis;
- develop a clear timetable for the review of severe learning difficulties (SLD) schools in Cambridge in the light of the revised SEN strategy;
- continue to reduce the number of statements prevented from being issued within 18 weeks by factors included within the allowable exceptions.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The Supply of School Places and Admissions

120. The LEA meets its statutory requirements with regard to the provision of school places and admissions to school. The admissions and appeals processes are handled effectively and the service was rated highly by schools in the school survey.
121. Cambridgeshire's school organisation plan is based on sound principles and extensive demographic data and has appropriate links with the infant class size plan and the EDP. The LEA has established a School Organisation Committee, which has approved and monitored the implementation of the school organisation plan. Appropriate training and advice has been provided on school organisation issues.
122. Secondary pupil numbers in Cambridgeshire are expected to continue to expand and the current level of secondary surplus places of around four per cent hides considerable pressure due to new housing. There are just over 3,460 primary surplus places and appropriate action is being taken in line with District Audit recommendations to reduce these wherever possible. The LEA has also responded appropriately to localised demographic changes through changes in standard numbers, amalgamations, the removal or addition of accommodation and proposals for school closures.
123. As part of any review, the Schools' Service Advisory Group undertakes an extensive consultation process with school staff, governors, parents and the wider community, as well as the Diocesan authorities, local churches and businesses. Schools visited commented positively on this process and viewed it as an example of good practice.
124. There has been extensive consultation on the LEA's Infant Class Size Plan with parents, neighbouring LEAs, the Diocesan authorities and schools. In 1998/1999 there were 7,139 (37.52 per cent) pupils in classes of 30 or more and class size was an issue for 103 of the 182 schools. There are currently six schools with reception classes of 31 pupils. Of these, three had been agreed as exceptions by the LEA, one was the result of a successful appeal and one was the result of an unusual standard number and appropriate action is being taken to reduce the admissions numbers. Appropriate action is being taken to reduce class sizes for year 1 and 2 pupils in a further 19 schools.
125. Overall, planning on school places is well managed but the LEA has been slow in formulating its proposals for special school provision.

Asset Management Planning

126. The authority has been successful in getting capital funding through loan sanctions for its growing population and through contributions from property developers. It has been increasingly successful in grant bids. It has not yet opted for any sizeable Private Finance Initiatives, and there is scope for more

activity in this area, building on the good practice already developed in small scale projects.

127. Cambridgeshire received a Chartermark in 1999 for its property management services, and they are a clear strength of the Council. School buildings have been regularly surveyed, properly maintained and are generally in good condition. A fresh condition survey of all schools was commissioned in late 1999, following the DfEE recommended format for the Asset Management Plan, and the data were submitted within the DfEE's deadline.
128. Consultation with schools over the delegation of the property budget has been clear and transparent. The County set up a well supported indemnity scheme for the first year of delegation, and is now preparing consultation on a proposal for each school to manage its own maintenance budget, capital and revenue, in response to the government's formula capital distribution to schools.

Social Exclusion

129. One of the EDP priorities is to improve educational access, participation and welfare. Schools understand and share the LEA's desire to promote social inclusion and feel that most of the strategies are effective. The LEA has effective arrangements for supporting schools in dealing with behaviour and avoiding exclusions, although the provision for pupils who are excluded or out of school for other reasons is too variable. The support for attendance, pupils of minority ethnic background, including Travellers, and children in public care is generally good. Support for the health, safety and welfare of pupils is systematic and highly valued by schools.

Provision of Education Otherwise Than At School

130. The LEA is rightly concerned to improve the quality and consistency of its provision of education for pupils otherwise than at school. Although there has been some progress in increasing the amount of teaching and the range of programmes available for pupils out of school, there is too wide a variation in what is provided in different parts of the County.
131. The LEA monitors exclusions and out of school placements carefully. It is largely successful in its policy of reintegrating excluded primary pupils into school. There are currently just under 100 pupils at Key Stage 3 and just over 300 pupils at Key Stage 4 educated out of school. The LEA has one PRU located in Cambridge with 26 places for Key Stage 4 pupils. This is currently in special measures but is making satisfactory progress. The Cambridge Alternative Programme for Education provides another 22 places, mostly for pupils in Key Stage 4. Twelve pupils in Cambridge have full-time programmes in a college of further education. There are also programmes based in Huntingdon, March and Ely which provide for pupils out of school.
132. The status of the provision outside of the PRU is currently unclear and its success varies between areas. It is most successful in one area where schools recognise the provision as part of a local strategy which includes a commitment

on their part to accept pupils excluded from other schools. Elsewhere, the provision is less coherent and the LEA has much to do if it is to provide a range of appropriate full-time programmes for all pupils out of school by 2002. Additional resources are being secured for this purpose through the medium term planning process.

Attendance

133. Attendance in Cambridgeshire is slightly above national averages and slightly below the LEA's statistical neighbours. Rates of unauthorised absence are also below national averages but slightly higher than the LEA's statistical neighbours. The LEA's target is to reduce unauthorised attendance from 0.4 per cent of half days missed to 0.3 per cent. The level of attendance has remained fairly static over the past three years. There are significant variations in attendance rates across the LEA; attendance is highest in south Cambridgeshire and lowest in the Fenlands.
134. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) provides a satisfactory level of support to schools and it is generally valued. The recently appointed head of service has begun to target support more precisely; for example in the Fenlands, a secondary attendance project has been set up at four schools. The service has focused much of its work on reducing the levels of unauthorised absence and now provides good quality data to schools to enable them to compare their attendance to similar schools in the LEA and to set targets for improving attendance. A wider range of services is being offered to schools, notably attendance audits, which schools have found helpful. The EWS has increased the numbers of prosecutions and is monitoring the effectiveness of this strategy. The service has systematic links with other teams providing support to pupils.
135. The EWS has a good service plan and has a thorough system for monitoring its performance. Clear policies and protocols have been established. The service meets its legal requirements and offers good value for money, though its resources are stretched to provide the full range of services

Behaviour Support

136. Permanent exclusions in primary and secondary schools have fallen over the last four years and are significantly below national levels. Permanent exclusions are within the limits set by the DfEE. However, behaviour in primary and secondary schools was judged as being slightly worse than that found nationally in OFSTED inspections.
137. The LEA provides good support to its schools to help them improve behaviour. There was evidence from the visits to schools, supported by recent OFSTED inspections, of this support being effective. The behaviour support plan has clear aims which are translated into appropriate objectives and actions. It is linked with the work of other agencies such as the EWS, educational psychology service and education otherwise than at school. Schools are now given useful data on exclusions and attendance which enable them to compare

their performance with national averages and similar schools locally in order to set their own targets. Schools understand the priorities of the plan and the links with the LEA's strategies to reduce exclusions and promote social inclusion. Headteachers support the LEA's strategy and most feel that it is effective, with the exception of provision for pupils permanently excluded from school and the availability of behaviour support for primary pupils at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice.

138. The criteria for allocating support for behaviour are different for primary and secondary schools. Secondary schools rated the support highly and felt it was effective in reducing exclusions. Primary schools rated the support less highly than secondary schools. However, most valued both the quality of advice given for devising whole-school behaviour policies and the support provided for individual pupils. A minority of primary schools, particularly those with significant numbers of challenging pupils, felt that the expertise of the support team and the help and advice provided did not always fully match their needs. Even where emergency funding is available for schools to employ learning support assistants, they find it difficult to recruit staff with the right expertise in this area.

Health, Safety, Welfare, Child Protection

139. The LEA meets its responsibilities for safeguarding the health and welfare of pupils. Health and safety procedures are systematic. Child protection procedures and support for children in need are rated highly by schools. The service provides good quality, up-to-date guidance and training for schools and governors. This includes such issues as anti-bullying strategies and the teaching of personal safety skills. The child protection team works closely with other agencies and teams. The LEA has a well-established drugs education programme which targets its activities in response to schools' needs. Schools are provided with clear information and guidance and encouraged to carefully record all incidents. Drugs education programmes include work with groups considered to be most at risk, for example young people on out of school programmes. The LEA has established a 'healthy schools' initiative which it aims to extend to a wider range of schools, particularly those serving disadvantaged areas.

Children in Public Care

140. The education of children in public care is a high priority in Cambridgeshire and the overall provision is good. There is a detailed section referring to support for children in public care in the EDP. This specifies a clear set of targets, appropriate actions to achieve them, responsibilities for implementation and systems for monitoring and evaluating progress. The education plan for children in public care is comprehensive and includes the care plan. The draft Joint Protocol between LEA and Social Services is generally appropriate but lacks detail about the children who are out of school.
141. There is good monitoring of the performance of children in public care. Performance is relatively good. In 1999, 54 out of 56 year 11 children sat

GCSE examinations, with 51.9 per cent of these achieving one or more A-G passes. The target set in the EDP is in line with national targets and at the current rate, should be achieved within the prescribed time. However, the LEA has not taken the opportunity to set more ambitious targets for children who might be expected to achieve five or more good passes.

Minority Ethnic and Traveller Children

142. The LEA has one of the largest populations of Traveller pupils in England. The total numbers of other minority ethnic groups are relatively small and widely dispersed. In Cambridge many schools have very small numbers of pupils speaking a wide range of languages but who are not fluent in English. A small number of schools have significant proportions of pupils for whom English is an additional language or who are of Black Caribbean heritage. The LEA monitors the performance of the main minority ethnic groups and targets support appropriately on those performing least well in comparison with local and national averages. Because the overall numbers in any group are small, performance can fluctuate markedly year on year. The LEA currently sets targets on the basis of cohort data. With such small numbers it would be more useful to set targets based on individual performance. The Cambridge Minority Ethnic Support Service (CMES) undertakes useful monitoring of individual pupils' progress in English.
143. The Traveller support service is centrally funded and its staff is largely peripatetic. It includes three learning support assistants who are Travellers. The service has worked hard with some success to improve pupils' attendance, including that of secondary age pupils, and to improve participation in pre-school education. There are well developed systems for identifying Traveller pupils and monitoring their movement. There is good liaison between the Traveller support service and the EWS to promote attendance and ensure consistency in recording absence. The service also provides advice and some resources to schools. Schools generally value the support of the service. It now needs to establish a clearer strategy to improve pupil performance as well as attendance.
144. CMES provides well targeted and generally effective support to improve the achievement of minority ethnic pupils. Bangladeshi pupils perform below expectations at all stages and Black Caribbean pupils underachieve from Key Stage 2, though their achievement is in line with other groups in baseline and Key Stage 1 tests. The performance of Pakistani pupils, who also receive support, has improved. The CMES has established clear and well understood criteria for allocating funding to schools. Funding is delegated to schools appropriately and 80 per cent of schools buy back services from the LEA. Schools value the quality of support provided by teachers and bilingual assistants where there is a significant level of support. Some schools with small numbers of pupils who are not fluent in English felt that the support was less effective. The CMES team has contributed to the work of the literacy team, for example, in the development and use of big books, training for the literacy hour and partnership teaching.

Education Against Racism

145. The LEA has made an appropriate response to the report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence and has reviewed its provision for action against racism. An action planning group has been formed which is attended by the Director of Education. All schools have a small allocation of money to spend on training and resources to promote equal opportunities. Good existing guidance, for example, on bullying, has been updated and published on the LEA intranet and incorporated into governor training. An interagency project has been established to support isolated minority ethnic families on the Oxmoor estate.

Recommendations

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

- develop a clear, staged and costed strategy for the provision of full-time programmes for pupils out of school;
- as a matter of urgency, clarify the status of the provision in establishments outside of the PRU.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

In order to improve the EDP:

- target activities more precisely on under-performing schools, groups of pupils and geographic areas;
- strengthen and make more explicit the strategies for reducing regional differences in performance;
- ensure that all strategies are coherent, consistent and sequential;
- encourage greater understanding of the EDP by schools.

In order to improve the allocation of resources:

- evaluate and develop proposals for changing the school funding formula, with particular reference to its impact on schools of different sizes and phases.

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

- ensure greater consistency in the work undertaken by assigned inspectors, bringing general performance closer to the best;
- rebalance the amount of centrally funded support between effective schools and those experiencing difficulty or causing concern.

In order to improve the collection and analysis of data:

- improve the presentation of performance data and include an analysis of each school's strengths and weaknesses;
- further develop a common methodology for setting targets;
- improve the arrangements for the transfer of pupil data and other information between primary and secondary schools.

In order to improve the support for literacy:

- improve the quality and coherence of the support provided to special schools.

In order to improve the support for ICT:

- consult with schools more widely on the delegation of funds for ICT;
- institute more effective systems for monitoring and improving the quality of services supporting ICT so that they more closely match the needs of schools.

In order to improve strategic management:

- establish a clear vision for the future of the education service, including clear descriptions of respective roles, responsibilities and expectations;
- improve performance management arrangements for service units and agencies within ELH and establish new departmental standards, consistent with the best within other parts of the Council;
- strengthen the client role of schools by providing them with better information on the costs, service specifications and performance standards of LEA services;
- use the results of the Best Value review of payroll to put in place a time limited action plan to improve the quality of service to schools;

In order to improve special educational needs provision:

- use the Best Value review of SEN to revise the strategy for SEN, including clear principles, timescales, success criteria and resource analysis;
- develop a clear timetable for the review of severe learning difficulties (SLD) schools in Cambridge in the light of the revised SEN strategy;
- continue to reduce the number of statements prevented from being issued within 18 weeks by factors included within the allowable exceptions.

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

- develop a clear, staged and costed strategy for the provision of full-time programmes for pupils out of school;
- as a matter of urgency, clarify the status of the provision in establishments outside of the PRU.

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