



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

October 2000

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

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APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was partly based on data and documentation, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports. It also involved discussions with LEA members, groups of headteachers, parents, governors, staff in the education department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. A questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 87 schools. The response rate was 78 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 12 primary, four secondary and two special 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 that 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.
4. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

COMMENTARY

5. Bath and North East Somerset is a unitary authority established in April 1996. Around half the population lives in the City of Bath, with the rest living in small towns or rural villages. The area served by the LEA includes some very affluent suburban and rural areas, although there are pockets of deprivation.
6. The LEA is performing well and has only a few areas of major weakness. It got off to a slow start, but has made good progress recently in establishing its vision for education. The education director, who was appointed in November 1999, has set a clear agenda for the education department with a strong focus on school improvement. Communication with schools and the openness of decision-making have improved.
7. Standards in primary schools are generally in line with national averages and are improving at around the average rate. Given that the attainment of pupils on entry to primary schools is above average overall, standards at the end of Key Stage 2 should be higher than they are. Results in secondary schools are above national figures for the end of Key Stage 3 and for GCSE. There are wide differences between the results in different primary and secondary schools, which cannot be explained in terms of indicators of deprivation such as free school meals. The LEA has rightly recognised underachievement in some schools and has begun to tackle the under-performance in a systematic and rigorous way. Although most schools accept the need to raise standards, a legacy of complacency remains in a few schools and an unwillingness to accept the need to improve.
8. A-Level results are close to the national average, but in 1999 the average point score for pupils with two or more A-Levels was below average. The LEA is concerned about underachievement in the sixth forms and is aware of the need to review provision, but has not yet devoted much attention to these issues.
9. The Council has made education a priority and has funded it consistently above the standard spending assessment. Councillors have grown in confidence and understanding of educational issues from a low starting point, when very few of them had any experience of running education. There has been a hung Council since 1996, although there is little political disagreement over education matters. Decisions have usually been taken promptly based on clear and timely information from education officers. The Council has, though, been less decisive on matters relating to school organisation and the need to close or amalgamate schools.
10. The LEA inherited school buildings that were often in a poor state of repair. It has begun to take steps to improve matters. However, many school buildings remain in a desperately poor condition, and the lack of an effective asset management plan means that the way funding is allocated for improvements is not sufficiently clear or transparent.
11. Schools have established very strong and supportive local networks, through area clusters, and as a body of headteachers who are an influential group, and

are well represented at most levels of decision-making. Consultation is very good, particularly over the budget, and schools are very positive about the three-year financial plan agreed by the Council.

12. Corporate planning is good. The education department is well-managed and has responded swiftly to Government initiatives, such as the Code of Practice on LEA/school relations. Links with partners and other organisations are very effective. The joint working of education and social services has been identified as an example of good practice by the Audit Commission and Social Services Inspectorate. Education staff are deployed well and are usually highly regarded by schools. The education department's management structure was reorganised last year as a result of the Council's decision to cut around a quarter of the senior posts. This reorganisation has resulted in an unduly and unusually small management team for education. The difficulty in filling the vacancy for a key post, the head of children's services, has also put increased pressure on education managers and team leaders and slowed down progress on important strategic issues such as inclusion.
13. The LEA carries out most functions satisfactorily and many well. The following are undertaken particularly well:
 - support to schools for target setting;
 - support for numeracy;
 - support for early years;
 - support for behaviour;
 - administration of admissions;
 - support for administrative information and communication technology (ICT);
 - support for health and safety;
 - personnel services; and
 - financial planning.
14. By contrast, the following functions have significant weaknesses:
 - support to schools for ICT in the curriculum;
 - property services;
 - provision of service specifications;
 - payroll services; and
 - asset management planning and the transparency of funds for buildings.
15. The LEA has recognised these weaknesses and in most cases is taking appropriate action to remedy them. It is an improving authority and has the growing support of its schools. It still has some way to go to overcome the complacency that exists in some schools, but the signs are encouraging. The LEA has demonstrated the capacity to respond to the recommendations for improvement in this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

16. Bath and North East Somerset is a unitary authority that was established in April 1996 following the dissolution of Avon. The Council serves a population of nearly 160,000, about half of whom live in the City of Bath, with the rest living in small towns or villages. The Bath and North East Somerset area includes some very affluent suburban and rural areas as well as pockets of deprivation. The proportions of the population with higher education qualifications and in social classes one and two are above the national average. In 1999, 13 per cent of primary and 9.6 per cent of secondary school pupils were entitled to free school meals, significantly below the national averages of 20.5 per cent and 18.1 per cent respectively. The percentage of pupils from ethnic minority groups is relatively small (2.6 per cent compared with 11.7 per cent nationally). The proportion of pupils in special schools is close to that found nationally as is the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs (3.1 per cent).
17. The LEA maintains 87 schools comprising:
- sixty-nine primary schools (including infant, junior and all-through primaries), with wide differences in size, from 33 to 417 pupils on roll; nearly one-fifth have fewer than 100 pupils;
 - nine nursery classes in primary or infant schools; in addition, there is an extensive range of private, voluntary and independent provision, sufficient to meet local needs;
 - thirteen secondary schools (nine county, two voluntary aided and two former grant maintained), all but one of which have a sixth form; and there is a preponderance of single sex provision in the Bath area, with only one of the five non-denominational schools offering co-education; and
 - five special schools providing for a range of special educational needs.

Performance

18. Evidence from OFSTED inspections shows that pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is above average overall.
19. Standards of attainment in primary schools are generally close to the national average and in line with those for schools in similar LEAs¹. Improvement over the last few years has been close to that found nationally.
20. Key Stage 1 results for Level 2 and above in reading, writing and mathematics were in line with the national average in 1999, but a higher proportion of pupils gained Levels 3 and above in the reading and writing tests. In 1999, the proportion of Key Stage 2 pupils achieving Level 4 and above was in line with the national average in English and science but above it in mathematics. The

¹ Bath and North East Somerset's statistical neighbours are Cheshire, Warwickshire, North Somerset, East Sussex, Bedfordshire, Leicestershire, West Sussex, Solihull, Worcestershire and Shropshire.

proportion gaining Level 5 or above was better than found nationally for English and science, and in line for mathematics. There are wide differences in performance between schools, which cannot be accounted for wholly by indicators such as the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

21. Standards are generally above average in secondary schools and improvements over time are in line with the national average. The percentage of 14-year-old pupils gaining Level 5 and above was higher than the national average in English, mathematics and science in 1999, and a higher than average proportion gained Level 6 and above. Results at GCSE have been consistently above average in terms of all the indicators. There is, though, a variation in the performance of schools and a small number are performing worse than expected when compared with similar schools.
22. Post-16 results in schools are generally close to the national average. In 1999, the average point score for two or more A-levels was, however, below average. Given that pupils perform better than average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, the results at A-level are lower than expected and indicate underachievement in the LEA's sixth forms.
23. Attendance in primary schools is above the national average and the percentage of unauthorised absences is close to average. Attendance in secondary schools is close to the national average but with fewer unauthorised absences. In 1997/98, the exclusion rates per 1000 pupils were broadly in line with the national averages for primary and secondary schools, although higher than those in similar LEAs. The number of permanent exclusions has fallen considerably from eight primary and 58 secondary in 1997/98, to two and 20 respectively in 1998/99.
24. Evidence from OFSTED inspections shows that the proportion of good or very good primary and secondary schools in the LEA is above the national average. Inspectors identified more poor teaching in Bath and North East Somerset primary schools than nationally. Improvement in teaching between the first and second cycle of inspections was less than the national average in primary schools. The quality of teaching in secondary schools was better than the national average in the second cycle of inspections and improvement has been greater than that found nationally.
25. Since 1997, only one school has been placed in special measures (in November 1999) and two schools have been identified by OFSTED inspections as having serious weaknesses. This is a relatively small proportion of the LEA's schools.

Funding

26. Bath and North East Somerset receives one of the lowest education standard spending assessments (SSA) of any LEA. The SSA for 2000/01 ranks 149th out of 150 LEAs for secondary pupils (£2,830 per pupil) and 145th for primary pupils (£2,238 per pupil). In 1999/00, the respective figures were £2,158 per

primary pupil and £2,715 per secondary pupil compared with England averages of £2,372 and £3,031 respectively.

27. However, the LEA has a strong commitment to education and spends well above the SSA. The table below shows education expenditure against SSA in Bath and North East Somerset.

	UNDER FIVES	Primary	11 - 15	Post 16	Other	Total
Budget 99/00	£3,914	£26,488	£30,113	£6,748	£1,533	£68,795
SSA 99/00	£3,455	£23,698	£2,8151	£5,222	£1,816	£62,342
Budget as % of SSA	113%	112%	107%	129%	84%	110%
Budget 00/01	£4,081	£27,618	£31,397	£7,035	£1,598	£71,730
SSA 00/01	£3,564	£24,644	£30,014	£5,544	£1,745	£6,5511
Budget as % of SSA	115%	112%	105%	127%	92%	109%

28. Overall, the budgeted expenditure for 2000/01 is, in spite of the low SSA, slightly above that for statistical neighbours but slightly below the averages for England and for unitary authorities.
29. The LEA has passed the increases in the 2000/01 education SSA to schools, and now delegates 84.2 per cent of the local schools budget (LSB) to schools compared to 81.9 per cent in 1999/00. This is in line with its statistical neighbours and England averages. Costs of individual LEA functions are broadly in line with averages for England and statistical neighbours.
30. The LEA was granted £3.026m through the Standards Fund in 1999/00. At £120 per pupil this is less than the average for unitary authorities (£143) or for England (£161). Schools have received a total of £343,000 under the specialist schools programme, equivalent to £14 per pupil and well above the averages for England (£5) and unitary authorities (£5).
31. At present primary and secondary schools are funded through a formula largely unchanged since it was inherited from Avon. Rightly, the LEA has embarked upon a fundamental review, following the successful review last year of the funding formula for special schools. The review is expected to be completed in time for the start of the 2001/02 financial year. The LEA has identified the issues that need to be addressed such as the balance of funding between key stages; at present funding for sixth forms is relatively high and for Key Stage 2 relatively low. The protection for small schools is currently generous and will need to be revised. The present method of allocating funds to meet additional educational needs is no longer appropriate for this authority.

32. Schools receive clear and timely information about budget allocations. The processes for monitoring budgets are mainly sound. Audit checks on school finances that have been completed are thorough and the reports contain appropriate recommendations. At the end of March 1999, 64 per cent of primary schools had budget balances that were more than five per cent of their annual budget. The LEA has good systems for following this up and all the schools concerned had plans to spend the balances. Systems for supporting the small number of schools with potential deficit budgets are good.
33. In 1999 the Council sold its entire public housing stock. This has given it sufficient capital funds to pay off its debts and to expand its programme of capital expenditure in pursuit of its priorities. Capital expenditure on education is planned to grow from £1.284 million in 1997/98 to a budgeted £3.903 million in 2000/01, more than half of which will be funded from capital receipts. In 1999/00 budgeted capital expenditure per pupil (£93) lagged behind statistical neighbours and unitary authority averages (£146 and £127 respectively).

Council structure

34. There are 65 councillors, of whom 30 are Liberal Democrats, 17 Labour, 16 Conservative and two are Independent. No political party has an overall majority; a situation that has existed throughout the lifetime of the authority. The Council has yet to modernise its structure and still operates through committees. The one major area of political disagreement has been over modernising the Council structure, which explains why it has been slow to act on this.
35. The education committee comprises 12 councillors and six co-opted members. There is no permanent chair of the education committee and a chairperson is appointed for each meeting. A sub-committee for education effectiveness monitors the work of schools and the department appropriately. It reviews OFSTED reports and receives regular reports on target setting and school performance. Each of the three major political groups has appointed an education spokesperson who acts as a point of contact for officers. The arrangement works reasonably well and does not slow down decisions unduly.

The Education Development Plan (EDP)

36. The Education Development Plan (EDP) is the LEA's lead plan for raising standards and improving schools. The plan has received the full three-year approval from the DfEE, with no specific conditions. It is consistent with the LEA's other plans, for example its behaviour support plan, and makes appropriate reference to them. There is also coherence between the EDP and the core values of the service.
37. The priorities in the EDP are related to:
 - standards in literacy in primary schools;
 - standards in numeracy in primary schools;
 - standards in ICT in all schools;

- standards at 16;
 - quality of management and leadership in schools;
 - quality of teaching in all schools; and
 - social inclusion.
38. These priorities are based on a sound audit of need and reflect well the local and national priorities. A weakness of the audit in the EDP is its lack of analysis of the performance of ethnic minority pupils. The plan refers to the need to raise literacy levels of pupils with English as an additional language but provides no supporting analysis, although some relevant data are now available.
39. The audit in the EDP and corresponding priorities illustrate the LEA's willingness to tackle the underlying complacency and underachievement in some of its schools. The analysis of performance resulting in the identification of underachievement, for example from OFSTED reports and by comparison with similar schools, is good. The LEA has also identified the lower than average results at A-Level and is aware of the need to review provision, but has not yet devoted much attention to these issues.
40. The EDP is for the most part well constructed. The activities are clear, with appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. The success criteria are relevant, although not always easily assessable. The success criteria are not tied in closely enough to the activities and there are too few interim targets by which to check progress.
41. The targets in the EDP for 2002 are appropriate and achievable. The process of setting targets with schools is generally very effective, although the schools' aggregated targets for Key Stage 2 English are still one per cent below the LEA's targets for 2000 and 2001. The Key Stage 2 English target for 2002 (86 per cent) is the most challenging, involving a rise of 14 per cent from last year's performance, but should be achieved. The Key Stage 2 mathematics target for 2002 has just been increased by two per cent to 82 per cent because of the better than expected results in 1999. The 2002 targets for unauthorised absence and exclusions were reached in 1999 and will need to be revised.
42. The consultation process on the EDP was very thorough. Headteachers, dioceses, parents, teachers, members and local partners were involved and their views were influential. During the school visits as part of the inspection, headteachers and governors often showed a good familiarity with the EDP priorities and shared the LEA's determination to raise standards. In a few schools, there was a reluctance to accept the need to raise standards, despite clear evidence of underachievement.
43. The LEA's procedures for managing the implementation of the EDP and reviewing progress are good. Each of the priorities has a nominated lead officer as well as a steering group, called the priority review group, made up of headteachers. Nearly all the headteachers in the LEA are involved in one of the seven priority review groups. The groups meet termly and produced their first reports last autumn. The reports are useful and indicate that progress with

the plan overall is good. Each report is written to a slightly different format; this is unhelpful and makes it difficult to get a clear overview of progress.

44. The education department has just sought the Council's approval of its intention to revise the EDP to make it easier to monitor and to get an overview of progress. This is a positive step forward.

The allocation of resources to priorities

45. In its early years as a unitary authority, the LEA struggled to establish a transparent and trusted mechanism for consulting with schools on budgetary matters. In the lead up to the 2000/01 budget round, an education budget forum was convened, consisting of elected members, officers from education and finance departments, headteachers, and governors. This forum has been an outstanding success and schools report a much more open approach to budget setting this year. This has enhanced the confidence that schools have in the way the LEA sets its budgets. The forum has agreed an appropriate set of priorities for future education expenditure and these are reflected in the Council's financial strategy.
46. The Council has agreed a three-year budget and financial strategy that anticipates the need to pass future increases in education SSA on to schools. This is a very positive development and allows schools to plan ahead with some confidence. Appropriately, given the needs of schools and the financial situation of the Council, a proportion of these future increases will be passed as capital funding rather than revenue.
47. Resources to support the EDP are appropriately targeted. The allocation of capital funds and other resources for improving school buildings has not been transparent. The establishment of the asset management forum (AMF) is a positive development, and a step towards greater transparency.
48. The Council has appropriate structures in place to achieve Best Value. The introduction of Best Value reinforces the Council's existing approaches to performance management and is beginning to make them more systematic. The pilot review of the property services function has led to a restructuring of the service in order to make it more responsive to its customers. Best Value reviews planned for 2000 include transportation and financial services, both of which impact on the education service. Education services will be reviewed in subsequent years. While the Council and its departments are well prepared for the introduction of Best Value, its schools are not well informed about the implications or their responsibilities.

Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- ensure that future versions of the EDP include interim targets and measurable success criteria that are linked closely to activities, more attention to standards

in the sixth form, and an analysis of the achievement of pupils from ethnic minorities; and

- ensure that schools are informed about Best Value policies and methodology so that they can contribute effectively to the evaluation of LEA services and can apply the principles when purchasing services for themselves.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

49. The LEA's school effectiveness team plays a key role in monitoring, challenging, and supporting schools. It does this mainly through a small team comprising the principal adviser and seven school development advisers (including one vacancy). The advisers work very closely and effectively with the literacy and numeracy consultants.
50. There are strengths and weaknesses in the LEA's procedures for monitoring, supporting and challenging schools. Link advisers have a good knowledge of their schools from the sound analysis of school data and their programme of visits. However, the agendas for the visits are too long and insufficiently discriminating between schools. The agenda and proforma that advisers use to collect information are sent in advance of visits, but the completed forms are not routinely shared with the schools, nor is there a follow-up note of the outcomes. Although schools causing concern are targeted appropriately for extra support, there is not enough differentiation between the time given to the other schools; all currently get at least five half-day visits per year. Nearly all the headteachers spoken to during the inspection spoke highly of their link adviser, whom they described as helpful but challenging. The level of challenge is good, although not always comfortable to schools, and has resulted in schools revising their targets. The joint monitoring of lessons by advisers and headteachers, mainly in literacy and numeracy, has proved to be beneficial.
51. The LEA is aware of the deficiencies in its programme of monitoring and has made appropriate steps to bring about improvements. It has piloted a school profile, which has the full approval of headteachers. The profile includes quantitative and qualitative data about every aspect of a school's performance, and a clearer and more differentiated categorisation of schools. This will result in a much needed reduction in the routine visits to most schools, from September 2000.
52. The school effectiveness team carries out a small number of reviews every year. These reviews, which involve a team of two or three advisers, consist of mini-inspections of a school or subject department. They have often been requested by the governing body and help the LEA to clearly identify, in the absence of recent OFSTED inspection evidence, where weaknesses are and what needs to be done to improve. They are, though, costly and time-consuming and will need to be reconsidered in the light of the Code of Practice on LEA/school relations.
53. The LEA has wisely restricted the role of its small team of advisers and has not attempted to offer the full range of subject support. It has limited the training it offers to activities connected with the EDP priorities. Advisers have a nominal subject brief and support termly meetings for subject co-ordinators and heads of department, sometimes bringing in external expertise. The LEA has asked neighbouring authorities to send their INSET programme directly to schools.

However, schools are not provided systematically with lists of subject INSET providers or consultants.

54. Schools have developed very strong networks or cluster groups of headteachers that meet regularly. The meetings provide useful opportunities to share ideas and to feed information through their representative headteacher who is on the Bath and North East Somerset Headteachers (BANESH) executive. These cluster meetings are led by the headteachers and involve officers by invitation. They provide mutual support for headteachers and illustrate the good cooperation between schools.
55. The strategic management of the school effectiveness team and other services that support school improvement, is satisfactory. Mechanisms for the performance management of staff are appropriate. Staff are well qualified and have a high degree of credibility with schools. The Code of Practice on LEA/school relations has given a fresh impetus and confidence to the team. It has become more challenging and responded more decisively in schools causing concern. Procedures are being sharpened up and formalised, for example through preparation of the school profile. There is still some way to go to implement what has been planned.

Support for the use of performance data

56. The LEA provides schools with useful performance data and works with them very effectively to set challenging but achievable targets.
57. The LEA's provision and analysis of data have a secure foundation in its system of baseline assessment. Thereafter, schools are provided with analyses of data on the performance of their pupils and with comparisons between schools across the LEA and nationally. A strength of the system is that a database of individual pupils' performance has been established, enabling the value that each school adds to be calculated.
58. This year, improvements have been made in the presentation of the data, making them easier for schools to interpret and use. For example, value-added graphs have been included and the data are accompanied by helpful notes of guidance. A few primary schools are still hesitant in their use of the data, and the guidance does not include comments and questions that are specific to the performance of individual schools. The LEA is seeking to improve its provision further by producing its data earlier in the autumn term.
59. The LEA has accepted that there has been too much complacency in the past and that some schools and pupils are not performing as well as they ought. The schools have been supported successfully by their link advisers in using the performance data to set targets that are not merely predictions based on pupils' prior attainment but include an element of challenge.
60. The new system of data analysis and target setting was explained at headteachers' conferences. About 80 per cent of governing bodies have been represented at LEA training courses on target setting and some link advisers

have provided in-school training for governors. In the survey, schools rated the LEA's provision of data and its support for target setting as satisfactory or better. Visits to schools during the inspection confirmed that this is an effective and improving area of the LEA's provision.

Support for literacy

61. The LEA provides good support for literacy through the work of its team of two consultants and an adviser. Most of the schools visited during the inspection, of all phases, commented on the high quality of the support provided by the literacy team and the good quality of the training provided. Link advisers provide good support for work in literacy through an effective programme of monitoring and feedback to teachers.
62. Standards in literacy are generally rising. The proportion of Key Stage 2 pupils who achieved Level 4 or above in 1999 was broadly in line with the national average. Key Stage 3 results are above the national average, although there was a slight dip in results in 1999. The LEA is rightly concerned that the figures overall conceal considerable differences in the attainment of similar individual schools.
63. The support for low-achieving primary schools is good. Schools comment positively on the help given to improve their planning and on identifying curricular targets. Much of the support has helped to raise standards, but in a few schools results have not risen and in some cases have fallen. The literacy team reviews the effectiveness of its support, but does not undertake a systematic analysis of the reasons for its effectiveness or otherwise. Next year the team plans, appropriately, to sustain improvements by giving medium level support to a further 20 schools as well as supporting low-achieving schools.
64. The literacy team offer good training courses on, for example, phonics, spelling, writing and data analysis. Schools have been well prepared for running booster classes and for literacy work in the summer schools supported by the LEA. The training for learning support assistants in the use of the additional literacy support materials has been very effective and schools indicate that this has been of great benefit. Special schools, teachers and other workers in early years have received good levels of support and training. Cluster group meetings for English coordinators have provided a useful forum for discussions of effective practice and for extra training focused on their needs. Teachers have had good opportunities to see demonstration lessons by leading literacy teachers.
65. Staff in secondary schools have received useful training to prepare them for developing work in literacy. The LEA has been very successful in developing links between infant and junior, and between primary and secondary schools, through its building bridges project. This project was initiated in response to national guidance and a general concern about a dip in pupils' performance on transfer between schools. The building bridges project is less well developed in literacy than it is in numeracy but there is some useful work taking place, such as primary and secondary schools sharing a unit of work in poetry.

Support for numeracy

66. The LEA has implemented the National Numeracy Strategy effectively in its schools and is giving very good support in helping to raise standards. Attainment in mathematics is rising. In 1999 the proportion of Key Stage 2 pupils achieving Level 4 or above in the national tests was 72.7 per cent, above the national average of 69.0 per cent. At Key Stage 3 the proportion of pupils gaining Level 5 or above was 71.3 per cent, above the national figure of 62.8 per cent. The LEA has already exceeded its year 2000 target for Key Stage 2 and is well on course to achieve its year 2002 target of 80 per cent. Nevertheless, as in literacy, the global figures conceal considerable differences in the results of similar schools.
67. The numeracy team is small but very effective. It comprises a full-time consultant and adviser who gives approximately 50 per cent of his time to working in the team. A second consultant has been appointed for September. Teachers are enthusiastic about the quality of the training that they received initially and about the subsequent 'upbeat' support provided by the numeracy team. In several schools visited, headteachers commented on the increased confidence and competence of staff in teaching numeracy, and indicated that standards are rising.
68. The link advisers monitored lessons in Year 2 and Year 6 throughout the LEA and the numeracy team provided very good, comprehensive feedback to staff. Schools have benefited from observing demonstration lessons by the consultant and leading mathematics teachers. The team provides training of high quality that has included advice on setting homework and providing information for parents. Link advisers give good support by monitoring lessons and commenting on the implementation of the numeracy strategy and have helped schools to set realistic targets. Cluster groups of coordinators appreciate the good input of the consultant at some of their meetings.
69. The LEAs building bridges pilot project in the Norton Radstock area has been very successful. The LEA was a catalyst for the project and has monitored and supported the work, which has won national recognition. Year 6 pupils have worked on a bridging unit in algebra and this work is continued in mathematics lessons when the pupils transfer to secondary schools. A bridging unit between Key Stages 1 and 2 is also in use. Headteachers whose schools took part in the scheme consider that it has had a positive impact on standards and has strengthened liaison between schools. This year all schools in the LEA have agreed to take part.

Support for ICT in the curriculum

70. The LEA's support for curricular information and communication technology (ICT) is poor. It was judged unsatisfactory in almost three-quarters of the schools visited during the inspection. In the survey, the primary schools gave it the lowest rating of all the LEAs surveyed so far. Secondary and special schools judged it less than satisfactory.

71. ICT is the one area in which the schools perform below the national average. OFSTED inspections reveal that progress in the primary schools is below that in similar LEAs and the nation as a whole, although progress in the secondary schools is in line. The LEA's own analysis of the 33 most recent school inspection reports found little improvement. In late 1997, an LEA audit of ICT in every school revealed much out-of-date equipment and a significant need for professional development for teachers, especially in primary schools.
72. The LEA has not been staffed adequately to provide effective support for ICT. The adviser with responsibility for ICT has significant other demands on his time. Belatedly, the LEA has taken action. With the aid of the Standards Fund it has appointed, with effect from September 2000, a consultant to carry out work in primary schools, concentrating appropriately on those with the greatest needs and on the dissemination of good practice. The school effectiveness team, sensibly, is also now drawing on the expertise of an officer from the highly successful administrative ICT area to aid the development of ICT in the curriculum. A further LEA plan to use the expertise of secondary school technicians to assist primary schools has met with little success, although it is happening in two areas on the schools' own initiative.
73. Rightly, the EDP includes a priority to raise standards in ICT and some progress is now being made. An appropriate strategic ICT development plan has been produced and schools' strengths and weaknesses have been identified through advisers' visits. However, over half the primary schools and one in five secondary schools have yet to produce satisfactory ICT development plans, and headteachers and governors have not received guidance on how to monitor standards in ICT. Many schools lack the knowledge to purchase hardware and software with confidence. The proportion of teachers meeting the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) expectation on ICT competence is very low. The LEA is not in a position to judge reliably pupils' attainment and progress in ICT.
74. Implementation of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) is progressing in line with the LEA's plan. Following consultation, funds were allocated so that the schools most ready to proceed received their major allocation in the first year. However, schools have not been given adequate support or advice on how to manage the purchase and installation of computer suites and networks. The LEA has appropriately recognised that the third cohort of schools will need much more help than the first two groups because of their lack of confidence and competence.
75. The LEA has adopted an appropriate background role in relation to the New Opportunity Fund (NOF) training, putting schools in touch with providers but leaving the choice to them. The LEA's only direct provision of training has been in relation to action planning for senior managers. Schools have found this of mixed value, sometimes because their planning had already been done. Other training has been negotiated with higher education providers, other LEAs and good school practitioners. The LEA has taken a positive initiative in forming four ICT cluster groups of schools for mutual support, sharing of good practice and possibly cooperation on technician support.

76. The LEA is a member of a broadband consortium with four other LEAs and this is beginning to have a positive impact. One school from each LEA is involved in a project developing curricular materials. The consortium also facilitates broader access to a range of opportunities such as conferences, training and schools where there is good practice.

Support for schools causing concern

77. The LEA has relatively few schools identified by OFSTED inspections as needing special measures or with serious weaknesses. There are two schools with serious weaknesses and one school requiring special measures (identified in November last year); all three are primary schools. Thirteen other schools have been acknowledged by the LEA as causing concern, for appropriate reasons such as low standards or weak management. The LEA's support for all these schools is good and its procedures for managing this support are improving.
78. The policy on schools causing concern, included in the EDP, lacks detail. The criteria for under-performing schools are insufficiently explicit or based on clear indicators of performance. The LEA currently has three categories of schools causing concern: special measures, serious weaknesses, and under-performing. These schools appropriately receive support over and above that given to the remaining 'light touch' schools. The present system is insufficiently differentiated and the LEA has recognised this. Their plans for five categories of school, linked to the school profile, look promising and an improvement.
79. The support given to schools causing concern is better in practice than the policy would suggest. The schools are given a good level of well-targeted support. The school in special measures has been visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors and found to be making good progress, as has one of the schools with serious weaknesses. The LEA is working closely with the other schools causing concern. A particularly good development is the use of project groups to work with some of the schools. The project groups bring together advisers and other officers who are working with the school in order to prepare a well co-ordinated programme of support.
80. The principal adviser plays a key role in overseeing support for these schools, along with the link advisers. They have adopted an approach of zero tolerance of under-performance, which is not always easy for headteachers and governors to accept. Nevertheless, the LEA is justified in identifying underachievement and bringing this to the attention of the school. The LEA still has its work cut out to convince the governors in a few schools that there are weaknesses, particularly when a school's results are close to the national average.
81. The LEA has made good use of headteachers or consultants to support schools where there are management problems or where headteachers are on sick leave. This has been done swiftly and often successfully, demonstrating the advisers' knowledge of where there is good practice. The LEA has also

appointed four additional governors to the school in special measures, a move that has proved to be effective in strengthening the governing body.

Support for school management

82. The LEA provides satisfactory support for school management by carefully targeting its own contribution and making realistic and usually effective use of other sources of support. Some aspects of the provision are good.
83. An EDP priority is to improve management and leadership in schools. The LEA's valid justification for the priority was that under achievement in some schools was linked with weaknesses in the quality of management and leadership. The first cycle of OFSTED inspections revealed weak management and leadership in a small minority of schools. The priority, which aims at improving the role of headteachers, deputy heads and middle managers, includes appropriate activities.
84. The LEA provides strong support and challenge for the senior managers of schools through its link advisers. However, it accepts that it has limited capacity to support school managers directly and, therefore, it calls on expertise from elsewhere. Its school development advisers are using the OFSTED school self-evaluation training. Most participants have found this helpful and it is beginning to have an impact. Good numbers are involved in the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) for aspiring headteachers, and in the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH). The LEA has commissioned consultants to support schools working towards the Investors in People (IIP) award, which 16 had gained by March 2000. This package of provision, when fully implemented, has the potential to help senior managers develop skills in monitoring, evaluating and reviewing their schools. Currently, some opportunities are missed. For example, there are few planned occasions when NPQH and LPSH participants are able to share what they have learned for the benefit of others. However, the LEA has now appointed an adviser with responsibility for leadership and management and there are signs that this is beginning to have an effect. For example, new and acting headteachers, for whom there was previously no induction, now meet termly with the adviser. While this falls short of an adequate induction programme, it is a step in the right direction.
85. The provision for the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) meets national requirements. However, the training of induction tutors is currently inadequate.
86. Visits to schools during the inspection confirmed the view expressed in the survey that the support for management is at least satisfactory. Evidence from those schools that have been inspected twice by OFSTED shows that management and efficiency are improving. In primary schools, the improvement is not as great as in the nation as a whole, but in secondary schools it is considerably above the national rate.

Support for governors

87. The LEA provides satisfactory support for governors, at low cost and in line with statutory requirements. Some features of the provision are good.
88. The first cycle of OFSTED inspections found the role of governors to be under-developed in a significant number of schools. The LEA responded appropriately by including within its EDP an activity to strengthen the governors' role in holding schools to account.
89. The LEA has effective procedures for communication and consultation with governors. Visits to schools during the inspection confirmed the survey findings that information and advice for governors are at least satisfactory. A governors' forum, which consists of a link governor from every school, meets termly with officers to consider a joint agenda. The forum's executive is made up of ten governors representing a good cross-section of schools. It meets senior officers termly and is represented on various committees, including the education committee and school organisation committee. Both the forum and its executive are well briefed by the LEA.
90. All governing bodies receive sound administrative and procedural advice and support at no charge. They also benefit from the involvement of link advisers in schools. Nearly all schools purchase the training and advice that the LEA provides through consultants. Many governors value the training, which is well attended and provided centrally, regionally and for individual governing bodies. The training is supplemented by useful 'health checks' in which a consultant visits a governing body to audit its strengths and weaknesses and suggest improvements. At the time of the inspection, almost half the schools had benefited from these visits, which had received a largely positive response from governors.
91. Governing bodies appoint their own clerks, for whom relevant training is available. Clerks are provided with helpful electronic and printed information on procedural matters. Much information provided by the LEA for governors is in an accessible, summarised form, and termly newsletters have recently been introduced. The LEA does not hold regular meetings for the chairs of governing bodies. Some chairs have made compensatory arrangements through the local networks of schools. A helpline is available, but some governors spoken to during the inspection were not aware of it.
92. There is a serious shortage of governors in the LEA. At the time of the inspection, 205 of the 1,202 governor posts were vacant. These vacancies, which include virtually all categories of governor, are often in small schools in rural areas. There is also a problem of recruitment in areas served by several schools, which are therefore competing for a limited pool of potential governors.

Support for early years

93. The good support provided for early years is a strength of the LEA. The diverse range of educational places for under-fives across the maintained,

private, voluntary and independent sectors gives parents a wide choice. Within this range of provision, the LEA meets its statutory duty to secure sufficient places for all four year olds whose parents want them. Currently the LEA provides places in nursery classes for approximately 25 per cent of its three-year-olds and has no plans to increase these. It is intended that, by 2002, working in partnership with private and voluntary providers, 66 per cent of three-year-olds will be in receipt of free nursery education.

94. The LEA works vigorously as part of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) group, which draws together elected members, officers from major Council services and representatives from schools and other educational settings in the maintained, private and voluntary sectors. The EYDCP for 2000–2001 is comprehensive, thorough and clearly sets out suitable objectives for developing education, care and integrated support services through partnership with all recognised providers.
95. The early years team, comprising representatives from education and the EYDCP, is well led by an LEA adviser. The team advises and supports individual schools and other settings. The extensive programme of well-attended courses, workshops and conferences are focused on national initiatives and on the team's analysis of needs across the whole early years sector. Link teachers visit pre-school establishments to give useful support and advice, for example on the teaching of numeracy. Schools visited commented on the high quality of the training, for example, on the introduction of the foundation stage and early learning goals. Regular cluster group and network meetings enable early years practitioners to share information and skills. Schools recognise the benefits of the multi-agency training that provides useful contacts with a range of providers. The EYDCP funds 50 per cent of the costs for those teachers and other early years workers who wish to attend accredited training.

Support for able pupils

96. The LEA has organised good support for able pupils. It rightly recognised the need to focus attention on able pupils as part of its audit for the EDP. A project was set up around 18 months ago by the educational psychology service to promote the achievement of able pupils. The project started out with Saturday morning workshops covering a range of subjects and activities. The LEA was recently awarded £83,000 from NOF for another series of workshops to extend opportunities for pupils that are more able.
97. A number of useful developments have taken place. For example, schools are encouraged to develop policies and to appoint coordinators for more able pupils. Several well-attended training days have been organised with national speakers on literacy and numeracy for more able pupils. Links are being established with other LEAs and with universities, and a range of stimulating materials targeted at more able pupils has been prepared.

Support for international work in schools

98. Support for international work in schools is a distinctive and interesting feature of Bath and North East Somerset. The LEA promotes international links in its schools very effectively. The Council has been involved in international activity since its inception and has made good use of the reputation of the City of Bath as a world heritage site. It has demonstrated its commitment to international work in schools by funding a full-time advisory teacher.
99. Schools are given good help by the advisory teacher in establishing links with other countries and in securing funds from a range of sources. There is a good range of information available to schools, such as newsletters and guidance materials. The international links have contributed effectively to work in many curriculum areas including literacy, numeracy, ICT, geography and modern foreign languages. A high proportion of schools take advantage of the opportunities and most secondary schools have appointed a co-ordinator for international work.

Support for music

100. The LEA provides an extensive music service that is highly regarded by schools. Around 10 per cent of the school population, from Key Stage 2 upwards, receive a wide range of instrumental tuition. This service was not followed up during the inspection, but in the school survey schools expressed a considerable satisfaction with the service, with secondary schools giving it the highest rating of all LEAs inspected to date.

Recommendations

In order to make school improvement more effective:

- improve the efficiency and effectiveness of advisers' work in schools by targeting link visits more closely to schools' needs, reducing the frequency of visits to all schools, and implementing, and making more explicit, the proposals for categorising the amount of support given to schools;
- undertake a systematic analysis of the reasons for the success or otherwise of the literacy team's intervention strategies to inform future action;
- improve the support for ICT by ensuring that all schools have satisfactory ICT development plans, helping teachers, especially in primary schools, to increase their confidence and competence, monitoring more accurately the standards attained by pupils and the progress they are making, and building on the existing expertise for administrative ICT support to give advice on the installation of curriculum networks and on securing technician support for primary schools; and
- recruit more governors to fill the large number of vacancies.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

101. The LEA got off to an uncertain start and made slow progress in its first two years, following the formation of Bath and North East Somerset Council in 1996. The Council was an amalgam of part of Avon Council and of two district Councils, Bath and Wansdyke. Each of these brought with them different cultures and expectations and, most significantly, few councillors with experience of running education. The LEA has made better progress in the last two years. The chief executive, who has been in post since 1998, has a clear view of where the authority is heading and has set up some effective strategies to achieve it. The elected members are growing in experience and confidence and the education department has a tighter brief with a clearer focus on school improvement.
102. Education has been a high priority for the Council and has been funded accordingly. Elected members take their responsibilities seriously and there is generally agreement following a good level of debate. The level of knowledge of councillors has improved considerably over the years. There is now a useful induction programme for new members of the education committee. The group party leaders rely heavily on their education spokespersons to keep them up-to-date on educational matters. The spokespersons have a sound grasp of the educational issues. Although elected members generally demonstrate good leadership on educational matters, they have been reluctant to make contentious decisions about school places. For example, whilst officers recognise the need to remove surplus school places and hence to close or amalgamate schools, councillors have twice failed to act on this.
103. Elected members receive good quality information and advice from officers. For example, officers' reports to the education committee are clear and concise, and where relevant, present alternative proposals for members' consideration.
104. The education department's management structure was reorganised last year as a result of the Council's decision to review the directorate and to cut around a quarter of all first and second tier posts. This reorganisation has resulted in an unduly and unusually small management team for education, with too much onus on the director and deputy director. A key post, the head of children's services, has been unfilled for a year despite several attempts at recruitment. The absence of this post-holder has put increased pressure on education managers and team leaders and slowed progress on important strategic issues such as inclusion. This situation is unsatisfactory.
105. In most respects, apart from the weakness identified in the preceding paragraph, corporate planning is good. Some well-considered changes to the education management structure have been made. For example, the director has a more focused role and a finance manager was appointed in order to improve services to schools. Education features prominently in the Council's plans, through, for example, the objective to 'encourage and support lifelong

learning'. There is coherence amongst the corporate plans and effective use of measurable performance targets. The local performance plan is a clearly written and accessible document that is consistent with other corporate plans.

106. The Council has good arrangements for coordinating financial management across the departments. The finance department manages the education department's finances through a service level agreement. Communication between the finance and education departments is good.
107. There are a number of useful ways in which the performance of the education department is kept under review. The Council's corporate management team has a monthly programme of looking at performance reports from each service; this was commended by the district auditor. Education team leaders welcome the need to write monthly reports, which, although time-consuming to produce, are good for morale, as they identify achievements. In addition, there are sound procedures for self-review and the education department's management team monitors performance and the implementation of plans.
108. The leadership shown by senior officers in the education department has improved and is now good, as attested by the comments from headteachers during school visits and in the school survey. Headteachers welcome the more focused role for the director and the greater emphasis on raising standards. They appreciate the greater clarity of message and vision shown by the director, who has been in post since November 1999, and the improved communication and transparency of decisions. Developments have stepped up a pace in the past year as the education department has responded positively to Government initiatives such as the Code of Practice on LEA/school relations and the need to implement its EDP.
109. Communication and consultation between the LEA and headteachers are good. The headteachers set up Bath and North East Somerset Headteachers (BANESH) two years before the LEA was established and have played an important role in shaping its direction ever since. For example, they were responsible for recommending a lean advisory service and suggested some very pertinent ways of working. Members of the BANESH executive have regular meetings with the director and education spokespersons. The BANESH chair takes a full part in alternate meetings of the education management team. BANESH is also represented on the education committee, the budget and asset management forums, and is involved in the appointment of senior officers. There are regular well-attended conferences for headteachers. This high level of headteacher involvement is a strength and indicative of the good relationship with schools.
110. The education department has established very good links with its partners and other stakeholders. There is, for example, effective inter-departmental work with social services. The recent review of social services by the Audit Commission and Social Services Inspectorate highlighted the joint working of education and social services as an example of good practice. Links with the health authorities are constructive. The LEA works effectively with the police at all levels, from the director and officers, through to schools. There are good

systems for consulting the Anglican and Catholic dioceses, with which the LEA has formal partnership agreements. The LEA has worked closely with Learning Partnership West (LPW), the local careers service company, to develop a strategy for lifelong learning. It is a core partner, alongside LPW and others, in the recent bid to set up a Connexions service in the former Avon area. The local Training and Enterprise Council has sponsored a programme to raise achievement in schools through the Investors in People award, and several secondary schools have achieved the Investors in Careers award. The LEA makes good use of its strong links with higher education institutions, for example for consultancy work with individual schools and for training.

Management services

111. Since it was established, the LEA has offered a full range of management support services to its schools. Funding for many of these services was delegated for the first time in April 2000, which complies with the fair funding legislation, but is slower than in many other LEAs. Bath and North East Somerset was late in producing service specifications and prices, which made it difficult for schools to give proper consideration to alternative service providers. Consequently, in order to avoid disruption, the great majority of schools decided to buy back into LEA services.
112. Payroll services, provided by the corporate and business finance service of the finance department, have been problematic since the formation of the unitary authority in 1996. The three former authorities had different, incompatible systems, and errors arose in transferring data to the new system. Errors and inaccurate coding have continued until recently. It has taken too long to resolve these problems. Further changes to the operation of the system have been made recently and some schools acknowledge that the service has improved. However, although the service is improving, it is not yet satisfactory and schools are not convinced that it is cost-effective. The finance department also provides satisfactory creditor and debtor services to primary schools.
113. The finance unit in the education department provides good support to schools through a budget officer service. The cost of this service was delegated in April 2000 and it provides helpful support to those schools that purchase it.
114. The personnel unit within the education department provides good support and is very well regarded by schools. It has provided clear, sensitive advice to headteachers and governing bodies in relation to teacher competency and long-term sickness absence. A good range of model policies is offered to schools.
115. The administrative ICT support team within the education department provides an excellent service, which is highly regarded by schools. The team offers a wide range of training courses on all of the school administration software and provides individual support through a telephone helpline, supplemented with remote support software and school visits. Some schools have sought and valued advice from this team when expanding or enhancing their administrative ICT systems.

116. Computer services for the education department are provided through a service level agreement with the Council's central management information division. This internal trading relationship is recent and concentrates on supporting corporately endorsed applications. This arrangement is satisfactory but the education department must ensure that what it receives continues to meet its needs in a cost-effective way.
117. The commercial services department of the LEA provides cleaning, catering and transport services for education. These services are generally well received by schools and provide satisfactory value for money.
118. The poor reputation of property services among schools is justified. This is acknowledged by the LEA and the service was subject to a pilot Best Value review in 1999. The service had suffered from a lack of consistent leadership since 1996. A restructuring under a new head of service is nearly complete, with the intention of making the service more customer-focused. Property professionals in both education and property services departments of the authority have exercised their own judgement when deciding priorities and have not always engaged in a proper dialogue with schools.
119. Funding for repairs and maintenance was delegated to schools in 1999/2000. The LEA offered a scheme through which it would retain this money over a three-year period and use it to undertake building work in relation to priority needs. A high proportion of schools agreed to participate in this scheme, partly to secure access to larger pools of funding to get work done, and partly to ensure that they do not miss out on the allocation of other funds. This is a further indication of the lack of trust schools have in the property department.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management:

- review the management structure within the education department to ensure that workloads are manageable and key positions filled;
- prepare clear, costed specifications of services for schools in good time (by the end of November 2000), so that schools can make comparisons with alternative providers and make purchasing decisions before the start of the financial year;
- continue to improve the payroll services and win back the confidence of schools; and
- improve the property services so that they work in open partnership with schools.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

120. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs (SEN) is satisfactory. Its sound policy and guidelines are reflected in the EDP and are in line with the Government's expectations. The LEA has set out a reasonable schedule for change and developed a strategy for a more inclusive education system by September 2000. Proposals for this have just been put to the education committee and progress towards greater inclusion is, albeit belatedly, taking place.
121. There are some, although not yet sufficient, good examples of close liaison between special, primary and secondary schools to promote the effective dissemination of special school expertise. An audit of secondary school provision has resulted in a small number of schools being designated for adaptation to ensure full access for pupils in wheelchairs; one has already been completed, another is scheduled for completion by 2002 and a third has yet to be selected. Wherever possible, parental wishes for a place in a mainstream school are met.
122. Partnership arrangements are growing and the LEA is seeking to establish positive relationships with parents. A teacher has been seconded for six months, from September 2000, to establish stronger links between schools and families with autistic children and to help with pre-school issues and initial school contacts. The LEA has appointed a parent liaison officer and supports a voluntary organisation to provide an independent helpline and forum. However, there is confusion about the role of this forum amongst some parents who feel strongly that the two voluntary groups consulted regularly by the LEA are not adequately representative. The LEA's communication and consultation procedures are viewed with considerable mistrust by some parents.
123. The LEA supports the vast majority of its special needs pupils within its own schools and receives about 50 from other LEAs. All the special schools have received favourable inspection reports. The LEA has anticipated a reduction in the number of special school places as more pupils with special needs are taught in mainstream schools. Preliminary discussions with some of the special school headteachers have taken place about this reduction in places. However, no decisions have been made, and the costing and timetabling of this matter have yet to be tackled as part of the inclusion strategy. The LEA is not well placed to provide the strong leadership and clear strategic direction it needs on this issue while the key post of head of children's services remains vacant.

Statutory obligations

124. The LEA meets its statutory obligations well. It provides satisfactory guidance for parents, suitable appeal procedures and has due regard for the SEN Code of Practice. There are several useful booklets that inform parents of their rights. The assessment and statementing processes are well managed and the

LEA is successful in completing well over 90 per cent of statements within the recommended period. All schools have been issued with clear guidance for the assessment procedures leading to statements. A panel of officers, headteachers and SEN coordinators (SENCOs) meets regularly to assess the requests for a statutory assessment, using appropriate published criteria.

125. The quality of the statements is good; they are detailed and well presented. Appropriate arrangements for annual and transitional reviews have been established. During the reviews, pupils' progress over the previous year is carefully evaluated, new targets are set and, if necessary, the statement and funding are appropriately adjusted. This process is contributing effectively to the LEA's overall drive to raise standards. Most parents are kept well informed, with meetings arranged at their convenience.
126. The educational psychology service fulfils its statutory duties successfully and works closely with the special education team and children's support services as well as representing the LEA at meetings with the social services and health departments. There are good links with social services and collaboration with the local health trusts is growing.

Support for school improvement

127. All but one of the schools visited during the inspection received at least satisfactory support for pupils with SEN, and in a third of them it was good. This reflects the general satisfaction expressed by schools in their responses to the survey. The educational psychology service, learning support team, emotional and behavioural difficulty team, school effectiveness team and sensory impaired service all work effectively with pupils and teachers. However, a number of schools would like more learning support for pupils at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice.
128. The educational psychology service has a good reputation for promoting individual improvement and latterly for providing in-service training to teachers. Their work to support early intervention and help at the pre-school stage is effective.
129. The service for special educational needs contributes effectively to raising standards. It organises courses for classroom assistants, SENCOs and school governors. SENCOs benefit further from the strong support of their local networks.
130. The building bridges project is used effectively to encourage better communication and understanding between primary and secondary schools about pupils with SEN. Secondary SENCOs attend the reviews of Year 6 pupils on Stages 1 to 3 of the Code of Practice where possible. The work of the LEA's literacy and numeracy teams in special schools, and to support pupils with special needs in mainstream schools, has been well received and has helped staff to implement the strategies successfully. Additional support for the development of ICT in special schools has only been available for a short time but is providing useful guidance.

Value for money

131. The LEA's support for special educational needs provides satisfactory value for money.
132. A review of the local management of schools (LMS) funding formula for special schools was completed in late 1999 and the revised formula was used as the basis for funding special schools from April 2000. Special school headteachers were consulted well during the review. The revised formula constitutes a fairer method for the allocation of resources, provided that the needs of individual children have been assessed accurately.
133. Funding of pupils with statements in mainstream schools is allocated, according to a matrix of need, by a panel that includes LEA officers and school representatives. This funding is monitored appropriately. Resources to meet the needs of pupils at Stages 1 to 3 of the Code of Practice are allocated through the local management of schools (LMS) funding formula. There has, however, been no systematic monitoring by the LEA of how these funds are used.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision for special educational needs:

- ensure that the inclusion strategy and any re-organisation of special education provision are effectively managed and implemented;
- improve communication and consultation with parents of children who have special educational needs; and
- monitor the use of funds delegated to schools through the local management of schools (LMS) funding formula to meet pupils' special educational needs.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

Admissions and the supply of school places

134. Admissions to primary schools are very well organised. Children whose parents wish it are admitted to school in the September following their fourth birthday. The LEA has successfully implemented a plan to ensure that no infant class has more than thirty pupils. The LEA maintains some all-through primary schools and some paired infant and junior schools. In the latter case transfer from infant to junior school usually proceeds smoothly.
135. Admission to secondary schools is also well organised. The LEA produces an attractive brochure to outline the transfer to parents. Ninety-eight appeals were heard for admission to community schools in 1999, of which 15 were upheld. The LEA also administers appeals on behalf of voluntary aided schools. Appeals are administered efficiently and applicants informed of the outcomes in good time. The LEA has now put good systems in place to facilitate the electronic transfer of performance data between primary and secondary schools. However, these links do not extend to the primary schools in neighbouring LEAs from where some secondary schools take a proportion of pupils.
136. The LEA has good systems for planning school places. The district auditor reviewed the provision of school places in 1997 and again in 1999, and noted the LEA's good practice in forecasting demand, managing demand and adding capacity. The authority has put into practice many of the recommendations of the first audit. There are some eight per cent surplus places in schools but these are not evenly distributed either geographically or by phase. The LEA has produced a school organisation plan that was agreed by the school organisation committee in January 2000. The plan sets out clearly where surplus places exist and where additional capacity will be needed. Revisions to the plan are currently out for consultation.
137. While the plans are good, the LEA does not always follow them through with decisive action. The education committee considered proposals to amalgamate six pairs of infant and junior schools in 1997, but decided not to proceed. Procedures and criteria for initiating school reviews have now been agreed. There are significant numbers of surplus places in some parts of the LEA. Two recent reviews indicate that benefits can be achieved through removing surplus places. The education committee has postponed making a decision on the closure of a very small school.
138. The LEA has started to consider the pattern of secondary provision in the City of Bath. Consultants have reviewed the position and a survey of prospective parents has been undertaken. There are too many places at single-sex schools and not enough at co-educational ones to meet the projected demand. Options have been suggested, but none have yet been formalised.
139. Twelve of the thirteen maintained secondary schools in the LEA have sixth forms. Of these, six currently have fewer than 160 students, and, with some

minor changes, the picture is projected to be similar in future. Some of the schools have, appropriately, set up partnership arrangements with one another and with a local college of further education to broaden their curricula. The LEA is concerned about the A-Level results in its schools and about its sixth-form provision, but has not yet done much about this. In part, it is waiting to see what opportunities the Learning and Skills Council's coordinated approach to post-16 education will offer.

The asset management plan

140. Many of the school buildings that the LEA inherited in 1996 were in a poor state of repair. The LEA has taken some action to improve matters. It has, for example, made successful bids under each round of the New Deal for Schools, receiving funds totalling £4.9m, and has also invested its own funds. In spite of these improvements, many school buildings remain in a desperately poor condition. Schools have little confidence in the transparency with which funding has been allocated. These shortcomings were identified in the school survey and the LEA has taken some steps to improve practice but still has a long way to go.
141. The LEA does not have a satisfactory asset management plan (AMP). The initial AMP policy statement sets out the role of respective partners, but is less clear about how priorities will be determined and agreed. This statement is currently under revision. However, while DfEE requirements for condition surveys have been met, none of the information gathered has been shared with schools. The LEA is making progress with conducting suitability surveys, but, again, has not done this in a way that involves schools and leaves them feeling confident in the results. In some schools the suitability surveys were carried out without any discussion with the headteacher.
142. The LEA is fortunate as its capital budget is planned to grow for the next few years. This will provide a golden opportunity to improve the condition and suitability of school premises. The establishment of the asset management forum (AMF) marks a very good start towards greater transparency. The AMF is modelled on the successful budget forum and includes officers, elected members, school and diocesan representatives.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

143. The LEA does not have large numbers of pupils who receive their education other than at school. Provision for these pupils is suitably varied according to needs and is, in most respects, satisfactory.
144. Provision for pupils who have no school place is the responsibility of children's services. The LEA gives appropriate priority to the re-integration of pupils into school, wherever possible. It has an effective system for managing, administering and monitoring provision for pupils who are not being educated in schools or by their parents at home.

145. Appropriate links have been forged with other relevant services. The LEA has begun to work with schools to support pupils in danger of exclusion. There has been some, although not yet enough, exploration of work-related courses at Key Stage 4. The re-engage and motivate pupils (RAMP) project, involving joint working by the education and youth services, attempts to re-engage and motivate pupils through a life skills programme on two afternoons per week. Results have been mixed; there have been notable successes but also some problems with re-integration into school. The project has been appropriately evaluated recently and next year pupils will attend for one full day rather than two half-days weekly.
146. The LEA did not inherit a pupil referral unit and its policy is not to create one. However, it has established an annex at a school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) to provide for Key Stage 4 pupils who have been permanently excluded. This operates successfully, and pupils have gained good GCSE results. Although some schools feel that there is insufficient provision for permanently excluded pupils, the need for this provision is decreasing as fewer pupils are being excluded.
147. At the end of January 2000, less than half of the permanently excluded pupils were receiving over 20 hours tuition per week. Currently, the LEA has no clear strategy for achieving the Government's target of full-time provision for all permanently excluded pupils by 2002.

Attendance

148. The LEA provides strong, effective support to encourage good attendance. The education welfare service (EWS) offers clearly defined support for schools experiencing difficulties with attendance.
149. In primary schools, attendance is above the national average with unauthorised absence close to national figures. Attendance in secondary schools is broadly in line with national levels with unauthorised absence below average. Officers from the EWS visit schools regularly and, amongst other responsibilities, they check registers, discuss referrals for non-attendance and follow up absences. In one of the schools visited, the EWS officer has led a useful in-school conference on attendance.

Behaviour support

150. The LEA's support to improve pupils' behaviour at school is good. In the survey, schools judged the support for behaviour to be satisfactory or better. Evidence from visits to schools during the inspection suggests that this is an improving aspect of the LEA's work. Several schools rated the support they had received very highly.
151. OFSTED inspection evidence shows that the quality of behaviour in the schools has been mixed. In primary schools, it has been broadly in line with the national average and that for similar LEAs. In secondary schools, it has been below these averages. The LEA responded by carrying out a thorough

budgetary review of its behaviour support service to ensure that funding was well targeted. Funding for the EDP and the behaviour support plan (BSP) is clearly identified and well linked to priorities.

152. The LEA's policies and support have contributed to the significant reduction in exclusions, from 66 in 1997/98 to 22 in 1998/99. The LEA analyses permanent exclusion data appropriately according to categories, including minority ethnic pupils, children in public care and pupils with statements of SEN.
153. The BSP is satisfactory. It includes all essential elements, has no significant omissions, and links well with the EDP and other relevant plans and policies. It is being implemented within a framework of sound principles and strategies. Throughout, there is a sense of support and challenge for schools. However, while some of the plan's objectives are suitably focused, others are too general. The success criteria are insufficiently specific and quantitative.
154. The LEA sets out its expectations of schools clearly in the BSP. Its advice on writing behaviour and discipline policies is constructively supported by case studies. A further positive step is that behaviour support networks have been established with named contacts in every school and with a focus on sharing good practice. The plan helpfully highlights how structures already in place, such as home/school agreements, can be developed to support inclusion.
155. A strength of the service is the work that is being carried out in schools, particularly in the secondary phase. The BSP outlines clearly the provision available and how it can be accessed by schools. Pupils with a statement of emotional and behavioural difficulty (EBD) are allocated funds according to a tariff. Appropriately, some schools have been targeted as in need of behaviour support and others have had audits in relation to EBD pupils. The behaviour support team emphasises whole school responsibility for behaviour and is working with schools to improve individual education plans. The training provided for schools supports this. The educational psychology service runs a popular ten-session course for teachers and learning support assistants on managing behaviour in primary schools.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

156. Schools value the very high quality of the service provided by the health and safety team. The LEA provides clear policies and comprehensive, well-presented guidance on issues related to health and safety in schools. Initial risk assessment surveys have been carried out in all schools, and the second cycle has started. The activities have helped to build relationships with schools and have helped train school staff in carrying out their own risk assessments. Many of the issues raised by schools relate to the difficulties in maintaining buildings that are old or in a poor state of repair. Officers respond promptly to requests for help. The team works closely with the property services department in trying to meet the schools' needs within the available resources.
157. The LEA has made children's welfare a priority. The EWS has good links with other agencies and is active in joint agency working. For example, it works well

with the police in the joint truancy watch scheme. EWS officers give good training to schools on child protection procedures and issues. One of the schools visited was enthusiastic about the way the training it had recently received had involved other agencies. As a result, the school knew where to access suitable help should the need arise. The training management group of the area child protection committee was until recently having difficulty in meeting training needs. The joint funding of a new two-year post for a co-ordinator of child protection training should help resolve this and a good training programme has been agreed.

Children in public care

158. In partnership with social services, the LEA has successfully focused on improving its provision for children in public care. Schools are aware of the EDP priority for raising the attainment and provision for these children. Clear protocols are in place to ensure that the relevant school and services are informed when a child is taken into public care. The educational progress of children in public care is effectively monitored. The multi-agency approach ensures that children and their teachers are well supported. The school visits indicate that schools have taken action to name key members of staff with responsibility for children in public care. Attainment targets and plans for reducing exclusions of these children are in place and the LEA works actively to promote success in these areas.

Support for minority ethnic children and Traveller children

159. The LEA provides effectively for children of minority ethnic heritage. Funds are pooled to purchase support from the ethnic minority achievement service (EMAS) managed by the City of Bristol. As a result, they have suitable access to an experienced and responsive support service. The small numbers of ethnic minority pupils, dispersed throughout schools in the LEA, receive a good range of support from EMAS. For instance, in one of the schools visited the help included direct teaching of the pupils; the loan of teaching materials; and support for parents through bilingual home-school liaison. EMAS provides appropriate training for staff on race equality issues. The LEA monitors ethnic minority attainment at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4, but not enough is done to monitor pupils' attainment at other stages of their learning. The EDP makes little reference to support for ethnic minority children.

160. The small numbers of Travellers' children are supported through a range of services purchased from the Avon Consortium Traveller Education Service and the arrangements work well.

Measures to combat social exclusion and racism

161. The EDP includes an appropriate priority on social inclusion but, so far, it has had a more direct impact on the work of officers than it has on the staff of schools. At the time of the inspection, the priority was being supplemented by the director's submission to the education committee of a strategy for developing a more inclusive education system. While the strategy is

appropriate, it is weakened by the lack of a senior officer to manage its implementation.

162. Operationally, the LEA is doing much to promote social inclusion and this work is receiving a largely positive response from schools. Its support for improving attendance, promoting positive behaviour, protecting children, combating racism and raising the achievement of children in public care and those from ethnic minorities is good. The number of permanent exclusions has been reduced significantly. Its provision for pupils with special educational needs and for children who have no school place is satisfactory. This effective practice is not yet adequately supported by a clear understanding between the LEA and the schools about its intentions in relation to social inclusion and how it plans to achieve it.
163. The LEA has drawn schools' attention to the implications of the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, which includes a definition of institutional racism. The LEA has made clear its firm intention that its guidelines for dealing with racial abuse and harassment should be followed by all schools. It has drawn attention to the low number of reported incidents of racial abuse and to the view that these numbers are unlikely to reflect the true picture of what is happening in schools. Headteachers in the schools visited were aware of the LEA's concerns and of their obligation to monitor, respond to, record and report all racial incidents.

Recommendations

In order to improve pupils' access to education:

- review provision for post-16 education;
- review secondary provision in the City of Bath and, once consultation is complete, ensure that agreed proposals are implemented;
- keep surplus places, including maintained nursery places, under review and take effective action once positive options have been identified and consultation has taken place;
- as a matter of urgency, complete the preparation of a clear asset management plan for the improvement of school buildings, which is based on clear priorities and is openly shared among all relevant partners;
- ensure that there is a clear plan for all permanently excluded pupils to receive full-time equivalent tuition by 2002;
- monitor the attainment of ethnic minority pupils at regular intervals during the primary and secondary stages of their education; and
- develop a shared understanding between the LEA and the schools about the strategy for social inclusion, its management and implementation.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- ensure that future versions of the EDP include interim targets and measurable success criteria that are linked closely to activities, more attention to standards in the sixth form, and an analysis of the achievement of pupils from ethnic minorities; and
- ensure that schools are informed about Best Value policies and methodology so that they can contribute effectively to the evaluation of LEA services and can apply the principles when purchasing services for themselves.

In order to make school improvement more effective:

- improve the efficiency and effectiveness of advisers' work in schools by targeting link visits more closely to schools' needs, reducing the frequency of visits to all schools, and implementing, and making more explicit, the proposals for categorising the amount of support given to schools;
- undertake a systematic analysis of the reasons for the success or otherwise of the literacy team's intervention strategies to inform future action;
- improve the support for ICT by ensuring that all schools have satisfactory ICT development plans, helping teachers, especially in primary schools, to increase their confidence and competence, monitoring more accurately the standards attained by pupils and the progress they are making, and building on the existing expertise for administrative ICT support to give advice on the installation of curriculum networks and on securing technician support for primary schools; and
- recruit more governors to fill the large number of vacancies.

In order to improve strategic management:

- review the management structure within the education department to ensure that workloads are manageable and key positions filled;
- prepare clear, costed specifications of services for schools in good time (by the end of November 2000), so that schools can make comparisons with alternative providers and make purchasing decisions before the start of the financial year;
- continue to improve the payroll services and win back the confidence of schools; and
- improve the property services so that they work in open partnership with schools.

In order to improve provision for special educational needs:

- ensure that the inclusion strategy and any re-organisation of special education provision are effectively managed and implemented;
- improve communication and consultation with parents of children who have special educational needs; and
- monitor the use of funds delegated to schools through the local management of schools (LMS) funding formula to meet pupils' special educational needs.

In order to improve pupils' access to education:

- review provision for post-16 education;
- review secondary provision in the City of Bath and, once consultation is complete, ensure that agreed proposals are implemented;
- keep surplus places, including maintained nursery places, under review and take effective action once positive options have been identified and consultation has taken place;
- as a matter of urgency, complete the preparation of a clear asset management plan for the improvement of school buildings, which is based on clear priorities and is openly shared among all relevant partners;
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- develop a shared understanding between the LEA and the schools about the strategy for social inclusion, its management and implementation.

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