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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
WEST SUSSEX
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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INTRODUCTION

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

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA elected members, staff in the directorate for education and the arts and in other council departments, and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 74 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to four first schools, two junior, seven junior and infant, three middle deemed 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. Further evidence was considered from the inspection of the literacy and numeracy strategies in another seven primary schools.

COMMENTARY

4. West Sussex is the tenth largest education authority nationally. It serves a relatively prosperous and predominantly rural area which also includes several medium sized towns, including seaside resorts and a new town built in the 1950s to house the overspill population from London. A very small number of wards, mostly in the seaside towns, are among the most disadvantaged 15 per cent of wards nationally.

5. Standards in schools overall are sound to good. Results are in line with national averages and with similar authorities at Key Stage 1 and 2, and above the national average but in line with similar authorities at Key Stage 3 and 4. Standards are improving in line with the national trend, and with similar authorities at Key Stage 2 and the percentage of pupils attaining five or more passes at grades A*-C at GCSE. In line with the council's priority for excellence in education, very challenging targets have been set which, if met, will bring attainment to the 95th percentile of performance nationally.

6. 'Excellence in education' is demonstrably the council's highest corporate priority. Realising this priority is very well-supported by the work of elected members and the corporate centre, combining prudent financial management with an appropriate level of positive, but critical, scrutiny. The director of education provides very good leadership and sets the tone and pace of development. His leadership is underpinned by strong educational values and is in the best traditions of public service. Strategic planning is consistently good. Developments demonstrate thoughtful and intelligent approaches and, in nearly every case, are made in careful consultation with schools and stakeholders. Decisions are made in a timely way and are communicated effectively to schools. Relationships with schools are very good. Schools in all phases recognise the value that the LEA adds to schooling.

7. The school improvement strategy is well planned, creative and responsive to the needs and ambitions of the schools. The programmes are extensive, often innovative and well planned, based on a rigorous analysis of the performance and needs of schools. The quality and effectiveness of the work is outstanding and has the capacity to sustain and develop schools at all levels of effectiveness. Such a comprehensive school development programme has been a feature of West Sussex's provision for a number of years. More recently, and in line with national policy, the advisory and inspection service has placed more emphasis on the systematic monitoring of schools. This has injected greater challenge and deployed support in inverse proportion to success.

8. This change in culture has been very well managed and is supported by schools. Systems are consistent; and schools understand them well and support the intentions. At the sharp end of this approach is determined, challenging and focused support to a small number of schools that have been identified by the LEA as having one or more weaknesses. This inspection visited a disproportionate number of these schools, and the support was found to be very effective, expert and appropriately focused. In conjunction with the work of the LEA's education officers (schools), very difficult personnel issues have been defused effectively and with skill and sensitivity.

9. The following functions are performed very well:

- the Education Development Plan and its implementation;
- the leadership of elected members and the advice which they receive;
- the priority and support given to education by the corporate centre;
- the quality of leadership of senior officers;
- targeting resources on priorities;
- structures for achieving Best Value;
- leadership and management of the inspection and advisory services;
- monitoring, challenge, support and intervention;
- performance data and target setting;
- support to schools causing concern;
- support to school management;
- support for literacy;
- support for numeracy;
- support to governors;
- investment and strategy for the provision of school buildings:
- financial services;
- human resources;
- information and communication technology for school administration;
- school admissions;
- health, safety and child protection;
- support for ethnic minority and Traveller children; and
- support for gifted and talented children.

10. In all other areas, the LEA provides satisfactory support overall. Nevertheless, even within this positive picture, there are a few aspects of relative weakness. Recent developments in the strategy for the curriculum use of ICT have rather belatedly resulted in a strategy and level of support where strengths outweigh weaknesses. But the LEA is not in the vanguard of the development of curriculum use of ICT.

11. Determined efforts to manage the development of special educational needs and behaviour policies have resulted in some new, potentially helpful, developments. Some of the mechanisms, however, lack sufficient transparency and from time to time err on the side of being too bluntly applied. Services to support social inclusion are sound, but the strategy overall lacks sufficient co-ordination and clarity. Uncharacteristically, the decision to terminate hot school meals in primary schools had to be made hurriedly, in the absence of a consensus, but has led to unforeseen repercussions. The LEA has been cautious in its investment in early years education and in standardising the age of transfer to secondary schools. It is now working to review and improve both aspects.

12. This is a very good LEA with considerable strengths and no aspect of support that is unsatisfactory overall. In many respects, its work is outstanding. The LEA has few weaknesses, and is addressing those it has. The schools, parents and pupils of West Sussex are very well served.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13. West Sussex is the tenth largest local education authority nationally. The centre of the county is mainly rural, with the population concentrated along the south coast and on the eastern and north eastern edges in small and medium sized towns. The current population is growing more rapidly than the average for south east England. The school-aged population has grown by 8.8 per cent from 1993-1997.

14. The county is generally prosperous with low levels of disadvantage overall. All the districts are rated average or above on Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2000). However, four wards in the seaside towns of Littlehampton and Worthing rank among the most disadvantaged 15 per cent of wards nationally. Overall the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than the national averages. A low percentage of pupils, about four per cent, is of minority ethnic heritage.

15. West Sussex maintains 312 schools including four nursery schools, 228 primary schools, 22 middle schools deemed primary, three middle schools deemed secondary, 36 secondary schools, 15 special schools and four pupil referral units. In five areas of the county, pupils transfer to secondary schools at ages which are not compatible with the end of National Curriculum Key Stages.

16. In 2000, in line with national averages, 1.6 and 2.6 per cent respectively of primary and secondary aged pupils were the subject of statements of special educational need. In line with national averages, 70 per cent of pupils with statements attend mainstream primary and secondary schools and 1.2 per cent of all pupils attend special schools.

17. A low percentage of three and four-year-old pupils attends maintained nursery schools and classes. Seven per cent of three and four-year-olds attend maintained nursery schools and classes, and 37 per cent nursery and infant classes in primary schools, compared with the national rate of 30 and 58 per cent respectively. The percentage of pupils who stay on in education post-16 is very high at 77 and 65 per cent of 16 and 17-years-olds respectively, compared with 70 and 57 per cent nationally.

Performance

18. Standards of attainment at Key Stage 1 and 2 are in line with national averages and similar authorities¹ in English and mathematics and above national averages in science. In 2000, at the end of Key Stage 2, 76 per cent and 72 per cent of pupils achieved Level 4 or above in English and mathematics respectively compared with 75 and 72 per cent nationally. Standards are higher than national averages and in line with similar authorities in Key Stage 3 and at GCSE. In 2000, 55.4 per cent of pupils achieved five or more passes at Grades A*-C at GCSE and 97.1 per cent

¹ West Sussex's similar authorities include Essex, Worcestershire, Leicestershire, Bedfordshire, Kent, Hertfordshire, Warwickshire, East Sussex, Cheshire and South Gloucestershire.

achieved at least one A*-G pass compared with 47.4 and 95.6 per cent nationally. Attainment at GNVQ and Advanced level is in line with national averages and similar authorities.

19. Standards of attainment are rising. At Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, at five or more passes at GCSE and at Advanced Level, standards are rising in line with the national trend. At Key Stage 3 National Curriculum assessments, the percentage of pupils achieving one or more A*-G passes and pupils' average points score at GCSE, standards are rising but below the national trend. However, pupils' progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is above average.

20. In the schools' latest OFSTED inspections, standards achieved by 63 per cent and 74 per cent of primary and secondary schools respectively were judged good or very good compared with 53 and 58 per cent nationally. Overall, 82 and 81 per cent of primary schools and secondary schools were rated good or very good compared with 72 and 68 per cent nationally. Six schools have been awarded Beacon status. Since 1993, in total, five schools have required special measures although three no longer require them. Since 1997, in total, 11 schools have been identified as having serious weaknesses.

21. Attendance is satisfactory and in line with national averages. The rate of permanent exclusion is in line with national statistics in secondary schools but higher than that nationally in primary schools.

Funding

22. Education is a high priority. The LEA has always funded above education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) and by five per cent in 2000. School budgets have always been protected except for a 0.7 per cent £1.1million cut in 1999 which was mainly reinstated in 2000. In 2001, real increases are planned which are targeted effectively at areas where there is scope for greater improvement such as early years, provision for pupils who are educated out of school and Key Stage 2. The council has effective financial procedures, medium term financial planning and tight budget monitoring. Annual consultation with schools on the budget is good. This financial stability supports schools in their own resource planning and in their improvement

23. Delegated funding in 2000 is £2,293 per pupil, above the county LEA average of £2,261 and the statistical neighbour average of £2,279. The local schools budget (LSB) is £2,750 per pupil, just above the national and similar authorities' averages. Generally the pattern of central LEA funding is in line with similar LEAs. However, special educational needs (SEN) funding of £187 per pupil is higher than the county LEA average of £154 and the statistical neighbour average of £157. Expenditure is lower on school improvement at £14 per pupil than the county and statistical neighbour average of £20. However, in part, these disparities may be accounted for in the different levels of delegation. School transport costs are £68 per pupil, which is below the county LEA average of £96 and the statistical neighbour average of £89.

24. The council had a policy of no borrowing until 2000. It was able to fund school building through recycling of capital receipts and skilful use of section 106 agreements with developers. Borrowing, however, has been agreed for this year and expenditure on capital for education was £22.9 million in 2000, and is projected to continue at that level or above. Capital for minor improvements was delegated to schools seven years ago, so schools are well prepared for the new national arrangements.

25. The LEA has been very successful in securing additional funding for schools and helping them bid for lottery and other funds, including, at the time of the inspection, the highest single school sports lottery award nationally of £4 million. It has three of the twelve national small pathfinder projects and has been successful in bidding for a large Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme of £60 million to improve the three community secondary schools and build one new secondary school in Crawley.

Council structure

26. The council consists of 71 county councillors; 38 Conservative, 23 Liberal Democrat, nine Labour and one Independent. In May 2000, the council began a one year pilot scheme in line with the Government's proposals for modernising local government. Protocols and procedures are well developed.

27. A cabinet consists of seven members. The member with responsibility for the portfolio for education and the arts is assisted by a small policy advisory group of members from the ruling party. An all-party select committee has scrutiny functions. It has devised an appropriate programme of work. Business is efficiently conducted and early reports show an effective level of scrutiny. Termly stakeholder conferences enable a wider group of elected members, together with representatives of interested groups, to be consulted and contribute to developments in education.

The Education Development Plan

28. This plan (EDP) is West Sussex's third Education Development Plan (EDP). It goes beyond its predecessors, but the approach used and the priorities set show significant continuity with earlier plans. This coherence and consistency in planning over a long period is one of the secrets of the LEA's success.

29. The current priorities are clearly articulated and reflect national priorities and also the needs of the local context. The priorities include:

- Priority 1 To achieve targets set for literacy.
- Priority 2 To achieve targets set for numeracy.
- Priority 3 To use the National Grid for Learning to raise achievement in information and communication technology.
- Priority 4 To support school self-evaluation and review.
- Priority 5 To raise the standards of achievement in particular groups of pupils requiring additional support and challenge.

- Priority 6 To disseminate effective practice from successful schools and educational research relevant to effective management and high quality teaching in schools.
- Priority 7 To identify, challenge and support schools and departments with serious weaknesses.
- Priority 8 To recruit, retain, motivate, support and develop the LEA's teaching staff.

30. The priorities and the activity plans are rooted in a very detailed audit which reflects local circumstances. The plan is clear and coherent. It dovetails with, but does not duplicate, other plans. The activities are feasible and sensibly sequenced. They often represent a creative response to an evaluation of what has worked well. All activities are directed specifically at meeting well-defined targets and measurable success criteria that include improvements in quality and standards. Schools are well consulted on the strategy in an on-going way. The priorities show a considerable degree of compatibility with the proposals in school development plans.

31. Resources which are required for implementation are carefully quantified, deployed and monitored in a transparent way. The schools' take-up of developments from centrally retained activities, school purchase and the EDP are audited. The records were made available to the inspection team for each school visited for this inspection. The deployment for centrally retained activities and the EDP are clearly made on the basis of intervention in inverse proportion to success. The EDP provides very good value for money. The cost, when compared with similar authorities, is comparatively low at £14.03 per pupil.

32. The targets set by the LEA are very challenging, appropriate, and reflect the council's ambition for excellence in education. These targets too, predate the national requirement and were set when the target-setting was rooted more in aspiration than in reality. Nonetheless, West Sussex has continued to adopt these targets now that they are statutory. They are set at the highest indicative level for both literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 2. The GCSE target for 2002 is 65 per cent of pupils attaining five or more passes at grade A*-C at GCSE, a level of performance which to date has only been met by one LEA.

Implementation of the EDP

33. The implementation of the EDP is very well managed. Responsibility for activity areas are well-defined. Regular monitoring shows that proposed actions are being undertaken in line with projections. The impact of all activities is visible and particularly effective for priorities 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7.

34. Monitoring and evaluation are exemplary and, together with the rigorous analysis of data, inform all new developments. The LEA submitted to the inspection team reports of 38 recent evaluations of activities which contribute to the EDP, as well as an overarching monitoring report of the first year's progress which has been presented to elected members. In many cases evaluations are small scale activities, but all are powerfully targeted at identifying what works well to improve future practice. Evaluation is fit for purpose and is well-established as a routine activity in ensuring effectiveness and efficiency.

35. West Sussex has fallen marginally short of meeting 2000 targets at Key Stage 2 for literacy and numeracy. It has identified areas for improvement and has well targeted plans. The 2002 targets are challenging but are on track to be met. At GCSE, the target for average points has already been met and the target for the percentage of pupils passing one A*-G pass at GCSE has been met for 2000 and is on course to be met in 2002. However, there is a shortfall of 3.6 per cent this year in meeting the target for GCSE. The improvements which are required in individual pupils' attainment have been projected and built into the schools' targets in an impressively detailed way.

The allocation of resources to priorities

36. The LEA effectively allocates resources to priorities. It exceeds national delegation targets. Schools were delegated 83.4 per cent of the individual schools' budget (ISB) in 2000 and this will rise to 87 per cent in 2001. From September the funding for statements will be delegated to schools. This has been well-planned and schools are very clear how this will affect their budgets and enhance their responsibilities.

37. The growth in the education budget in 2001 is well targeted, both within the schools budgets and to key, centrally funded services. The funding formula is regularly reviewed with schools, and is partly based on teacher ratios for various age groups. It reflects the priorities and the needs of the wide range of schools in the LEA.

38. In the past members have been decisive in making savings in other education budgets to protect the prioritised school budgets. This led to the decision to save capital and revenue through ceasing the provision of hot meals in primary schools. Meals were only taken up by 25 per cent of pupils and some school kitchens required refurbishment. However, this decision was uncharacteristically hurried, and has led to some unforeseen repercussions. It is still criticised by a minority of parents and a few schools. Nevertheless, the LEA has provided schools with additional money to convert kitchens into very useful accommodation such as ICT suites. In the 2001-2002 budget plan additional finance has been made available to improve the quality and nutritional standards of the meals. (See paragraph 122.)

Best Value

39. The council has extended its existing good practice in business planning, public consultation and review in its positive approach to Best Value. This is clearly set out in the Best Value Performance Plan for 2001 which responds to all points made by the auditor on the first plan. The 'West Sussex improvement programme' sensibly combines Best Value with the scrutiny function of the select committees. The council has learnt from its first ten Best Value reviews and has reshaped its programme of reviews to cover broad areas of high risk or opportunity. Developments have also been made in the process such as including external participants. The council has decided to provide a robust and relevant application of the principles of competition and challenge to test for possible improvement through the outsourcing of a wide range of corporate support services in one package, including the educational element.

40. The proposed programme of reviews in education is very well focused on appropriate issues, such as inclusion of young people which will encompass Special Education Needs, special schools and the youth service. Generally reviews are sensibly timed for use to inform other requirements such as the review of the EDP priorities which will achieve a good basis for drafting a new statutory EDP in 2002.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

41. Consistency, stability and good communication are important factors in contributing to the strategy and support for school improvement. In discharging other functions, the LEA is consistent in that there are no areas that are unsatisfactory overall. New policies and procedures are implemented in a consistent way. Staffing is relatively stable and developments are made in a way that ensures coherence and continuity through good medium and long term planning. Communication with schools is very good, especially in view of the size of the county. As a result, schools consistently understand the rationale for development as well as the practicalities.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

42. This is excellent. The system is comprehensive and transparent. It is implemented consistently and effectively and schools understand the system. Support is deployed in inverse proportion to success and fulfils all requirements of the Code of Practice for LEA–School Relations. The strategy is comparatively recently implemented. It is in its second year in primary schools, and in its first for secondary schools. It has been clearly thought through in consultation with schools and has rapidly become well-established.

43. Schools are systematically categorised annually on the basis of performance data. Criteria for identification are precise and include comprehensive indices including teaching and management, with good use made of OFSTED inspection data. Categorisation also depends on an annual performance review which takes place with the school in the autumn term. The categorisation is discussed and agreed with the headteacher and the governing body and can be reviewed and changed during the year if this is required. Subject departments have also been categorised in secondary schools and weak departments have been identified for targeted support. In the schools that were visited for this inspection, categorisation of the schools was accurate and based on sound evidence.

44. There are published, written protocols governing the annual review visits and the role of the link adviser. Monitoring is conducted through an appropriately planned programme and covers target-setting, development planning and school self review. There were many good examples of the judicious use of a more challenging approach which has increased the expectations and performance of schools.

45. The categorisation is linked to the level of monitoring, support or intervention which the school requires. All schools are allocated two days a year for monitoring visits and more for schools with difficulties. Self-managing schools are identified where monitoring is light touch. These schools understand clearly that the responsibility for procuring the necessary support for improvement rests with them, and support is clearly deployed on the basis of purchase. Nevertheless, monitoring has the capacity to, and does, identify schools where standards, management and quality may be starting to slip. Additional monitoring and support are deployed to three other categories; those which have new head teachers, or those which may be under-performing or those which have one or more serious weaknesses. There are

separate categories for schools identified by OFSTED as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses.

46. Monitoring in these five categories of schools is accompanied by a comprehensive package of support tailored to meet the schools' particular needs. This is discussed across the education department and where necessary all LEA services make a contribution. Some support is provided from centrally held funds but in all schools link advisers have been effective in encouraging the more strategic purchase of relevant additional support. Schools and governing bodies receive clear, succinct and helpful reports on progress following the monitoring visits. Two policy managers, principal and senior advisers carefully monitor the consistent operation of the system. The system has already been evaluated in primary schools as a check to ensure that the procedures are consistently implemented and in a way that leads to improvement.

The management of the inspection and advisory service

47. This is a very well managed service. The service has clear aims that reflect the national requirements, the county strategy and the education department portfolio service plan. The service has identified broad targets reflecting the intended outcomes of the main areas of work. Draft service standards are in use for the first time to aid in the appointment of new staff and the review of service and individual performance. The standards are grouped into three key aspects and cover the main processes of advisory work. The standards define, in a feasible way, the key knowledge and skills which staff require to perform their functions.

48. The leadership of the service is very good. Vision is accompanied by good planning, clear expectations, good communication, effective performance management, induction and staff development, and appropriate systems of monitoring and evaluation. The systems are well communicated, and presented in a consistent way in well-written, succinct documents which guide practice.

49. The service plan demonstrates a rigorous approach to planning which identifies relevant priorities for improvement. The plan reflects the education department strategic plan and the EDP priorities and successfully establishes clarity and coherence between the two. The service plan is developed through improvement plans which cover main strands of the service's work. It defines relevant improvements in the management and leadership of the service and includes details of the comprehensive programme of in-service training and a planned programme of future evaluation of the service's work.

50. The provision of support through centrally retained budgets and schools' purchase is very clear. The service level agreements with schools for the provision of advice and support are flexible. Ninety-two per cent of the funds that were delegated to schools are committed by them to buy back the services offered. The schools' reasons for purchasing the service were tested rigorously during the school visits for this inspection. Schools' decisions are not built on a feeling of compulsion or loyalty but on evidence of the very competitive costs, quality, and relevant focus which is informed by a knowledge of the school, ease of access and value for money. The schools are nevertheless exploring the markets and are encouraged to do so, although they are not overtly provided with any advice on suitable contractors.

The service level agreement is scheduled for review next year. Likely changes to the profile of purchase are already known and have been modelled.

51. The service has access to considerable expertise and covers all subjects of the curriculum and senior management experience. This is a large service including 23 advisers, 36 other professionals and 33 administrative and clerical staff. The service also contracts, on a part time basis, additional expertise from headteachers, higher educational institutions and independent consultants as required. Workloads of the advisory staff are very carefully planned and monitored.

52. The service has a clear and appropriate policy on monitoring and evaluation. The use of evaluation, together with the rigorous analysis of performance data, is embedded into service culture. About two per cent of the service's time is devoted to evaluation. A programme of evaluation has been identified. The impact of evaluation on service planning and developments is clear. There is an effective dialogue between the schools and the service. All secondary schools and a sample of primary schools are regularly canvassed for their views on the service, its priorities, working arrangements and effectiveness.

53. Performance management systems are well established. The service has been awarded Investors in People status which has been further reviewed on two occasions. Induction and staff development programmes are good. Workloads and targets are set and reviewed with line managers at suitably regular intervals. This will be conducted on the basis of a self-review against service standards for the first time this year.

The Best Value review of the inspection and advisory service

54. This is an outstanding service which demonstrates a capacity to improve. The Best Value review is helping to drive improvement since the targets are appropriate and are already embedded into the well-conceived service development plan. The service has effective systems of performance management in place that will also drive improvements. The outcomes, in the light of the findings of this inspection, are all appropriate. The targets which have been set include improving quality and outcomes of the service, but also identify the need to extend and develop the use of Best Value principles. The service, through conducting the process at an early stage, has acquired a deeper insight into what may be required for an effective review of Best Value in future.

55. Nevertheless, this Best Value review was conducted last year and has some deficiencies. Under usual circumstances the inspection and advisory service would not be a high priority for review since it is neither high cost nor a high priority for improvement. It was conducted before the council's corporate procedures for Best Value reviews had been finalised. The review took place in the knowledge that there will be Best Value reviews for each priority of the current EDP with a view to providing a firm platform for drafting a new EDP. The current review uses the Best Value principles to consider the work of the advisory and inspection service at a general level to assist drafting the service development plan.

56. The review appropriately makes good use of the considerable and extensive consultation with schools and stakeholders, analyses of data and monitoring and evaluation of performance which already takes place on a regular basis. While the review was directed at providing development targets to inform the service's development plan, in view of the complexity of the service's many activities, and despite the clarity of the service aims, the intentions and the areas for scrutiny are not sufficiently defined to provide a clear focus. This has inhibited the rigour with which the four principles of challenge, comparison, competition and consultation have been applied.

57. Challenge has been tested through the dispositions of elected members and schools, the successful buy-back record and against statutory requirements. However, specific aspects where new or different organisational arrangements or procurement of services may feasibly deliver even better outcomes are not tackled at any depth. While this is not a focus of the review, the service has taken some steps to examine other forms of procurement. It has entered into consultation with other commercial providers about possible mutual developments. The review was entirely managed from within the inspection and advisory service and did not make use of headteachers, teachers' representatives, any external consultants or participants from other local authority services. This has not maximised the challenge or helped to bring new perspectives on the work of the service. The review has concluded, however, on the basis of the evidence, that two areas of the work of the service should cease.

58. The absence of nationally reliable benchmarked data on activity and costs has inhibited the rigorous application of challenge, comparison and competition. The service made attempts to acquire such data by contacting its statistical neighbours, but this did not result in the evidence which was required. However, there was untapped potential in this approach. The service has demonstrated that it has the capacity to be creative and may have had more success in devising rigorous approaches if the focus had been more precise. However, through conducting this review, the service has recognised the importance of developing the existing valuable monitoring and evaluating activities to incorporate a more outward-looking perspective, including comparisons with other services nationally. It is currently working with other LEAs and a commercial consultant to devise ways of benchmarking specific processes in advisory and inspection activities, such as support to schools causing concern.

59. The principle of competition was applied by reviewing existing service arrangements and using indicators of take-up and buy-back as confirming evidence. However, it is not accompanied by a rigorous market analysis which compares the costs or services which are available from other providers in the locality. This would have been a practical and useful activity. It could have provided schools with information on the availability of other providers in relation to costs. It would also confirm that the service makes the most productive use of local availability and offers services at competitive costs.

60. In many respects the summary report has not done justice to the extensive work conducted on reviewing performance which is contained in the appendices to the report or to the effectiveness and quality of the service. In the absence of guidance or models, too much of the report provides a descriptive account of the

process of the review, rather than consistently showing how the outcomes have emerged from the process. However, the outcomes are all supported by evidence which is contained within the extensive appendices. The summary report also falls short of defining the characteristics of the top 25 per cent of services. It has therefore not made a judgement on the effectiveness of the service or its capacity to improve. Both are implied in the indicators but not clearly stated. The findings of this inspection have shown the service is already in the top 25 per cent of the most effective services nationally and is most likely to be within the top five per cent.

Performance data and target-setting

61. The LEA's expertise in providing and using data on school performance is excellent and well established. Schools are provided with very comprehensive and high quality performance data. The schools visited for this inspection use the data very effectively for target-setting, school self-evaluation and to drive continuous improvement.

62. Detailed profiles are circulated to primary and secondary schools. These provide exceptionally good and comprehensive statistical and comparative information. Developments, however, continue to take place and the LEA is rightly working to include data on pupils learning English as an additional language, and with social services to track the attainment of pupils in public care. It is also developing a data profile for special schools based on the rigorous use of 'P' scales and determining the robustness of Year 4 optional tests as a reliable value added measure.

63. Training for headteachers on the use of these profiles has been well received and this has been disseminated to middle managers. Schools report that the availability of local comparative data has enabled them to make effective links with other schools. Chairs of governing bodies and link governors of primary and secondary schools receive a comprehensive and useful pack for governors.

64. The LEA provides good guidance to schools on target-setting which is based on raising achievement through the analysis of data combined with effective development planning. The annual performance review is rigorous and challenging. It includes a joint evaluation with the headteacher of the extent to which previous targets have been met and validation of the school's proposed targets for improvement. Governors are strongly encouraged to be part of this process. Headteachers give credence to the visit and recognise that it is a serious and thought-provoking event. As a result, schools set robust, challenging and realistic targets, based on carefully analysed pupil level data. Link advisers are well trained for this role, have considerable expertise in data analyses and are competent in their advice to schools on planning for improvement.

65. Recent draft guidance on transfer and transition clearly sets out the responsibilities of all schools for the consistent exchange of pupil information. Accompanying guidelines from two local projects offer a good range of strategies to ensure curriculum continuity. This guidance, although supplemented by work in literacy and numeracy and well informed by good research, is overdue in view of the number of transfer points and arrangements already in place in several family groups.

Support for literacy

66. Support for literacy is good. Strong strategic planning, well focused plans to improve writing and effective targeting of resources in line with need, should ensure the LEA meets its challenging target of 86 per cent of pupils attaining Level 4 or above in English for 2002. However, there is no room for slippage. Whilst writing results are broadly in line with national figures, boys lag behind girls by 18 percentage points. The LEA is determined to remedy this and has clear and well-targeted plans for doing so. Outcomes from monitoring already indicate significant improvements in the quality of teaching of writing, both within literacy lessons and across the curriculum

67. The management of the National Literacy Strategy is good, and firmly located within the LEA's school improvement strategy. The strategy for supporting schools is differentiated and entitlement is clear. Consultants are effective. A very good and detailed evaluation of the impact of this intervention in individual schools has identified the significant factors in promoting or inhibiting their work. This has been very well used to increase the effectiveness of work with schools that are making insufficient progress.

68. Good support is provided for all schools; advice and training are well targeted, well delivered and well received. Training for writing has been particularly useful. A range of good publications includes extensive guidance for the teaching of writing, pupils with English as an additional language, and for mixed aged classes.

69. Headteachers and co-ordinators are well supported in their leadership and management roles through regular meetings and briefings. Good use has been made of expert practitioners to provide training and to develop ICT support materials. The networking of effective practice will be furthered by the identification of expert practitioners in all schools. The literacy team has established good links with teams from other services. The 'Literacy Extravaganza', as part of the National Year of Reading, was a significant achievement in cross-departmental working.

70. Monitoring and evaluation is very good. It is systematic and regular and includes lesson observations by link advisers. A good system of 'literacy landmarks' enables monitoring against yearly benchmarks. Advisers are well trained for this role and offer good advice to schools on targets for improvement. Communications between link advisers and consultants are effective, and include joint school review. Good use is made of ICT for data analysis and curricular target setting with schools, and considerable progress has been made with this.

71. The EDP appropriately prioritises improving the teaching of literacy across the secondary curriculum and recognises the necessity for secondary schools to build on the literacy achievements of pupils in primary schools. Good training has taken place in half of the LEA's secondary schools and there are twice-yearly conferences for literacy managers and teachers' working groups. However, literacy has not been given a sufficiently high profile in all schools, and therefore progress is not as rapid as the LEA expects.

Support for numeracy

72. Support for numeracy is good. Monitoring indicates considerable progress and an assurance that the challenging target of 80 per cent of pupils attaining Level 4 and above for 2002, will be met. The management of the numeracy strategy is good. Strategic planning is effective and EDP priorities are well targeted; good use is made of national findings to inform local developments. The National Numeracy Strategy is well aligned with the National Literacy Strategy and the major teaching links between the two strategies are clear. The LEA has rightly identified the teaching of number, and management and leadership in schools which are not making sufficient progress, as priorities. However, a vacant full-time post has delayed the current monitoring programme, and an EDP activity aimed at improving the teaching of number in the reception year has had to be postponed.

73. Schools receiving intensive support are accurately identified and show a six per cent overall rise, compared with the LEA's three per cent overall increase. Entitlement is appropriately differentiated. Numeracy consultants are effective and skilful in their work. Exit strategies are well planned. A thorough evaluation of the impact of the work of numeracy consultants indicates clear evidence of impact on standards, teaching quality and subject leadership.

74. Training is of good quality and well-targeted. Headteachers and co-ordinators are well supported through regular meetings, conferences, and good guidance materials which include regular updates; all of which have been well received. The LEA has identified and trained 30 leading mathematics teachers, appropriately selected from teachers in Year R-Year 6. These expert practitioners were used to good effect in the first year of the strategy but the reduction in the availability of supply teachers has inhibited further work. Teachers from primary and secondary schools are currently developing materials for the LEA's 'Grid Plus' project. Monitoring and evaluation are thorough and focused appropriately on the impact of support. Findings are used effectively with schools to inform targeted action.

75. Conferences on the Key Stage 3 framework have been very well received by secondary schools. Further information and training has been offered to schools through the annual heads of mathematics conference and through central in-service training. A number of departments are using principles of the National Numeracy Strategy to inform their teaching and some schools have observed numeracy teaching in primary schools. The LEA is currently identifying leading mathematics teachers for Key Stage 3.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

76. The support is satisfactory overall, and improving; so far there is too much variability in the take-up and impact. LEA support was at least satisfactory in two thirds of the schools visited for this inspection. Recent developments have now, albeit belatedly, resulted in a strategy and support where strengths outweigh weaknesses, although significant areas are still to be addressed. Improvements have been made from an unsatisfactory position where the LEA had over-estimated its capacity to implement and manage this major initiative, and where direction and leadership was insufficient. Strategic leadership has been strengthened. The revised 2001-2002 EDP has shifted from providing hardware and equipment, to

identifying activities appropriate to raising pupils' standards in ICT and improving the use of ICT in the curriculum. Schools have been reassured by an increase in staffing, improvement in advice and support and a recent and very comprehensive draft strategic plan.

77. Support and advice on purchasing equipment has been good or even excellent in some schools; others report that it is incidental or muddled. More than one school has had to make costly modifications to rectify poor purchases and the inappropriate location of equipment. Advice has, however, improved in the second year of implementation. National Grid for Learning connections will be complete in advance of the target date,

78. The strategy for curriculum support has been in place for about three years. However, standards of attainment and usage of ICT as a teaching and learning tool are still too variable. About 50 per cent of primary schools have received consultancy visits which is lower than the national average of about 76 per cent. However, well-documented and very successful curriculum development work has taken place, particularly in literacy and numeracy, in some primary and secondary schools. Sound written advice, which has included the construction of ICT development plans, has been provided. Although well-intentioned, this advice has caused considerable frustration because although sensible, it is difficult to comprehend. Centrally organised training and regular meetings for co-ordinators are judged helpful by some schools and variable by others. Not all schools have taken full advantage of this provision. Schools have received a list of options for the training provided under New Opportunities Fund and the majority of schools visited are already taking advantage of the programme.

79. A number of schools are making relatively slow progress against their plans. Some schools clearly require considerable support and at a very basic level. The LEA has plans to make more use of advanced skills teachers to provide intensive support to schools where progress is slow. ICT development plans have been checked and issues followed up but progress has not been monitored. As yet, the systematic monitoring and evaluation, including an analysis of data on pupils' ICT standards, is not sufficient to ensure that support is well-targeted to identify potential difficulties at a sufficiently early stage.

80. Nevertheless, the LEA is actively promoting the use of ICT to support improvements in teaching. A Grid+ project which has the potential to be excellent has been initiated, as part of the West Sussex Grid for Learning. At present, its use in the schools visited is limited because it is still under construction, but when completed it will effectively disseminate best practice through high quality web-based teaching resources for all schools.

Support for schools causing concern

81. Support for schools causing concern is excellent and has improved over the last two years. Five schools have required special measures since 1993 and a further eleven have been identified as having serious weaknesses. Three schools have been removed from special measures in a timely way. The two schools remaining in special measures have both been identified by OFSTED in the last two years. Both schools have made reasonable progress. Two other schools which had

serious weaknesses have since been inspected for a second time and no longer have serious weaknesses. No school has required special measures following the identification by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses. At any one time, the LEA has identified a further 26 schools which have one or more serious weakness.

82. The procedures for identifying and supporting schools causing concern have been considerably improved and up-dated in the last two years. The system for the identification of schools and details of subsequent support are clearly defined. Procedures are rigorous. Representatives of all LEA services meet to share information on schools which are likely to cause concern. Nevertheless, the procedures do not provide clear information about when a warning letter may be issued or when delegation of budgets may be withdrawn. As yet, neither procedure has been required.

83. Very good progress has been made in implementing Priority 7 of the EDP. Once identified, improvements in standards and progress, quality of teaching and leadership and management are carefully monitored by link advisers. Each school is given a projected date when it should expect to be removed from the category if good progress is made. Progress is reviewed at six monthly intervals for schools identified by the LEA and every two months when identified by OFSTED. Headteachers and governors are provided with clear reports which state the weaknesses, and a clear overall judgement on progress together with a precise identification of new objectives. Regular reports are submitted to the members' standards task force. Regular reviews determine the progress made overall by all the schools.

84. The support which the schools receive is expert, sufficient, well targeted and very effective. On identification, representatives from all LEA services discuss the support which the school requires to improve. Headteachers do not attend this meeting, although following this, the link adviser negotiates the package of support which has been agreed by the services with the school. Improvement plans are drafted. The LEA has a clear view of the support which is required to enable schools in difficulties to improve. Unless a new headteacher has been appointed to the school, invariably a consultant headteacher is allocated with the intention of supporting improvements in leadership and management. They are usually an external consultant with extensive headship experience or a practising headteacher. An advisory headteacher or associate adviser is allocated to monitor the quality of teaching and to work with teachers who are judged unsatisfactory. In addition, if required, governors receive additional training or additional governors are appointed to the governing bodies. The link adviser also ensures that primary schools can purchase additional literacy and numeracy support over and above the intensive allocation. Education officers (schools) provide expert support to help governors and senior managers with financial issues and to defuse any difficult personnel issues in a sensitive but effective way.

85. About half the schools visited for this inspection had been identified as causing concern. Four had been identified by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses. In all the schools, the sufficiency and effectiveness of support were judged at least satisfactory, and in all but one of the schools, good. The work is invariably clear, focused and expert. The progress which the school made as a result of the support is clearly visible. An analysis of results at Key Stage 2 shows that the primary

schools which have at one time or another been identified as causing concern are on average improving faster than the national and LEA averages in all core subjects, but particularly in mathematics and science. In the last overall review, satisfactory progress had been made on the three key aspects of standards, teaching and leadership and management in about 60 per cent of schools. Sixteen schools in all were removed from one of the causing concern categories in the last year.

Support for governors

86. The LEA's approach to promote autonomy and school self-evaluation through its support to governors is intelligent, strategic, and well focused. Ninety nine per cent of schools buy into this service. This reflects governors' views that the service is proactive, very supportive and responsive in equipping them for their strategic role. Within the last two years, the LEA's expectations have shifted appropriately so that governing bodies are more directly involved in school performance. Chairs of governors are strongly advised to attend the annual performance review and receive summary school data profiles, as well as visit reports from link advisers.

87. Governors are provided with relevant and accessible information through a very good range of courses, high quality documentation and guidance materials, which all highlight the role of governors in promoting high standards. An excellent termly newsletter includes summaries of key developments, items of interest and articles written by governors. An annual governors' conference, termly governors' forums, which allow for consultation with the LEA on strategic issues, and termly briefings for chairs and link governors are very well attended. School-based governor training is considered outstanding, and governors cite excellent training and advice from officers for the appointment of headteachers. Evaluations from centrally provided training courses and responses to the school survey indicate a very high level of satisfaction, although a few governors reported that they would value training methods which include more opportunities for group work and discussion.

88. Communication and liaison between link advisers and governor support services are good. Advisers trawl minutes of governors' meetings, and detailed reports are completed when they attend. Both can trigger referrals for support. Support for governing bodies in schools causing concern has been successful. Additional governors are well supported and very effective, although some governors have not always been sufficiently well briefed on the school's context. The LEA has a reducing pool of experienced governors who are prepared to serve as additional governors and a recruitment drive is currently taking place.

89. All clerks are appointed by governing bodies. Termly briefings, regular model agendas and good briefing notes, together with the availability of well targeted and good quality training, helps to support a sound level of competence.

Support for school management

90. The LEA's support for school management is excellent. In all the 22 schools visited for this inspection, it was judged satisfactory and good in the very high number of 19 schools. It is very highly rated by schools and is the key to the school improvement strategy. The programme is comprehensive but also has imaginative

features. It is well planned to develop professional competencies but also extends teachers' academic interest in learning and pedagogy. The strength of the LEA's approach lies not only in the range and extent of provision, but also in its coherent focus on improving schools' practice of self-review and managing continuous improvement. This clearly has an impact. OFSTED school inspection findings indicate a significantly higher percentage of schools with good leadership and management than found nationally.

91. The programme includes training and development for senior, middle and aspiring managers in both primary, secondary and special schools, all of which are well aligned to national standards. This is supported by a series of high quality publications which provide very good practical guidance on aspects of school improvement. Good materials and training on school self-review have been particularly effective in primary schools. Eighty-four new headteachers have been appointed to West Sussex schools since April 1998 and, importantly, therefore, the LEA's newly appointed headteacher induction and mentoring programme is very effective and well tailored to individual needs. National training programmes for aspiring, serving and new headteachers are well supported by the LEA.

92. Where management of the school is unsatisfactory, link advisers and consultant headteachers provide good intensive in-school management support as part of LEA intervention programmes. This is a very thorough approach. In one school visited for this inspection, the consultant had, with the head, reviewed the roles of the senior management team, the school's main policy documents, the school development plan and roles of subject co-ordinators. Systems for the regular monitoring of teaching have been established and sampling of pupils' work had been combined with discussion with the children. This coaching was conducted in a way whereby the head felt empowered by the support. At each stage the consultant provided advice and feedback, injecting appropriate expectations for the development of the management and leadership of the school. Link advisers are very highly rated by schools for the challenge and practical support offered to headteachers through annual performance review and the development of self-evaluation systems.

93. The three-day annual residential conferences for headteachers provide one of the main regular training opportunities. These are very effective, highly valued and are strongly focused on school improvement. They are based on a topical theme, such as this year's primary conference which focused on inclusion. An evaluation of impact of the conferences demonstrates that they are effective and result in a considerable amount of development in schools.

94. Good support networks for middle managers and a very comprehensive programme of training for teachers and support assistants are arranged. All courses are backed by a guarantee of quality. Course evaluations indicate a very high level of satisfaction. The LEA proposes to systematically evaluate the impact of its training programme through follow-up work in schools. A comprehensive training and support programme for newly qualified teachers is effective, includes lesson observations by link advisers in schools categorised as under-performing or having serious weaknesses, and is underpinned by the use of the Career Entry Profile. Mentors also receive training and support.

95. A very successful feature of provision includes the funding of a very high quality MA programme. This is jointly taught by the LEA and a higher education institution. It enables teachers to develop expertise in action research designed to raise the quality of teaching and standards of pupil achievement. Summaries of dissertations are disseminated to all schools and the post-graduates lead training and conferences. In the schools visited for this inspection, teachers who had taken part in the post-graduate studies viewed the course as a very important aspect of their career development as well as providing the opportunity to develop a project which benefited the school.

96. In partnership with schools, the LEA has planned and implemented a number of longer term school improvement projects. The projects have enabled schools to have the time and support from advisers and academics to be able to tackle the 'harder' school improvement issues in a climate of mutual co-operation.

97. The dissemination of effective practice is an important feature of the LEA's school improvement strategy through support, training, publications, research projects and the work of leading and advanced skills teachers. Link advisers are central to helping schools to network effectively and there is considerable evidence of good partnering with Beacon schools. Plans are underway to develop more systematic school linkages through a best practice register, and research is in hand to establish factors accounting for effective impact.

Support for early years education

98. The majority of places for three-year-olds, and a large number of four-year-olds, are in non-maintained, voluntary and independent early education settings. Over the next three years places in the maintained sector will remain static, and the number of funded places in voluntary and independent settings will increase to meet national targets. OFSTED inspections indicate that attainment on entry to school is good in a higher number of schools, but poor in a greater number than that found nationally.

99. Support for early years is, therefore, of critical importance in developing a consistent quality of provision across many different providers in the drive to raise standards. Support is very well managed through the West Sussex early years development and childcare partnership. Priorities are clearly identified in the comprehensive early years development and childcare plan and action taken according to a good three-year implementation plan. The partnership is working effectively and is well focused on local needs. Good support is offered to providers in non-maintained settings. Appropriate cross-sector training has taken place. A recently appointed quality assurance team, and plans to develop the role of the four nursery schools, will add further capacity to support the developments.

100. However, continuity and progression between early years settings and the reception year are variable. Despite the annual circulation of the early years development and childcare plan and termly newsletters, visits to schools demonstrate that the work of the early years partnership is not known by most schools. Teachers of the reception year do not contribute to the work of the partnership. The visits also showed a mixed picture of the sufficiency and effectiveness of support which is provided to teachers of reception classes. The

EDP provides good support to children and families but lacks a sufficiently sharp focus on curriculum and progression between the foundation and Key Stage 1 curriculum.

Support for post-16 education

101. A very high percentage of students aged 16 and 17 continue in full-time education. They display a wide range of attainment and the LEA is rightly concerned that 'A' - Level, as the predominant course provision, results in a number of students making inappropriate choices.

102. The LEA's 16-19 improvement strategy is well focused on supporting schools to raise standards of achievement, through ensuring that curriculum choices are well matched to student need. Actions are well targeted and rightly prioritise the assurance of high quality provision, alongside the development of local networks and partnerships. A potentially good development will focus on use of ICT to improve performance and improve collaboration between schools through independent study materials and distance learning.

103. Since 1995, a high level of very well targeted work has supported GNVQ developments including the effective support of the pathways team and the education business partnership. Schools, however, have been slow to offer this accreditation, partly because of the strong parental preference for 'A' - Level. Nevertheless, there has been a significant rise in the number of pupils in schools taking advanced GNVQs and it is expected that this will rise further. The LEA's good strategic planning, effective support and success in working in partnership with schools has contributed to this.

Recommendations

In order to ensure Best Value for inspection and advisory services:

- systematically review and compare the costs and services available locally from other providers.

In order to clarify the procedures for supporting schools causing concern:

- define clearly in procedures the circumstances whereby the LEA may issue a warning letter or withdraw delegation from the schools.

In order to improve the pupils' standards and the use of information and communication technology in the curriculum:

- systematically monitor and evaluate schools' progress in implementing their ICT development plans, identify the schools where progress is too slow and ensure that the school has access to the support required to make improvement.

In order to improve the baseline standards of attainment for early years:

- further develop mechanisms for informing schools and reception teachers of the priorities and activities of the early years partnership; and
- ensure that early years providers and schools, particularly reception teachers, develop and implement effective procedures for progression and continuity on entry into the reception year of school and between the foundation stage and National Curriculum.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

104. The County Strategy 1997-2001 is clear, succinct and appropriate. It sets the overall aim of the county council as 'steady, sustainable progress towards effective, quality services with the best use of resources'. To achieve that aim the county council has set four priorities for 1997-2001. These include:

- to preserve the rural character of West Sussex while promoting economic growth which is both viable and environmentally sustainable;
- to improve community safety in West Sussex;
- to ensure that individuals in need are cared for and those at risk protected; and
- to achieve excellence in education.

105. These priorities are fully reflected in the Best Value Performance Plan and are developed in detail in service plans for each service portfolio. The portfolio service plan for education and the arts is very clear, rational, well argued and set at the right level of detail. It is understandable to the lay reader and reflects the needs of the education service in West Sussex very well. It assesses the likely impact of national policy in the immediate future and foresees the general implications for the council. It interlinks statutory plans and new statutory requirements skilfully while continuing to maintain the commitment to on-going developments. It uses the new requirements combined with a very good understanding of the relative strengths, weaknesses and potential pressure points of existing work, and seeks to make incremental improvements in the system. It sets appropriately high standards for the effectiveness of LEA. It aligns resources skilfully to ensure that the planned activities are delivered.

106. The delivery and implementation of the portfolio plan are supported by the service plans. Strategic planning by education services is coherent and consistently good. Developments in nearly every case are made in careful consultation with schools and stakeholders. The plans demonstrate thoughtful and intelligent approaches which are well-related to existing developments and local needs.

Implementation of corporate plans

107. A suitable corporate management structure has been developed to ensure that plans are implemented in a managed and co-ordinated way and that developments are well communicated across the council. A corporate board consists of the seven directors of service portfolios and the chief executive. This meets at fortnightly intervals. A management board consisting of the key managers of all major local authority services, meets regularly to share and agree developments. A small 'change team' has been formed to ensure that corporate systems are consistently implemented.

108. Communication has been improved across the council and is judged good within the education department and between the education department and schools. The chief executive takes the hot seat every week responding to staff

queries and criticisms through a weekly website chat shop. Performance management is sound and is being further tightened to make the linkages between corporate objectives, service plans, business plans and individual targets. The education department has been awarded Investors in People status.

The speed, openness and effectiveness of decision making

109. The education department is very well managed and in consequence the majority of decisions are foreseen well in advance. There are good structures for consultation with schools and these are consistently used. Representative groups of headteachers work with the LEA on devising the detail of the implementation for the development of most core policies. The schools recognise that, for the most part, there is an effective and on-going dialogue with the LEA about the priorities and their implementation. This pays dividends because, as this inspection has demonstrated, schools understand new developments well and, as a result, new systems are implemented consistently. This does not mean that this a cosy relationship or based on collusion, since this inspection found that schools and the education department have high expectations of each other. The partnership with schools and the respective responsibilities of schools and the LEA has been articulated in a clear key strategic document.

Leadership of elected members and senior officers

110. Political leadership is very good. Elected members execute their strategic responsibilities well and also help to ensure accountability for high standards and positive developments. Appropriate decisions support the corporate and departmental priorities. Members are developing their scrutiny role effectively. Officers advise members very well. Reports to committee are clear, informative and consider the options carefully. Good structures and procedures operate to inform members of all parties. Stakeholders' conferences are held regularly where members who are not closely involved in cabinet, the education policy advisory group or the select committee can maintain an interest in developments and contribute in a positive way.

111. Senior officers provide good leadership. The director of education provides very good leadership. He sets suitably high expectations, has a clear and well informed view of the work of the department and schools and enjoys the trust and respect of elected members, officers and schools.

Partnership

112. Partnership is good. Overall this is an outward looking LEA which seeks to share ideas and form networks for the benefit of the education system. There are very good links with business, the dioceses and institutions of higher education. The work of the education business partnership, for instance, is effectively managed within the education department and facilitates an extensive number of profitable and imaginative links with the business community. The LEA already plays an active role in the development of the Learning and Skills Council, learning partnerships and Connexions youth service.

113. Liaison with the health authority and the police results in good joint working with schools. Staff from both services work productively and their staff have a high

profile in schools. For instance, 40 per cent of police liaison officers' time supports the head and staff on behavioural issues. Strategic liaison with the social services is reported to be improving and a task force has been established consisting of members and the deputy directors of education and social services with representatives from the health authority. There are, however, few other concrete developments which demonstrate that the liaison is effective. Strategic planning between health, social services and education will need to take a step forward when work begins on formulating the new children's services plan. The existing plan predominantly reflects the single agency approach of social services.

114. At the school level, liaison between schools and social workers is variable and often schools feel that this is not satisfactory, although schools' perceptions may reflect difficulties in the past. No serious incidents, however, were reported to the inspection team as a result of inadequate liaison. Joint training has taken place on specific initiatives such as pastoral support programmes and corporate parenting, but there are few opportunities for school staff to meet with social workers in order to discuss general issues related to service priorities and working practices with a view to developing a better mutual understanding.

Management services

115. The services are well managed, responsive to schools' needs and cost effective. The services are clearly defined in service level agreements and through the categorisation of schools. The services provide schools with a very good infrastructure of support with minimal bureaucracy. They are managed equally well whether by the education department or by other departments of the council. Many of the schools visited had carefully considered whether to purchase service level agreements and at which level, and when to purchase from external providers. Even so, most services have over 90 per cent buy-back and in most cases this decision was taken on the grounds of quality and cost effectiveness.

116. **Human resources' support** to schools which are experiencing difficult individual cases is excellent. It is sensitively managed through co-ordinated work by the schools' personnel team and the LEA's education officers (schools). The recruitment strategy manager is developing responses to the pressures of recruitment and retention that have become apparent in the last few terms. Most of the schools visited had more newly qualified teachers than usual. Since April 1998, nearly a third of all headship appointments have required a second advertisement, and three have required a fourth advertisement. The LEA has worked well with governing bodies to identify and support interim managers.

117. Until recently, the basic administration and issue of new contracts was unsatisfactory with about six months back-log, but this has improved. The service combined the review of its service level agreement with schools with a Best Value review of the entire council's personnel function. This has led to useful improvements. The council has begun a job-evaluation review covering all non-teaching staff but not all schools can yet see the benefits.

118. **Financial support** to schools is good. The LEA provides good resource management training for heads, governors and bursars, and supports schools in effectively linking their financial and development planning. The LEA responded to

suggestions in an external audit report. It is encouraging the use of the audit commission's school budgets website.

119. Support to schools in managing and monitoring their budgets is good. Schools can purchase temporary bursars if needed. There is close monitoring of surplus and deficits and none are significant. The LEA has implemented an effective automated dial-up transfer of data between the council and schools financial systems which enables schools to reconcile their budgets efficiently at least monthly. Budget information is clear and timely. Schools get indicative information about their budget in November with three year forecasts so significant changes in budget can be identified. If necessary, co-ordinated management support is given on internal school budget restructuring. Final budgets are notified at the beginning of March.

120. **Administrative ICT** is effective, particularly the technical and software support which is a service highly valued by schools. The LEA is one of 22 testing next year's Pupil Level Annual Schools Census. A small minority of schools cannot make use, as yet, of the county's e-mail service, though there are well developed plans to use the West Sussex Grid for Learning for e-government to reduce the burden of paper on schools. E-mail communication is, otherwise, developing well. Advice has recently been provided to primary schools on options to appoint or buy shared technicians.

121. The **property maintenance service to schools** is generally reliable and effective. It is well managed and responsive to schools. It is valued by schools as the full buy-back offers some insurance against expensive emergencies. Every school is guaranteed that 75 per cent of its buy-in will be spent over the three year period on planned works utilising the condition survey or on reactive maintenance. All schools buy in, 95 per cent to the full level, and receive clear reports of work carried out. Many have tested comparisons and found the service offers good value.

122. At the time of this inspection, the **primary provision for school meals** was unsatisfactory. The provision of packed lunches was not popular. They were rarely purchased and hence only provided to pupils who are entitled to free school meals. This has had the embarrassing consequence of identifying the pupils too readily. The take-up has declined. This has led to a small, but unforeseen redistribution in some schools' budgets and reduced the usefulness of free school meals as an indicator of schools' comparative performance. (See paragraph 38.) However, recently, the need for improvement in the nutritional content and organisation has been recognised. Additional finance has been made available for this purpose from April 2001.

Recommendations

In order to increase the take-up of school meals by primary pupils:

- continue with recently initiated work to improve the quality and nutritional standard of the meals and promote the improvements with all parents and children; and

- review organisational arrangements to try to avoid identifying pupils who are entitled to free school meals.

In order to improve the liaison between schools and social workers:

- ensure that all schools are confident of lines of communication with social services; and
- provide more opportunities through training and seminars for teachers and social workers to discuss approaches to common issues, and develop a better understanding of respective priorities.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

123. The LEA has recently completed a special needs strategy document based on the Education Development Plan. It is a good plan which has been through thorough consultation with schools being involved throughout. The development of inclusion is being addressed in a measured way. Performance indicators show that the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need in mainstream schools and the percentage of pupils attending special schools is in line with national averages. The LEA has taken time to ensure the foundations of good practice are in place and that parents and teachers are confident in the ability of all schools to make appropriate provision for the pupils with Special Educational Needs who are placed there.

124. A high number of pupils (304) are placed in schools out of the county. Measures are being taken to ensure appropriate places for new referrals within the authority's schools. Any savings accrued from such placements will be part-delegated to the receiving schools. The LEA is aware that the success will depend on successful inter-agency co-operation with social services and the health authority in particular to ensure increased respite care is available for those pupils who require additional support.

125. The effects of the inclusion policy are already apparent in schools with examples of the successful inclusion in the mainstream of pupils from special schools. The support by specialist services and by the special school staff is good, although such links between the mainstream and special schools are just beginning to develop and are largely fostered by headteachers.

126. The reorganisation of two special schools to provide for primary and secondary pupils with special needs has been well-planned and will culminate in two new schools on the same site opening in 2003. In the schools visited for this inspection, the special resource facilities integrating pupils with particular disabilities into primary schools are well supported with clear allocations of resources, effective procedures for admissions and monitoring pupils' progress supported by effective advice and support for teachers.

127. The LEA gives an appropriate high priority to fostering good liaison and seeking the views of parents. The Parent Partnership Service is well established and is proving successful in helping to find solutions to parental difficulties through mediation. The SEN Forum consisting of parents and representatives of voluntary associations is in regular contact with the LEA. Forum members who were interviewed for this inspection are generally satisfied. They know who to contact and get prompt responses to requests for support and information.

Statutory obligations

128. The LEA is taking effective steps to meet its statutory obligations. Ninety per cent of statements are issued within the set timescale. This figure includes 20 per cent statutory exceptions where the statement is delayed for reasons beyond the LEA's control. The quality of the statements issued over the last two years is

generally good, providing sufficient information and targets for the schools to structure individual education plans.

129. Parents' wishes are properly taken into account in the process and the LEA facilitates tribunals when parents wish to appeal. Procedures are being reviewed to ensure that parents have all the necessary information and support at an early stage, to further reduce the need for referral to the tribunal.

130. The school visits indicate that there are concerns at delays in beginning the statementing process. Often time-lags have resulted from difficulties with recruitment and retention of educational psychologists. Referrals, already with extensive supporting material, are sometimes returned for additional information prior to sending them to the statement panel. The panel may reject a referral initially, only to approve it at the second attempt, suggesting that the first decision was incorrect. Statistics show that a high percentage, roughly one third of referrals to the statutory assessment panel for the autumn term 2000, were refused. This is too high and the time of hard-pressed teachers and support services is being wasted. The schools', support services' and statementing panel's interpretation of the criteria is not sufficiently shared. The workings of the statutory assessment initiation panel and the statement panel are not well-understood by schools. Both panels are composed solely of officers and representatives of support services, with no representation of schools or external bodies. This raises the issue of transparency and accountability.

131. The annual and transitional reviews of statements are conducted on time. The LEA is represented at transition reviews and if requested, at annual reviews. Evidence from central files reflects a prompt response to any recommendations.

Support for school improvement

132. The quality of support which is provided to schools is good and its accessibility and the quantity are satisfactory. It has been revised to enable schools to meet needs from their own delegated and devolved resources. Schools generally value the support, although new systems have not yet become fully embedded. Most schools, but not all, have understood that with delegation of funding, a shift in the work of support services is required, whereby smaller services focus on advising, monitoring and developing the skills of school staff rather than working directly with individual pupils.

133. The pattern of support to schools is good but it is also complicated. A number of branches of the service offer advice, training and casework support. While there is little evidence at present that roles are confused or advice conflicting, there is clearly potential for simplifying structures and line management in the interests of efficiency and consistency. The planned Best Value review will provide the opportunity to consider options.

134. Special schools receive very good support from the advisory service. The SEN advisory service is under strength at present; a post is to be filled shortly, in view of this, other schools received good support when it is available. The learning support service provides good guidance at school level and one of its advisory teachers is assigned to every primary school. Special needs officers monitor and

support schools very effectively in providing appropriately for statemented pupils. The behaviour support service helps equally effectively in cases of emotional and behavioural difficulty. The sensory support service continues to work with individual pupils and give useful practical support to pupils with hearing and visual impairments and their teachers. Surgeries provided by the support services in area resources centres are valued by teachers.

135. The educational psychologists' role in schools has been largely confined to statutory assessment of late because of shortage of staff, but where it has given broader advice, this has usually been highly esteemed. The service has faced some staffing difficulties over the past year which have affected the continuity of the service provided in some schools. The LEA has actively tried to recruit educational psychologists and is currently enabling three teachers to train as psychologists. The service is now up to strength.

136. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) are well supported, particularly through termly conferences which keep them abreast of developments. There is good training for SENCOs, other teachers and learning support assistants, to which most of the services mentioned above contribute.

137. An imaginative innovation has been the introduction of planning and review meetings (PARMs) in nearly every school. These are usually attended by the assigned educational psychologist, and in primary schools, the learning support teacher adviser as well as any other specialists involved with the school. They review cases and advise on targets and individual education plans. They are a strong moderating influence, helping to bring consistency between schools in the use of SEN registers and the understanding of criteria for the stages of the SEN Code of Practice. Some schools find them excessively time consuming but need them to lend validity to their referrals. The majority, however, find them useful and new SENCOs find them invaluable. There was evidence that even in small schools where the strains are greatest, they can be made efficient by careful preparation and can save time in the long run.

138. Further rigorous monitoring is provided by the annual SEN audit of a substantial sample of schools when a team of two officers scrutinises the school's provision and procedures in great detail. Schools generally approve of the system and appreciate the advice which results. Again, there are concerns about the administrative burden to both officers and schools and the LEA is intending to streamline the approach. There is no comparable arms-length audit of the office procedures for handling statutory referrals from schools and, in view of the concerns described in paragraph 130, this must be regarded as an omission.

Value for money

139. The level of funding for SEN is relatively high and a substantial proportion of it (80 per cent) is associated with the provision of statements. While the service provides satisfactory value for money, in view of its quality and comprehensiveness, the LEA is rightly concerned to control expenditure. It is working successfully to reduce costly out-county placements. The PARMs and audits are helping to develop consistency and reduce the number of statements and the excessively large SEN registers of some schools. There is little differential between the financial allocations

to schools at Stage 3 of the SEN Code of Practice and Band 1 of statements. The implications of this are not well understood by schools, who continue to press for costly multi-disciplinary assessment and statementing when there is, in the end, little advantage to the pupil.

140. Funding is being progressively delegated. Schools are well aware of the formula for allocating funds. The latest development is the delegation of stage five funding and this has been carefully documented; even before the training programme is complete, most SENCOs and headteachers are clear about their new responsibilities and welcome them.

Recommendations

In order to improve operation of statutory assessment and statementing procedures:

- establish a system for auditing objectively the administration of referrals for statementing;
- reduce the number of rejections by the panel by developing a shared understanding by both schools and the statementing panel of the criteria and explore other, less administrative, methods of managing and reducing schools' applications for assessment and statements;
- revise the constitution of the statement initiation and statement panel to include representation of schools and other interested bodies; and
- monitor carefully the sufficiency and consistency of the educational psychologists' contribution to statutory assessment, and, when required, act on the findings.

In order to improve the capacity of schools to manage Special Educational Needs:

- monitor the operation of the planning and review meetings (PARMs) and disseminate examples of efficient practice.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

141. The school organisation plan sets a good basis for planning. Liaison with the dioceses and neighbouring LEAs is good. Appropriate action has reduced the level of surplus places to ten per cent in each phase. Population data and projections are accurate. There is considerable demographic change, requiring expansion of schools in some areas, but with others experiencing a decline in the number of school age children. The issues are well communicated to schools. The LEA has worked effectively with schools, but two per cent of infant pupils are still in classes over 30, mainly due to decisions by appeals panels. The LEA supports small rural schools that serve distinct communities although very small schools are few in number.

142. The LEA's analysis of school performance data shows a tendency for the number of points of transition to have a negative effect on standards. Amalgamations of infant and junior schools have taken place. However, the age of transfer is not compatible with the end of a National Curriculum key stage and differs between county and voluntary sectors in five areas of the county. This was reviewed in 1997 and the decision made, on balance, to retain the status quo. The reasons for this are pertinent. First, the statistical evidence that the age of transfer has an impact on standards is inconclusive. Second, the changes would involve significant investment in capital programmes that had not been earmarked for that purpose. Third, schools were embarking on implementing substantial number of national improvement strategies that the additional turmoil of school reorganisation would not assist. At that time, the LEA agreed with the Government's green paper, Excellence in Education that raising standards and not structures was of paramount importance.

143. In 2001, large capital projects are planned for Crawley schools. The LEA has recognised that the issue should now be reviewed and that the successful PFI bid will provide the opportunity which is needed. However, the non-standard age of transfer is also causing difficulties in the other areas of the county. Middle schools are experiencing increasing difficulties in providing specialist teaching at Year 7 and their school budgets are affected by parents moving children to 11-18 secondary schools. Secondary schools expend considerable efforts on managing transition in Year 8 and some schools attempt to teach Key Stage 3 in two years.

School admissions

144. The LEA manages admissions very well, particularly given the complexity of different ages of transfer. There are still three termly intakes from rising fives, and rightly the LEA has begun to consider the range of issues around changing to two or one reception intakes. About 15,000 pupils are new entrants to a school each year and 95 per cent of first preferences are met. Admissions are managed from the local offices and staff in the council one-stop shops are also trained to provide information. The booklets for parents are clear, comprehensive and have been revised using feedback from parents. They are sent directly to parents. There is a lower proportion of appeals than nationally though a higher proportion of appeals are successful than nationally. The LEA provides appropriate guidance to appeals

panels, for instance on the infant class size issue. Appeals are well planned to finish in the summer term.

145. The LEA has established an admissions forum and has good relationships with other stakeholders. Admission costs are being compared and practice discussed in a network with other LEAs. The LEA is forward-looking and is contributing to the DfEE e-government consideration of on-line admissions processes.

Asset management planning

146. Most of the schools visited had buildings which provide a good environment for learning. Prudent investment has enabled clear targets to be set which predate the asset management plan and include building classrooms at least ten per cent above the DfEE minimum, ensuring that no school relies on outside toilets, providing three office spaces for primary schools and reducing the number of temporary classrooms.

147. The large capital programme includes major remodelling, extensions and new schools. All the new 218 classes provided to meet basic need and infant class size legislation are permanent, and now ten per cent of primary pupils are in permanent classrooms less than four years old. Two special schools are being rebuilt in an innovative co-location on a community school campus. The LEA has actively sought innovative ways of improving school buildings. Recently, it has successfully bid for a large new PFI scheme of £60 million which will improve secondary schools in Crawley by building a new school, rebuilding two others, the refurbishment of a further school and replacing two special schools.

148. The LEA met all deadlines in producing an asset management plan with condition and suitability surveys and received a positive grade and feedback from the DfEE. Under this plan, at the current rate of progress, all repairs will take six years to complete and category one repairs will be completed in one year. This is a very good position when compared with the national profile. Every school that has building works on site gives feedback and responses are over 90 per cent satisfactory or higher; unsatisfactory responses are followed up individually. Although the LEA has done all that it is required to do, the asset management process has confused some primary schools. Close consultation with representative headteachers takes place on all property issues.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

149. There is suitable provision for pupils not educated in ordinary schools because of exclusion, or for medical or other reasons. A strong and very good feature of the LEA's approach is that all such pupils are immediately assigned a case manager who then remains responsible for the student, drawing up an education plan and liaising with whatever services may be appropriate. An individual support panel monitors each case regularly. The four pupil referral units provide for Key Stage 4 pupils who have been excluded. Recent OFSTED reports indicate that they are predominantly well-managed institutions, with good academic and social opportunities and good teaching although there is greater scope for improving liaison with schools. Of the students leaving last year, 71 per cent continued in post-16 education.

150. The tuition service for younger excluded pupils who cannot immediately be returned to a school and for pupils who cannot attend for other reasons is managed by the pupils referral units. The service also manages the hospital education in the long-stay wards at Haywards Heath and Worthing. The policy for schoolgirl mothers is to facilitate education in the normal school setting. Should this be unsuitable in individual cases, the LEA expects case managers to make other arrangements for them, although so far this has not proved necessary. The allocation of educational contact time for pupils in pupil referral units, home or group tuition, is between five and 12 and a half hours, which is currently low. The LEA has budgeted to make all pupil referral unit provision and tuition for medical reasons full-time in advance of the DFEE deadline.

151. Pupils whom parents choose to educate at home are visited regularly and useful reports are produced which form the basis of advice to the parents.

Attendance

152. The LEA gives effective support and provides comprehensive guidance to schools in promoting good attendance. The educational welfare service is a well organised service with clear priorities which focus appropriately on working with schools to improve attendance. Educational welfare officers' time is allocated according to a needs-led formula which schools find satisfactory. Any additional support is triggered by well-defined criteria. Education welfare officers routinely check registers, discuss cases with senior staff and respond promptly to referrals for home visiting and other intervention. The service also co-operates in schools' own projects to raise attendance. Legal action is taken resolutely when it becomes necessary.

Behaviour support

153. The behaviour support plan is an effective instrument, developing the priorities of the EDP. The new plan for 2001/2004 is based on a careful review of the last one and a thorough analysis of performance data. The targets set in the last plan have been met in key areas and the new ones are equally rigorous and achievable. The reduction of exclusions has been a major concern to the LEA, particularly since 1998 when levels were particularly high. Since then, permanent exclusions in secondary schools have fallen sharply and are now in line with the national averages and those for similar LEAs. Both the LEA's figures and those derived by the DfEE from school submissions show that the level in primary schools remains above that found nationally and in similar LEAs. Appropriately, the LEA has identified those schools and areas where the risk of exclusion is greatest and concentrates its efforts in them.

154. The support for behaviour generally is good. The behaviour support team is a small and busy group whose work is held in high regard, be it in training staff, advice to teachers or support for individuals. Very good behaviour guidance is circulated to schools which includes thorough procedures regarding pastoral support programmes, the prevention and management of exclusion. Schools are well supported in preparing their own policies, including those for dealing with bullying. The team's structures are still quite new and it has listened to schools in the way it

has developed them. Concerns that the referral system was burdensome have been tackled and the service tries hard to respond quickly, particularly when there is a risk of exclusion. It allocates its time according to clear criteria and it initiates or participates in well-focused projects where there is greatest need. The education business partnership has been active in helping to develop good alternative provision for disaffected pupils in Year 11 which involves college, school and work experience. Sixty pupils took part, of which 89 per cent have now stayed on into further education.

155. The great majority of schools are committed to the LEA's policies but a few are still too ready to find solutions by seeking placements for pupils outside of the school. There is more work to do in supporting all schools to play their role in making effective provision for disaffected pupils and pupils with behavioural problems. Placing pupils who have been excluded or with behavioural problems is a difficult task, and the LEA has acted with determination in ensuring that children are offered a school place with the minimum delay. The LEA has rightly limited casual admissions into Key Stage 4 of a secondary school which has serious weaknesses. However, the school visits revealed instances of discontent because some schools felt ill-placed to take on the extra burden; information about the pupil's educational needs was insufficient to make a proper assessment of how these can be met; or the reasons for placing the pupil at the school were not transparent. The impending transfer of responsibility for reintegration to the behaviour support team is an opportunity to rigorously review the procedures.

156. Comments by schools suggest that the behaviour support service is overstretched, both in primary schools, where its main work lies, and secondary schools, where it has only a time allocation for training. There are, however, a number of services, such as the youth service and the education business partnership, which have the expertise and potential to provide support and advise schools on appropriate curricular opportunities for disaffected pupils. In view of the frequent concerns of schools about managing pupils with behavioural difficulties, there is scope for discussions with schools about ways of making more support available to schools who wish to purchase it. There is much to be learned from monitoring the secondary schools' use of delegated funding for behaviour support and disseminating the good practice more widely.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

157. The LEA's policy for health and safety sets out responsibilities very clearly, and there is a comprehensive set of very useful guidance on a range of situations which schools might encounter. Governors are well supported in their responsibility for risk assessment. Training and conferences are provided regularly for designated teachers in each school and the take-up of training is carefully monitored.

158. The child protection procedures handbook for schools is equally thorough. The area child protection committee, which includes the principal education welfare officer as the designated LEA officer, is proactive in promoting better interagency working by practical means, such as common data and communications systems. The health service and the police make effective contributions to health, personal and social education.

159. In practice most schools visited had found the liaison with social service effective in urgent situations, although still report inadequacies which they would wish to see improved. Mostly schools are concerned about the lack of consistency in the approach and feedback from area social work teams. Helplines worked reasonably well, although, because of shortages of social workers, part time provision was only available in one area. Schools do not have named social workers with whom they can discuss the general difficulties which emerge from joint working arrangements. In extremis, there is an alternative route schools can use to a social worker through the principal education welfare officer. Not all schools are entirely clear about this arrangement, despite the guidance issued.

Children in public care

160. Support for raising the attainment of pupils in public care is satisfactory and has the capacity to improve rapidly. The LEA's response to the Government's policy for raising the attainment of children in public care is appropriate and thorough, although implementation has begun later than in many LEAs but it is now being pursued with vigour. Suitable performance indicators have been established under the education protects management action plan. A good Education Protects handbook has been written for the use of all the partners, and initial training has taken place for LEA and social service personnel, health workers and care workers.

161. Members have recognised the council's responsibilities as corporate parent and have embarked on a scrutiny of provision and educational standards as part of the self-generated work programme of the select committee. A looked-after children team has been established within the education service, but working closely with social services, in particular. The team is well staffed with five advisory teachers, all experienced teachers who are well placed to maintain the educational focus. The new staff have established links with all the children's homes and care facilities. Homework clubs are already set up in some homes. A ceremony has recently taken place celebrating a variety of achievements by children in public care.

162. Monitoring of the attainment of children in public care has been initiated. There is a complete database of all the children in the care of the county and also, though in different databases at present, of their educational attainments. The information has been compared and a full analysis made of attainments at the end of each Key Stage. Plans for a unified database are in place and should be realised during this school year.

163. A significant proportion (4.4 per cent) of the LEA's children in public care are unaccompanied asylum seekers. In co-operation with the social services, the pupils are meticulously tracked from entry and the LEA's looked-after children team and the service to ethnic minority pupils, which supports English as an additional language, are notified immediately.

164. Schools have received documentary guidance and have mostly designated a teacher for the area, as required. The school visits show that there has otherwise been little impact in schools so far and this is likely to remain the case until the teachers have benefited from the training programme. It is intended that personal education plans should be written for priority pupils, new arrivals and pupils with

special needs by April and for all the children by the end of the summer term. In view of the late start, this will present a severe challenge.

Ethnic minority children

165. Support for pupils of ethnic minority heritage is good. Both the service to ethnic minority pupils and the Traveller education service are very effective services, which are highly regarded by schools. The ethnic minority and Traveller grant action plan springs from the EDP Priority five which includes support for pupils learning English as an additional language and Travellers. It is a good plan, based on a detailed analysis of minority ethnic groups and their attainments. It sets challenging targets for each group. Funding has been devolved to the 20 schools where concentrations of English as an additional language pupils are greatest, mainly in Crawley. Wisely, the remainder of the funding is to be retained centrally in order to maintain a viable service to minority groups scattered across the county. Traveller education service funding is held centrally for the same reason

166. All minority ethnic pupils are assessed for language competence, targets are set for each pupil and progress is reviewed annually in cooperation with the schools. Requests for help result in direct support to pupils by a teacher or assistant, staff training, advice or well tried resource materials. The Traveller education service has a sophisticated system for monitoring the movements of Traveller families and maintains close contact with them with the aid of its two assigned education welfare officers. Its teachers and assistants work closely with schools, particularly the schools where pupils over-winter. There are examples of pupils achieving notable successes at both primary and secondary stages.

Very able and gifted pupils

167. Support for very able and gifted pupils is exemplary. The LEA has given consistent priority to meeting the needs of able, talented and gifted pupils over the years. Leadership in this field is exceptionally strong and imaginative; the co-ordinating adviser is well supported by the many contributions of members of the advisory and inspection service in their respective areas of expertise. In their evaluations, headteachers speak of important gains by pupils in motivation and enquiry skills. There are also telling and encouraging trends in test and examination results. For instance, in English and science at Key Stage 2, not only has the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 risen steadily but the margin of lead over national averages has also increased.

168. All schools are expected to appoint a very able pupils co-ordinator (VAPCO) whose role it is to maintain a register of able pupils, with details of their abilities and aptitudes, and to ensure that individual targets are set for them. There is extensive in-service training for VAPCOs and other members of staff which is of good quality. There is strong emphasis on making provision within the class setting so that there are benefits to all pupils in the able spectrum, as well as the most gifted. Progress is reviewed regularly. The West Sussex school self-review procedures includes a section which is devoted to able pupils.

169. In addition, there is a wide-ranging programme of enrichment courses at weekends and during holidays for which schools may nominate pupils. The

contributions are from outside experts as well as LEA staff. The courses would not be possible in most schools, though schools are expected to follow them up in class where appropriate. The programme is heavily subscribed and schools, mostly secondary, and families of schools mount additional ones where they have the capacity. The LEA keeps an exhaustive database on schools' participation in staff training and enrichment courses and this forms part of its data for the monitoring of schools.

Measures to combat racism

170. Measures to combat racism in schools are satisfactory. West Sussex has made an appropriate response to the report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. The council has an equal opportunities policy embracing all services and the education service has produced a good strategy for implementation in schools. It requires that schools should set out their expectations clearly in a formal policy, offer guidance to pupils and staff and record all racist incidents. A working group has been set up to study minority ethnic achievement and implement the Commission for Racial Equality's standards over the next three years.

171. Guidance was issued to schools last term, later than in many LEAs, but the school visits produced examples of an immediate impact. For instance, one school, to its surprise, had already notified eleven incidents. It had found that this afforded a very useful opportunity to discuss issues with pupils, parents and staff and is of the opinion that the procedures can make a real difference to attitudes. It now remains for the LEA to monitor practice in schools over a longer period and respond in line with the needs which are identified.

Promoting social inclusion

172. There is no shortage of activity and no questioning the commitment of the LEA, its partners and the various interagency bodies which initiate projects. This LEA does not qualify for many of the national projects to promote social inclusion which foster integrated service approaches based on the school, but which have wider implications for parents and the community. The LEA makes use of the funding when it can, for instance through the single regeneration budget for wider community work in Littlehampton. The LEA prepared a bid for an Education Action Zone based in Littlehampton; however, through no fault of the LEA, the bid did not come to fruition.

173. The routine work of services which support pupils of minority ethnic heritage, Travellers, behaviour, attendance and the education for children who have no school place, provide at least satisfactory support to implementing the EDP Priority five, which has a strong regard to social disadvantage. In addition, there are a number of special, usually collaborative, projects in areas of particular need, such as the Crawley school counselling initiative, led by the Primary Care Trust, and the Worthing social inclusion project. The projects have potential, and some, such as the Crawley learning improvement project, look promising but are still at the planning stage.

174. Both the youth service, which was judged very good in a recent OFSTED inspection, and the newly formed learning partnerships, are using data in an

exemplary way to identify the small local areas, and even streets, where participation in educational activities is low and matching resources to these needs. Moreover there is great enthusiasm for setting up standing interagency bodies at a local level for the purpose of joint working on matters of health, social education and welfare. The various services, however, need a better mutual understanding of how the aspects of their work fit together and a clearer map of which client groups the various services and projects support, so that the work can be targeted effectively. While there is considerable activity, the approaches need better coordination to provide a clear understanding of needs with a coordinated infrastructure of supporting services.

Recommendations

In order to ensure the organisation of schooling supports schools' efforts to raise standards:

- review the different ages of admission and school transfer and make plans in the long term to develop a consistent system.

In order to improve access to educational opportunities for all pupils:

- establish firm and transparent criteria for the placement of disaffected and excluded pupils in school and develop better procedures to support the reintegration;
- monitor secondary schools' use of delegated funding for behaviour and disseminate the good practice. If there is a demand, increase the behaviour expertise available for schools to purchase from their delegated budgets, taking account of all that is available in the behaviour support team, pupil referral units, the youth service, the educational psychology service, projects supported by the education business partnership and in schools;
- give priority to the implementation in schools of the action plan for children in public care;
- monitor the pattern of racist incidents in school and develop supportive responses to schools in the light of the findings, for instance by providing training on how to tackle incidents and providing support for victims and perpetrators; and
- develop a suitable co-ordinating structure which has the capacity to develop a unified approach to social inclusion at the local level.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to ensure Best Value for inspection and advisory services:

- systematically review and compare the costs and services available locally from other providers.

In order to clarify the procedures for supporting schools causing concern:

- define clearly in procedures the circumstances whereby the LEA may issue a warning letter or withdraw delegation from the schools.

In order to improve the pupils' standards and the use of information and communication technology in the curriculum:

- systematically monitor and evaluate schools' progress in implementing their ICT development plans, identify the schools where progress is too slow and ensure that the school has access to the support required to make improvement.

In order to improve the baseline standards of attainment for early years:

- further develop mechanisms for informing schools and reception teachers of the priorities and activities of the early years partnership; and
- ensure that early years providers and schools, particularly reception teachers, develop and implement effective procedures for progression and continuity on entry into the reception year of school and between the foundation stage and National Curriculum.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In order to increase the take-up of school meals by primary pupils:

- continue with recently initiated work to improve the quality and nutritional standard of the meals and promote the improvements with all parents and children; and
- review organisational arrangements to try to avoid identifying pupils who are entitled to free school meals.

In order to improve the liaison between schools and social workers:

- ensure that all schools are confident of lines of communication with social services; and
- provide more opportunities through training and seminars for teachers and social workers to discuss approaches to common issues, and develop a better understanding of respective priorities.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

In order to improve operation of statutory assessment and statementing procedures:

- establish a system for auditing objectively the administration of referrals for statementing;
- reduce the number of rejections by the panel by developing a shared understanding by both schools and the statementing panel of the criteria and explore other, less administrative, methods of managing and reducing schools' applications for assessment and statements;
- revise the constitution of the statement initiation and statement panel to include representation of schools and other interested bodies; and
- monitor carefully the sufficiency and consistency of the educational psychologists' contribution to statutory assessment, and, when required, act on the findings.

In order to improve the capacity of schools to manage Special Educational Needs:

- monitor the operation of the planning and review meetings (PARMs) and disseminate examples of efficient practice.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

In order to ensure the organisation of schooling supports schools' efforts to raise standards:

- review the different ages of admission and school transfer and make plans in the long term to develop a consistent system.

In order to improve access to educational opportunities for all pupils:

- establish firm and transparent criteria for the placement of disaffected and excluded pupils in school and develop better procedures to support the reintegration;
- monitor secondary schools' use of delegated funding for behaviour and disseminate the good practice. If there is a demand, increase the behaviour expertise available for schools to purchase from their delegated budgets, taking account of all that is available in the behaviour support team, pupil referral units, the youth service, the educational psychology service, projects supported by the education business partnership and in schools;
- give priority to the implementation in schools of the action plan for children in public care;
- monitor the pattern of racist incidents in school and develop supportive responses to schools in the light of the findings, for instance by providing training on how to tackle incidents, and providing support for victims and perpetrators; and
- develop a suitable co-ordinating structure which has the capacity to develop a unified approach to social inclusion at the local level.

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**Office for Standards in Education
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE**

Tel: 020 7421 6800

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**West Sussex LEA
County Hall
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West Sussex
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