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EAST 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 also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the local authority (LEA) on Best Value. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with LEA members, staff in the education department and in other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 192 schools. The response rate was 85 per cent.
3. The inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one infant school, two junior and ten primary schools. The inspection team also visited five secondary schools, two special schools and one pupil referral unit. Separate telephone conversations were held with the headteachers of one secondary and two primary schools. The visits ascertained the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in challenging and contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools within the LEA was also considered.

COMMENTARY

- 4 East Sussex was established in its current form at the time of local government re-organisation in April 1997, following the creation of Brighton and Hove as a separate unitary authority. The population figures in East Sussex, of just below half a million, are growing steadily. The highest densities of population are predominantly located in the medium sized coastal ports and seaside resorts in the south. Although there are a few areas of considerable economic advantage in the county there are others, particularly in the East of the county, that have marked levels of social and economic disadvantage.
- 5 The proportion of the population that is of school age is below average for England and Wales. Of the 197 schools maintained by the LEA, 27 are secondary, 156 are for primary aged pupils and 11 for pupils with special educational needs. There are also three pupil referral units. Within this provision eight schools are designated as Beacon schools and there are seven specialist colleges in the secondary sector. Standards in primary and secondary schools are sound but unremarkable. They have been at or near national averages for the past four years and pupils' attainment has improved during that time. Standards should be higher and the challenging targets set for 2002 complement the LEA's justified high aspirations for its pupils.
- 6 East Sussex was slow to adapt to the pace of change and the new roles of an LEA following the introduction of the Code of Practice for LEA/School Relations. The relatively gentle pace of the new council's early work in education has some remaining legacies evident in the recent implementation of new strategies in a significant number of services. In the past eighteen months initiatives have been more sharply focused and approached with a suitable sense of urgency. Consequently some of the improvements made are recent and their sustained impact is difficult to assess.
- 7 There are unusual contradictions in the LEA's relationships with its schools, as a result of recent national and local changes that have not been positively incorporated by some schools. Many headteachers and governors have a high regard for the work of the LEA and relationships are mainly positive. At the same time, there is a surprising degree of resistance from a significant proportion of schools to the changed emphasis for differentiated intervention and support. In addition, some headteachers have a dismissive attitude to the use of target-setting as a contributory factor in raising standards in their schools.
- 8 The Education Development Plan sets out a clearly structured series of activities for school improvement which have been effectively implemented and monitored over three years. Schools' involvement in the consultation and review of the Education Development Plan has resulted in a good level of understanding and commitment to the plan. Its implementation has been satisfactory, with particular strengths in aspects of the work in schools, with the exception of support for information and communication technology in the curriculum. Discussions and proposals for the second Education

Development Plan are underway with schools. Overall there are more strengths than weaknesses in the services to schools and the inspection team found significant progress in line with the LEAs strategies for school improvement.

- 9 Elected members provide clear and sound leadership for education. They have well established strengths in their scrutiny procedures that are robust in holding the education directorate to account for standards and quality in service provision. The director of education provides strong, effective leadership for change, both corporately and in the education directorate, and the management of services by senior officers is secure and consistent.
- 10 Overall, the LEA has given insufficient priority to implementing its strategies to promote equality and combat racism, although there are notable exceptions in the work with the children of asylum seekers, refugees and Travellers. The director and the lead member for education indicate a clear commitment to improvement in this regard. They recognise the need for stronger and more consistent cross-service leadership for equalities issues within the LEA and in schools.
- 11 East Sussex is a satisfactory and improving LEA where there are significant strengths and few areas of major weakness. Performance in the great majority of its functions is satisfactory and good in a few.

The authority exercises the following functions well:

- support for governors;
- policy and strategy for special educational needs;
- statutory provision for pupils with special educational needs;
- collaboration and partnership with a range of services and external agencies; and
- provision of personnel services to schools.

Areas where the authority fulfils its functions unsatisfactorily are:

- support for information and communication technology in the curriculum; and
- the effectiveness of measures to combat racism and promote equality.

- 12 East Sussex has in place satisfactory procedures for Best Value. Scrutiny is thorough and performance management systems are established and improving. Two key elements of the LEA's work are less secure. The first is the evaluation of the impact of school improvement services on LEA targets and improved standards for pupils. The second is the extent to which the LEA has managed to build the commitment, particularly in schools, to its policies, priorities and processes. The authority must consolidate the improvements already made by further developing schools' ability to be self-evaluating and autonomous. The director of education, senior staff and service managers demonstrate their leadership, energy and commitment to improvement.

Overall, the LEA strategies are sound or better and it has a secure capacity to address the recommendations in this report and improve further.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

- 13 East Sussex is an average sized county, established in its current form at the time of local government reorganisation in 1997. Just fewer than half a million people live in East Sussex and the population has increased by five per cent since 1991. Seventy five per cent of the population is located on the coastal strip and in the market towns. The percentage of children and young adults is below the average for England and Wales.
- 14 The county lies within the average range of national socio-economic indicators, but it has, within its communities, significantly contrasting levels of prosperity. Some areas, particularly in the east of the county, where an Education Action Zone was established in 2000, have marked social and economic disadvantage. Across the county as a whole wages are close to the lowest in the south east. There are no large employers; much of the economy is founded on low skills service industries and there is little demand for high level and technological expertise. Higher education qualifications are slightly above the national average and social class 1 and 2 data indicate that, in 1991, East Sussex was well above the national average. Among the school age population the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is close to 15 per cent, which is broadly in line with the national average
- 15 There are 27 secondary schools in the county, 13 of which have sixth forms. Of the 156 primary age schools 13 are infant, 11 junior and 132 primary schools. Nine of the secondary and eight of the primary schools have on site integrated provision for special educational needs. The county also has 11 special schools and three pupil referral units. The majority of schools are community schools and thirty per cent are denominational. Provision for the under fives is in infant and primary school nursery classes of which there are 23, including two Sure Start programmes. There is a large private and voluntary sector nursery provision in the county.
- 16 In primary schools, the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need is broadly in line with the national average, but the proportion of primary pupils in special schools is above the national figure. By contrast, in secondary schools, the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs is below the national average, and placements in special schools are slightly above the national percentage. The proportion of minority ethnic pupils in all schools in East Sussex is two per cent, well below the national figure of 12 per cent.

Performance

- 17 Primary aged pupils in East Sussex achieve standards that are equal to the national average. In secondary schools at Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly in line with the national average. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades and those gaining one or more A* to G grades is in line with national averages whilst pupils' average point scores are above the national figure. At Key Stages 2 and 3, pupils' attainment is broadly in line with that in similar authorities, but Key Stage 1 standards in East Sussex are below those of similar authorities. Comparisons with similar authorities at Key Stage 4 show the results for five or more A* to C grades and the average points score to be in line with those authorities but below them for one or more A* to G results. The overall progress made by pupils between Key Stages 1 and 2 is below the national average, above the national level between Key Stages 2 and 3 and in line with it between Key Stage 3 and 4.
- 18 At Key Stage 1 pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is in line with the national average but below that of similar authorities. When compared with the national Key Stage 1 trends of improvement in the past three years, East Sussex has been below the national figure in reading, writing and mathematics. At Key Stages 2 and 3 standards in English, mathematics and science are in line both with the national figures and those of similar authorities. Improvements at Key Stage 2 in all three subjects have been in line with the national trend and above that of similar authorities. By Key Stage 3, recent improvement is below the national level in English and science but in line with the national trend for mathematics. Comparisons of improvement with similar authorities at Key Stage 3 puts East Sussex in line with the average in mathematics, but well below average in English and science.
- 19 In GCSE examinations, the proportions of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades and one or more A* to G grades are broadly in line with the national average. Average point scores are above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades as well as the average points score is in line with that of similar authorities, but the proportion gaining one or more A* to G grades is below like LEAs. These results show a trend of improvement that is in line with the national average and above that of similar authorities in all three measures.
- 20 Twenty eight per cent of post-16 students in East Sussex are educated in LEA schools. The standards achieved by those taking two or more advanced courses are below the national average and in line with that of similar authorities.
- 21 OFSTED inspections of East Sussex schools indicate that the percentage of primary schools judged to be good or very good is at the national average. By contrast, in secondary schools, the proportion deemed to be good or very good is above the national average. Between the first and second inspections there have been significant improvements in the management and efficiency

of primary and secondary schools. The two schools in the county requiring special measures were removed from that category by OFSTED during the period of the inspection. Seven schools are identified as having serious weaknesses.

- 22 Attendance at primary and secondary schools is in line with the national average but below that of similar authorities. Unauthorised absences are also in line with the national figures in primary and secondary schools.
- 23 Permanent exclusion rates in primary schools have been reducing in the past three years from a position where they had fluctuated above and below the national average. Boys predominate in these primary exclusion numbers as is the case nationally. In secondary schools, permanent exclusion rates have been reducing since 1998; they are now broadly in line with the national average.

Funding

- 24 In 2001/2002, council spending is over 106 per cent of its Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), a similar level to 2000/2001. Within this overall expenditure, the budget for education in 2001/2002 is just over 100 per cent of SSA, as it has been for the last four years.
- 25 The council's SSA has increased by 6.3 per cent in 2001/2002, the fourth highest increase of all county councils. Its primary and secondary education SSA per pupil is very close to the national average. The pattern of expenditure on education shows some variance between its constituent sub blocks: that for primary and the 11-15 age group is slightly below 100 per cent, and that for under-fives and post-16 well over, at 125 per cent and 114 per cent respectively.
- 26 Individual school budgets per pupil in 2000/2001 were comparatively more favourable for secondary than primary schools, though in each case higher than the statistical neighbours to East Sussex. The council funded £1,733 per primary pupil as opposed to an average £1,714 for statistical neighbours, £1,739 in counties and £1,869 in England. The equivalent secondary figures were £2,516 East Sussex, £2,319 statistical neighbours, £2,376 counties and £2,559 England.
- 27 The level of delegation to schools in 2000/2001 was 82 per cent, below the average for the three comparators: 82.4 per cent statistical neighbours, 83.5 per cent counties and 83.8 per cent England. East Sussex has so far met all the Secretary of State's targets for spending, including passing on the full increase in education SSA to the budget and raising the percentage delegation to schools in 2001/2002 to 86.9 per cent, above the target of 85 per cent.
- 28 Within its retained funding, expenditure on both statutory and regulatory duties had been rightly reduced but remained higher than average in 2000/2001. In 2001/2002 expenditure has been further reduced to very close

to the counties average. The total expenditure on agency placements for special education is more than double the average of other LEAs.

- 29 The council has committed between £11.6 million and £15.8 million to education capital expenditure in each of the last five years and has successfully established procedures to maximise external funding, so that in 2001/2002 £1.7 million has been so far attracted with a further £2.9 million awaiting approval.
- 30 Primary school balances at the end of 2000/2001 were over five per cent of the total delegated budget compared with over two per cent in secondary and almost six per cent in special schools.

Council structure

- 31 The council comprises 24 Conservatives, 13 Liberal Democrats and seven Labour members. There is a clear cross-party commitment to education exemplified by the council's decision, in recent years, to pass on to schools the full value of the SSA for education.
- 32 An early decision for modernisation was made in 1999 when a two party cabinet was established for which functions and responsibilities are clearly defined. Following the election in June 2001 there is now single party control. In addition, cross-service scrutiny committees were replaced by four single service scrutiny committees covering education, social services and health, community services, and transport and environment. At the same time, the audit and Best Value scrutiny committee was established to handle all Best Value reviews prior to cabinet consideration and decisions. Despite this structural change there is no indication that the successful cross service work for education will be curtailed. The chief executive and elected members are firmly committed to multi-agency provision.

The Education Development Plan

- 33 The Education Development Plan (EDP) is satisfactory; it has strengths that outweigh weaknesses. It effectively covers national priorities and local issues. It has improved in detail and specificity through annual reviews and subsequent changes, following consultation with headteachers, governors and elected members. An early version of the plan failed to secure effectively planned intervention and support to some of the schools with difficulties. Nevertheless, over three years the implementation of priorities in the plan has been generally effective with more strengths than weaknesses. The LEA's outline proposal for the second EDP, which has been shared with headteachers, builds upon the current plan and appropriately continues the focus on raising standards in schools.
- 34 The priorities in the Education Development Plan are clear and cover:
- developing the self improving school;
 - improving attainment in literacy;

- improving attainment in numeracy;
- breadth and balance: securing curriculum entitlement for all;
- developing the use of information and communication technology to support school improvement; and
- promoting inclusion and raising standards of attainment for the lowest achievers.

35 The EDP statement for 2001/2002 is based upon a satisfactory audit of the current strengths and weaknesses. The LEA acknowledges the need to be more precise in its use of evidence about strengths and weakness in order to accurately target its challenge and intervention and disseminate good practice. The EDP indicates good operational links between priorities and no undue overlap. Responsibility for each activity is clear, as are broad time scales for completion. Success criteria have a reasonable balance between those that are measurable and those that are demonstrable, but their precision can be improved. Costings are limited to person days for core and traded services with no information on financial costs. Monitoring procedures are clear and well documented; they have influenced improvement of the plan over three years. Activities in the EDP are well linked to those in the Education Action Zone (EAZ) and operational work is effectively co-ordinated.

Recommendations

In order to improve the Education Development Plan and planning procedures overall:

- identify more precisely the needs of schools to enable more accurate targeting of work to raise standards, and evaluate the impact of the strategies used; and
- ensure that, in all cases, planning in the Education Development Plan, planning for education other than at school and for attendance, behaviour management and schools causing concern has:
 - specific and measurable success criteria;
 - clear timescales and milestones for monitoring progress; and
 - information on financial costs for core and traded services.

36 The LEA's Key Stage 2 targets for 2000 were exceeded in mathematics but not achieved in English. Unconfirmed results in 2001 show a drop in standards in both subjects. The targets for 2002 are challenging and made more so by these results. At Key Stage 4 in 2000, the average point score target was exceeded, that for the proportion of pupils gaining one or more GCSE A* to G grades was met, but the target for five or more A* to C grades was missed by a small margin. In the 2001 unconfirmed results, standards are the same as those in 2000. The targets for 2002 remain challenging, though realistic.

37 Headteachers and governors are well informed about the EDP and its monitoring and review procedures; overall they view the priorities as reasonable. However, there is surprising variability, particularly in primary schools, in the extent to which headteachers and governors accept the need for challenge and target setting to secure school improvement.

- 38 The support for literacy and numeracy has been effective, and the development of self improving schools has been well managed by the LEA. Progress has been good in the extension of provision for disaffected pupils; the most vulnerable pupils; isolated and minority groups; and those with special educational needs. The implementation of support for information and communication technology in the curriculum has weaknesses related to the capacity of the service to meet the needs of schools.
- 39 The priority for a broad and balanced curriculum includes extra-curricular activities; personal and social development; and opportunities for able and talented pupils, especially through music, the arts and sport. The standing advisory council for religious education contributes positively to multi-faith work in schools as well as personal and social development for citizenship. Good progress has been made with these initiatives.

The allocation of resources to priorities

- 40 The LEA's allocation of resources to priorities is satisfactory with some strengths and few areas of weakness. There is a well-established procedure for examining expenditure priorities. In 2001/2002 this has, in particular, resulted in the provision of additional revenue funding to support the capital programme and an increase in the contribution to the Standards Fund. An ongoing shift of resources from agency placements for special education is continuing.
- 41 The council has effective procedures in place to control revenue and capital budgets, but it recognises that it needs to improve its capacity for medium term financial planning. The established policy of protecting school budgets will be tested in the difficult financial climate to be faced in the immediate future, in a context when the council's general fund balances have fallen to below two per cent.
- 42 Though satisfied overall, schools have mixed views about the funding formula for primary and secondary schools and the adequacy of consultation. In recent years the formula has been much improved in terms of simplicity and transparency, in particular as a result of a major review conducted in time for implementation in 2000/2001. Effective arrangements have been established for regular consultation with a standing representative group. There is a greater variation between primary and secondary funding than in most LEAs, working to the benefit of secondary schools. It is regrettable that the consultation to revise the special schools funding formula did not result in changes for 2001/2002, given that some individual funding levels per pupil in special schools vary significantly from the norm in other LEAs.

Recommendation

In order to align pupil funding in special schools more closely to national averages:

- revise the special school funding formula for 2002/2003.

43 Corporate services charged to the education department are in part regulated by service level agreements and have been recently revised. However, the basis for charging is still not clear enough. The review of corporate costs, which has now been commissioned from the district auditor, although overdue, will provide an opportunity for proper revision. Good use is made of external funding to support local education priorities, both corporately and within the education department, though more could be done to advise schools on how they could individually access further external funding.

Recommendation

In order to clarify and make transparent corporate charges:

- implement any amendments to corporate charges agreed following the external review in time for 2002/2003.

Best Value

44 Arrangements for Best Value within the education service are satisfactory and improving. There are few areas of weakness. They operate in the context of an effective Best Value Performance Plan that sets out a clear, comprehensive perspective of the council's priorities and performance. The number of reviews to be conducted has been correctly reduced to enable a more thematic approach. Some of the particular messages of the inspection of the home-to-school transport review, set out in Appendix 2, will have more general implications for other reviews within the education department.

45 The education department is in the second year of a business planning model and has, this year, introduced alongside it a robust performance management framework which provides the basis for effective monitoring. There are clear links through this performance framework from individual appraisal to service and education business plans. Quarterly monitoring of business plans has been introduced at all levels and the September 2001 report for education indicates accurate analyses of the progress, or lack of it, with business plan targets. These plans are reviewed annually at directorate and corporate level. Overall, procedures for Best Value are satisfactorily established and they are well understood by staff. Home-to-school transport is the first Best Value review in education. It has shortcomings in the quality of the action plan and the use of targets and these factors are also found in the planning for a small number of activities in the Education Development Plan. Within the business-planning model a closer alignment of service and financial planning is needed,

this is recognised and will be introduced from 2002/2003. Although recently implemented, the Best Value procedures promise positive improvement.

- 46 Limited progress has been made in advising schools of their responsibilities for Best Value, this being reflected in particular during school visits.

Recommendations

In order to improve the implementation of Best Value:

- ensure that Best Value principles are used to underpin planning, development and evaluation throughout the department; and
- improve schools' understanding of their Best Value responsibilities.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

- 47 The support given to school improvement by LEA services is largely satisfactory and in some cases good. School improvement is a key priority for the council and is well supported by the strategy and services for special educational needs. Provision for the access of pupils to education is generally satisfactory and the LEA, with its partners, takes these responsibilities seriously. There are few significant shortcomings in the functions of the LEA in support of school improvement. The two exceptions are the support for information and communication and technology in the curriculum and the council and LEA strategies to support and promote equality for minority ethnic pupils and to counter racism.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

- 48 Over the last three years, the LEA's vision for, commitment to and practice in monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervention in schools has greatly improved. The LEA has met resistance from some primary schools in carrying out its new role in light of the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations. It has clearly explained and consulted on its strategies. Even so, communication with a significant minority of schools has not yet been successful and these schools are still confused about the LEA's new responsibilities. Overall, however, the LEA's approach is now satisfactory with some good features.
- 49 The LEA's capability in **monitoring** schools is underpinned by good quality data, but some advisers have not used the data effectively. This has resulted in inconsistency in their ability to **challenge** schools. Discussions during school visits identified some variability in the depth and rigour provided by contact advisers and staff changes that have been too frequent. The LEA is currently exploring a public private partnership approach to the school improvement service. It remains to be seen whether this will help overcome recent difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff.
- 50 The recent reorganisation of the school improvement service has meant a sharper understanding by school effectiveness advisers of their role in monitoring and challenging schools. In a significant number of schools visited, challenge by advisers had contributed to change of practice in either management or delivery of the curriculum. In a few cases, however, schools reported either that LEA attempts to challenge had been ineffective or that they were resented. Attempts have been made to differentiate the programme of monitoring and challenge in response to the needs of individual schools. At present, however, there is an over-reliance on adviser visits.

Recommendation

In order to provide consistent and differentiated challenge to schools:

- improve the rigour of monitoring and challenge by contact advisers and refine the plans for differentiating this work.

- 51 There is a strong commitment in the LEA to promoting school autonomy. Advisers have provided an effective training programme on school self-evaluation, and support is being strengthened for headteachers and other managers. The LEA has also adopted a range of **intervention** strategies using criteria related to weaknesses in school management and governance, the quality of teaching and overall standards. Previously the LEA relied too heavily on OFSTED inspections to either identify or confirm the need for intervention. The LEA's ability to identify and respond to need is now much sharper and many interventions have been both appropriate and effective.
- 52 **Support** for schools is satisfactory overall, with school effectiveness advisers spending most time supporting schools with the greatest needs. The LEA has only recently introduced a traded service approach to supporting school improvement through the creation of the school development team of advisers and consultants. A plan is in place to strengthen this part of the service through a link with an external provider. The team has introduced new ways of working with schools that have, as yet, had little impact.
- 53 The recent reorganisation of the school improvement service is being consolidated. Service plans are appropriate and deployment of staff reflects Education Development Plan priorities. The analysis of school training needs and tracking of the impact of training are, however, under-developed. Attempts are made to seek schools' views on the quality of support provided, but these have been limited. The performance management structure is sound and an appropriate programme of adviser development is in place. Quality assurance procedures have recently been enhanced and the induction of new advisers much improved; it is now good.
- 54 A detailed analysis has been carried out of service costs, including benchmarking against other LEAs. Expertise throughout the service is satisfactory, enhanced by the recent appointment of more primary headteachers as school effectiveness advisers. A significant minority of secondary headteachers commented that advisers lack experience of secondary headship. The LEA acknowledges this and has taken some steps to address the issue. The workload of advisers is allocated on a 'school-points' system and is appropriately monitored. Overall, the service provides satisfactory value for money.

Collection and analysis of data

- 55 The provision of data on school performance is good. The LEA's use of data to support schools in setting targets is satisfactory, but has not been consistent. Early efforts by the LEA to pinpoint deficiencies in schools' own

data and to challenge primary schools aroused some resentment. Schools rate the support for target setting highly. However, in six of the schools visited, discussions with the LEA on target setting were found to have been insufficiently challenging. Competence levels of schools in analysing performance data are still too variable.

- 56 The LEA provides a good range of data and the significant support for data analysis and target setting over the last two years has been successful in focusing schools' attention on under-performance. Good progress has been made in analysing individual pupil data overall and guidance on target setting has been good. An accredited baseline assessment scheme is in place and used in most primary schools. Overall, good progress has been made on tracking individual pupil performance and the provision of value added data. For those pupils excluded from school the collection and use of attainment data is at an early stage of development. By contrast, the LEA effectively uses such data on pupils in public care and Travellers. The tracking of minority ethnic pupil attainment is not yet comprehensive, but data systems are being developed in order to use up to date information from the national census. Transfer of data at points between schools is mostly well managed, although electronic data exchange is underdeveloped and this is a weakness.

Recommendations

In order to improve the use of performance data with schools:

- provide further training for contact advisers and school managers in analysing performance data;
- ensure that comprehensive data on pupil ethnicity is collected and implement systems for tracking the progress, attainment and target setting of minority ethnic pupils; and
- develop data systems for tracking the progress attainment and target-setting of those pupils who are educated otherwise than at school.

- 57 Individual school profiles have been developed so that performance can be compared to other LEA schools. These are helpful documents and the most recent examples include the opportunity for contact advisers to add a commentary that summarises and challenges a school's performance. There is still too much variability in advisers' analysis of data and the profiles are not yet being consistently used to inform the work of schools.

Support for literacy

- 58 Support for literacy in primary and special schools is satisfactory with good features and few areas of weakness. The implementation of the National Literacy Strategy has been well managed. Primary literacy consultants are well regarded by schools, training and advice has been of good quality and mostly well targeted and well received. In schools receiving intensive literacy support, data show that the standards have generally risen faster than the East Sussex average, particularly at Key Stage 1, and at Key Stage 2 in

schools with larger cohorts. In a few cases, however, intensive support has not been appropriately targeted. For example, in one case where the consultant had rightly targeted poor quality teaching but failed to address this as a whole school issue. In another, where support had focused on planning but had not been sufficiently diagnostic resulting in a lack of coherence, some teacher confusion and no impact on pupils' standards.

- 59 Monitoring the strategy in schools and communication between the literacy team and contact advisers have improved and there is now generally good collaboration in challenging and supporting schools where there is under-performance. There are good day-to-day links between LEA and Education Action Zone consultants.
- 60 The 2001 results at Key Stage 2 fell below those of 2000, and considerable improvement will be needed if the target for 2002 is to be achieved. The recent and appropriate LEA focus on writing has resulted in improved standards. However, the gender gap in standards of writing has not closed and there has been a slight falling back in overall reading standards. Some good support has been provided in literacy classes for asylum seekers, including direct language support for pupils of East European origin. Members of the ethnic minority support team have attended training on 'Grammar for Writing.'
- 61 Sharing of good practice between schools is sound, and the LEA provides some good supportive documentation. Lessons learnt from the 'raising boys achievement' project have been effectively disseminated through headteacher conferences and case study materials. Support for cluster groups, regular newsletters and a range of other conferences, have also supported literacy co-ordinators and teachers. A Beacon school has usefully contributed to a writing project specifically aimed at village schools.
- 62 Support for secondary schools is at an early stage, but satisfactory. Plans for supporting the national Key Stage 3 strategy are in place. Consultants and a strategy manager have been appointed and are providing good advice and support. Networking has been re-established and emphasis has been placed on disseminating lessons learnt from schools with successful strategies. Schools have generally responded well to training, with many following the LEA's advice to appoint senior teachers to lead literacy development across the curriculum. The progress of the Year 6 pupils who attended literacy summer schools is being tracked into Year 7.

Support for numeracy

- 63 Support for numeracy in primary and special schools is satisfactory with few weaknesses. The implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy has been well managed. The strategy manager is now allocated full-time to supporting numeracy and mathematics and this is already resulting in improved monitoring and evaluation. The numeracy consultants are generally well regarded and some schools report excellent support.

- 64 In a few cases, intensive support to schools has not been provided quickly enough, reflecting a previous weakness in LEA monitoring. In the main, however, schools receiving intensive support are appropriately identified from performance data. Data show that the overall standards in schools receiving intensive support have risen faster than both the national and LEA averages. Special schools have appropriately been included in the strategy from the outset.
- 65 Despite the above, the 2001 results at Key Stage 2 were below those in 2000, suggesting that the target for 2002 might not be achieved. During 2000/2001, support for primary schools has focused particularly on Years 3 and 4. While this may have had merit, it would appear that the resulting reduction in support for Years 5 and 6 might have been inappropriate. Consultants provide a wide range of training, but have not always differentiated support to meet the needs of individual schools. Leading mathematics teachers at two schools are preparing materials to help disseminate good practice. Cluster meetings are provided at least once a term and are well supported by the consultants. Links have been established with other LEA teams and the Education Action Zone. Summer schools have been encouraged to share their experiences and family numeracy schemes have been offered in 17 schools.
- 66 Support for secondary schools is at an early stage and has begun well. It has appropriately focused on the launch of the Key Stage 3 strategy. The LEA is rightly concentrating on raising standards and improving curriculum links, continuity and progression. Training has been aimed at improving planning and developing the three-part lesson. Key Stage 3 conferences were mostly well received, and most secondary school staff have observed numeracy lessons in primary schools. A high percentage of secondary schools are adopting the National Numeracy Strategy Year 7 framework, with good use being made of bridging units. A conference on transition was well attended. Support group meetings for secondary schools have been re-introduced, although in one area the response from schools has been poor.

Support for information and communication technology

- 67 The LEA's support for information and communication technology (ICT) in the curriculum has some good features, but is unsatisfactory overall. The LEA has recently made good progress in making up some lost ground, and has managed national initiatives reasonably well. However, inconsistent and sometimes conflicting advice, shortfalls in capacity to meet schools' needs and a lack of detailed knowledge on pupils' competence levels, are all-important weaknesses.

Recommendation

In order to ensure appropriate information and communication technology support:

- establish comprehensive data on pupil attainment in information and communication technology and develop a more systematic means of monitoring progress; and
- provide greater consistency in curriculum advice and develop procedures for evaluating its impact.

- 68 Some progress has been made with the provision for ICT in schools. The pupil/computer ratio has steadily been improving, and the LEA is committed to meeting the 2004 Department for Education and Skills targets. The LEA's 'portables for teachers' scheme has already equipped over 30 per cent of teachers with laptops, with a target of 60 per cent by 2004 and teacher skills are reported to be improving. The 2001/2004 LEA strategy has appropriate aims and recognises the importance of Best Value principles. An ICT strategy group, including headteacher representation, is currently being reformed. The proportion of schools with ICT as a key issue identified in OFSTED inspections has reduced. The LEA has clear and appropriate performance targets for ICT in 2002.
- 69 The LEA has managed the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) and New Opportunities Funds satisfactorily. Having consulted with schools, the LEA's approach to NGfL prioritised support to primary schools was based on improving infrastructure and connectivity and a corporate approach to cabling. This has greatly improved the potential for ICT development in the schools, although progress has been impeded in some small schools by a lack of hardware. The learning schools programme has been successful in developing teachers' skills and confidence, mostly well supported by the part-time teacher associate advisers.
- 70 The LEA's knowledge of pupil capability in its schools is limited, having relied almost entirely on the outcomes of OFSTED reports, and only recently, on the teacher assessment data from schools. Some advice on curricular, technical and financial issues has been good, but this has been accompanied by inconsistent and conflicting messages from different staff. Schools also reported delays in the time taken for LEA responses to requests for support. Notes of visits to schools provide insufficient detail on action points and timings. A combination of seminars, workshops and the LEA web-site have been used to disseminate examples of good practice between schools, but with only limited effect. Monitoring of practice in schools is weak. At least two schools visited had made very little progress in delivering ICT, yet had received no support. Several schools are also unable to provide the full National Curriculum due to gaps in equipment or expertise.

Support for schools causing concern

- 71 Support for schools causing concern has improved over the last year and is now satisfactory with some good features and few major weaknesses. There are no longer any schools identified by OFSTED as requiring special measures, and the number of schools with serious weaknesses is low. This area of work has been a strength. The LEA's record in making decisive interventions to address weaknesses once they have been identified is good. Visits to schools found that prior to 2000, LEA support had been too little, too late and lacking in rigour. Support had been patchy and its impact had not been evaluated. Over the last 18 months, however, support has been more consistent and effective, with the average time taken to remove a school from special measures now well under two years.
- 72 Improved data analysis and sharper monitoring procedures have greatly enhanced the LEA's capacity to identify schools with difficulties at an early stage. Once schools have been identified and actions have been taken, monitoring of progress by both senior officers and elected members has been good.
- 73 The LEA divides schools causing concern into four categories. Although the categorisation is clear and correctly focuses on weaknesses in leadership and management; poor teaching; and pupil underachievement, there has been some reluctance among primary schools to being categorised in this way. Schools in each category are allocated a notional entitlement to advisory support and additional resources. However, the system lacks transparency. Few headteachers who were aware of their school's entitlement could explain the rationale behind the system, or understood how it would support improvement. The LEA is committed to reducing the proportion of schools causing concern and is rightly keen to encourage schools towards greater autonomy. Elected members on the standards panel receive progress reports on schools from advisers. In at least three schools the headteacher and/or the chair of governors would have been willing to discuss progress with members had they been invited to do so.

Recommendations

In order to clarify resources and sharpen the scrutiny of schools causing concern:

- make more transparent for schools their entitlement to additional resources as a school causing concern; and
- enhance school support plans by including clear milestones with timescales against which progress can be measured. Clarify the criteria by which a school will no longer cause concern.

- 74 In the past year, the LEA has improved its support for schools in difficulty and it is now mostly well co-ordinated. Support plans have steadily improved. However, milestones by which progress towards autonomy can be measured have rarely been made explicit. Support groups are in place and these effectively help the LEA to guide headteachers and governors, and provide challenge for further improvement. Suitably, this approach is used in category

C schools, deemed by the LEA to be at risk of serious weaknesses. Monitoring information is used well to help other schools facing similar concerns. Headteachers are unclear about the criteria by which a school is deemed no longer to be a cause for concern.

- 75 Major intervention in struggling schools has included a range of strategies, each of which has brought success. The LEA has applied effective pressure to remove weak teachers and senior staff. Challenging targets have been set for improvements in teaching, management and governance. Appropriate and targeted training has been provided for teachers and governors. The secondment of high-calibre teachers has contributed to improving the quality of teaching. Mentors and additional governors and the withdrawal of delegated powers have been used appropriately.
- 76 In a minority of cases, the LEA's support for schools in difficulties has been extensive, but has not been precisely targeted and has lacked the necessary intensity to be effective in raising standards.

Support for governors

- 77 Support for governors is good. The governor services team is very well managed and its support is having a positive impact on the strategic management of schools. High levels of subscription to the service level agreement and the degree of satisfaction found during the inspection confirms the high regard the service is held by schools.
- 78 Governors are provided with good quality information through briefing papers and newsletters, a well-regarded help-line, a comprehensive training programme and a developing website. These services support governors effectively and equip them to evaluate the work of their schools without undue reliance on the LEA.
- 79 A wide range of training opportunities for new and experienced governors is offered, including tailor-made courses based on individual school needs. The programme includes a suitable balance of administrative, management and school improvement courses. A small governor team of associate trainers, all of whom are current and experienced members of governing bodies, assists in the delivery of the training programme. In almost all schools visited, the training provided was found to have been helpful and supportive. Some training is poorly attended.
- 80 The LEA works hard to ensure that communication and liaison between schools, governor services and contact advisers are secure. Notes of adviser visits are normally circulated to chairs of governors ensuring that they are kept up to date about matters relating to standards and school effectiveness. The decision to locate governor services within the school improvement service has contributed to better co-ordination, particularly for those schools in need of improvement.

- 81 Governor vacancies are monitored carefully and there is good support for governor recruitment. The LEA has information on potential additional governors, but there is no central register for use by the LEA when applying its statutory powers of intervention. Where they have been appointed, additional governors have usually been very effective in helping stabilise governing bodies. Contact advisers also provide good support to governing bodies in schools causing concern. The LEA has no strategy to redress the under-representation of minority ethnic groups on governing bodies.

Support for school management

- 82 Support for senior and middle managers in schools is satisfactory; it has more strengths than weaknesses. Evidence from recent OFSTED inspections indicates that the quality of leadership and management in most schools is good. The LEA is aware of the areas needing improvement and has developed sound strategies for addressing them.
- 83 Support for the development of school self-evaluation is effective. Schools also have access to a considerable range of management training activities and regard the quality of development opportunities as at least satisfactory and sometimes good. A strategic and co-ordinated approach to management development is only just evolving, and a draft strategy for continuing professional development has only recently been published.

Recommendation

In order to offer a comprehensive continuum of professional development for staff:

- further refine proposals for training in the leadership and management skills required for school improvement.

- 84 The LEA actively promotes the national programmes for serving and aspiring headteachers and take-up has been good. It also supports networks for headteachers and deputy headteachers, by facilitating and negotiating programmes of training and development. The good small schools' network, which is self-managing, is also supported by an adviser. The acting senior secondary adviser has been working with headteachers to develop action research opportunities in collaboration with a local university. Induction and advice for newly appointed and acting headteachers is satisfactory. Courses for middle managers are good, providing opportunities to develop an appropriate range of leadership and management skills.
- 85 Schools are offered a wide range of general authority-wide and cluster-based in-service courses. These are available as a mix of core activities and options provided by the school development team. Schools visited reported that provision was of generally good quality, even though there is variability in the subject expertise of the advisers and consultants. In-school support is increasingly tailored to individual school needs and is steadily becoming more

effective. Only limited use is made of brokerage arrangements involving other agencies.

- 86 A variety of appropriate methods are used to disseminate good practice and many of these are effective, but overall the approach is not systematic. This is recognised as a development item in the proposals for the second Education Development Plan. Good use is made of headteacher conferences and briefings. A useful telephone help-line has just been set up for advice and guidance to headteachers.
- 87 Support for newly qualified teachers is well organised and effective. New teachers have access to a wide range of activities to complement school-based induction programmes and training for mentors is helpful and supportive. The progress of newly qualified teachers is monitored efficiently by advisers. The LEA has been proactive in its policy for attracting and retaining teachers. The strategies have been effective, all schools had satisfactory cover arrangements for teacher vacancies in September 2001, although in some subjects the field was very narrow.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

- 88 Corporate planning as it relates to educational aims and priorities is satisfactory with few major weaknesses. The plans of the council and the LEA are founded on effective cross service operations. The Best Value Performance Plan, through its priority for the learning county, is well matched to the plans of the education directorate. The Education Development Plan and the education business plan show a good level of alignment, as does the latter with the Best Value Performance Plan. Additional statutory plans for behaviour support, early years and childcare development and the Quality Protects management action plan are similarly matched to the Education Development Plan whilst the plan for minority ethnic achievement is less well aligned to it. The director of education provides strong strategic leadership to cross directorate operations. There is a range of good examples of strategic cross agency activities in education with social services, health, youth services and community and family provision.
- 89 Elected members take an appropriate and strategic role, they provide effective leadership to education and to the decisions and strategies for implementing the council's plans. They receive clear, well-informed and timely advice from officers with an outline of suitable options for decisions. Elected members are involved in education consultative groups and attend annual conferences and strategic planning days with headteachers and governors. Information on the business and decisions of the cabinet go to schools as do cabinet minutes. Nevertheless, a significant minority of schools report that they have little or no clarity on the strategic direction and leadership given by the council and the chief executive.
- 90 The LEA has secure systems in place for Best Value reviews of education developed through the well-established scrutiny reviews. The education scrutiny committee has, to date, been involved with cross service best value reviews that include education services, for example, home to school transport. The committee uses scrutiny reviews and 'call in' reports to examine issues in education as interim monitoring procedures within the appropriate five-year plan for Best Value reviews. Members are sensibly aware that these procedures must remain manageable to ensure an efficient education agenda. The accountability of senior officers through, performance management, is secure, and councillors additionally monitor the performance of the directorate and schools through the improving rigour of the standards panel.
- 91 The director of education and senior managers provide clear leadership that has many strengths. They have a strong commitment to school improvement and social inclusion that permeates the work of the directorate. They have effectively managed considerable change, development and improvement in LEA structures and services in the past eighteen months in order to implement the Code of Practice for LEA/School Relations. These changes are

mainly well planned, are at various stages of development and strongly indicate that the LEA is making progress in the right direction. As yet, the LEA has not sufficiently built the commitment to these plans and changes in some schools. Monitoring and review of the work of the directorate are thorough and influence change. However, evaluation, in particular of the impact of the actions for school improvement, is not consistently robust. Senior officers respond positively to initiatives and actively seek strategies to ensure improvement and higher standards. Consultation and decision-making with representatives of schools is a strong feature of the LEA, and in the majority of circumstances the relationships with schools are positive. There is a sound approach to using schools' natural networks for the dissemination of good practice, but it lacks an agreed framework that can use the evidence of such practice to its full.

Recommendations

In order to further improve the implementation of corporate and directorate plans and build schools' commitment to them:

- develop, through headteacher steering groups, a fuller understanding of the Code of Practice for LEA/School Relations and its implications, and, the objectives and expectations of the council's plans for education; and
- develop with schools an agreed framework for sharing good practice.

92 Performance management is thorough and includes staff supervision and monitoring, in line with corporate procedures. Staff have individual targets linked to the service plan. The outcome indicators of the directorate business plan are used both at six-weekly monitoring meetings and at the annual review with line managers.

Partnerships with other agencies and local government departments

93 The LEA has good strategies in place for developing partnerships both within and beyond the local authority. This work is a strength of the LEA. The director of education has established effective and productive networks and encouraged positive relationships for change. There are good links between LEA and Education Action Zone plans, between the respective staff who implement them and in the systems for monitoring and evaluating actions. Many of these partnership arrangements contribute positively to the Education Development Plan priorities for social inclusion and a broad, balanced curriculum.

94 LEA planning and operational work is effectively integrated with corporate processes. Structures are suitable with no undue overlap. Successful Sure Start programmes for early years provision involving education, social services and health are being extended. Music projects, that include the work of the Rythmix Partnership, provide the chance for many pupils to extend their

learning and experience through instrumental, group and multi-cultural experiences, as well as in opera and orchestral work. A New Start initiative, developed in the Education Action Zone, offers curriculum opportunities at Hastings Further Education College for the most disaffected pupils at Key Stage 4. A related project for secondary age pupils offers careers support, particularly to pupils with special educational needs. This is soon to be extended to support pupils in more isolated rural communities. Three community learning centres are developing on line access for teachers and the local strategic partnerships within the county are to be the basis for multi-agency support to communities and schools.

- 95 Operational work is equally effective with agencies beyond the local authority. Local higher and further education institutions in Brighton, Hastings and Bexhill provide a range of accredited training for teachers and support staff. Through work with 'sport England' pupils have access to an extended range of activities and skills that has enabled East Sussex to have the highest number of schools nationally with the active sports mark. Children's services, health providers and the Education Action Zone are linking headteachers with local practitioners to develop nurture groups for young pupils and their families. The three education business partnerships have well established links with some schools and work-related projects for pupils are being extended. Strategic links with the learning skills council and Connexions are well established. Visits to schools and their response to the survey indicate that some operational links with social services and health providers are unsatisfactory.

Recommendation

In order to improve corporate planning:

- strengthen with schools and social services the use of the agreed protocols for proactive and joint work for pupils.

Management services

- 96 The LEA has made major improvements in the range of services offered to schools for 2001/2002 and its 'Services to schools' booklet has many good features. Good procedures have been established to ensure that the delivery of services is monitored, both collectively and individually. The overall quality of services is satisfactory, with a particular strength in personnel.
- 97 The LEA correctly recognised the need to revise its services to schools and, following the establishment of a traded services business unit and extensive consultation, has now provided much more choice of service options, revised prices based on actual costs, and reduced the length of contract period from three years to one. It also gives some guidance to schools on alternative suppliers of services. Plans are in hand to extend the brokerage function of the LEA. The documentation provided to schools is generally well presented and allows sufficient time for schools to make informed choices. The presentation of services could be improved further by establishing a common

format that clearly sets out both traded services and, separately, elements of services which are centrally funded.

- 98 The **personnel** service is good. All schools buy back at least some part of the service, and have done so since delegation in 1994. The personnel handbook, at present being revised, clearly sets out relevant policies. The service is strong in monitoring the success, within a time frame, of all its activities, ranging from absence management through to advice to schools on specific staffing issues. It plays a prominent role in promoting school improvement and associated governor training. It has also had oversight of the LEA's successful strategy for recruitment and retention of teachers, assisted by a teaching training agency grant. Contracts are issued efficiently, and effective arrangements are in place with a contracted out payroll service. The costs of the personnel service will reduce when a new personnel system is introduced.
- 99 **Financial services** provided to schools are satisfactory overall, though in both the school survey and visits, a large minority rated the services as good. Almost all schools buy back each delegated finance function. At present the director of corporate resources has direct responsibility for education finance, which offers support and advice to schools on all relevant financial issues and, in doing so, plays an active role in promoting school improvement.
- 100 The council has accepted the findings of a recent district audit report on how efficiently and effectively the LEA funds; monitors; regulates; and supports schools in the management of their budgets. In general, the report confirmed the service is responding positively to the challenges it is facing. However, it can do more by promoting medium term planning in schools, analysing budget patterns at school level, making more use of benchmarking information and improving financial and resource management training for heads.
- 101 The **internal audit** service now operates effectively and is moving more towards a risk-based approach to schools auditing. Both the financial service and internal audit will improve further as targets in the audit report are addressed.
- 102 **Information and communication technology administration** is satisfactory as confirmed by the school survey and visits. Current arrangements for the electronic exchange of information between the LEA and its schools are much less satisfactory.
- 103 The proposed developments for information and communication technology (ICT) in education in East Sussex are well set out in a revised ICT strategy document for 2001-2004. To underpin this and the previous strategy, support for curriculum and administrative networks have sensibly been organised into one team since 1999. The service, now offered to schools in a range of packages and bought back in some form by almost all, has responded to concerns about speed of response by establishing local technical support

teams in some areas. This has been generally, but not universally, successful.

- 104 Only recently has there been a stronger corporate lead on integrated ICT development within the council, this is now being pursued through a co-ordinated and integrated ICT infrastructure, designed to connect all schools to the East Sussex intranet by July 2002.
- 105 The school survey indicated that schools were unhappy about the quality of services for **building maintenance** and **catering**, while satisfied with **grounds maintenance** and **cleaning**. Visits to schools during the inspection suggested that the recent improvements made by the council were beginning to bear fruit. The establishment of a building maintenance technical support team to advise schools on securing approved contractors is understandably seen by schools as an improvement on the direct service offered by a contractor with whom the council has now negotiated part early contract release. A new catering contract has been let in 2001, at a reduced cost, and very early signs are that the minority of secondary schools and almost all primary schools involved in the contract are more satisfied with the service provided. A majority of schools subscribe to the council grounds maintenance contract whereas the council cleaning function is largely restricted to client advice.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Strategy

- 106 The LEA's vision and policy for special educational needs (SEN) and inclusion is good. It is firmly based on principles for, and the implementation of, the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. The strategy has been developed, in consultation with schools and elected members, over several years. Although schools express a concern about potentially insufficient resources, they mainly have a positive commitment to the principles of inclusion.
- 107 The LEA's intentions are defined in a set of good principles for all special provision in the county. These are supported by a detailed action plan covering pupil needs; staff training; and resource planning, which addresses site developments, changes in provision and funding to schools. These plans lack detailed information on medium term budget and resource implications. Fundamental to the strategy is a changing role and re-focus of the specialisms of special schools, the growth of specialist provision in mainstream schools and a reduction in the use of out-county placements. A two-phase programme is in place for some of these developments and changes on a number of sites are now in operation. A recent example is the establishment of resourced provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders in special and mainstream schools, an initiative that was well managed by the LEA.
- 108 Inclusion targets for 2003 include budget transfers into mainstream schools and reductions in the number of statements and special school and agency placements. In addition, the LEA has targets to have trained specialist teachers for literacy and behaviour management in schools, and a reduction in levels of exclusion and unauthorised absence. A detailed analysis of the related data in August 2001 indicates that there is gradual progress towards most of these targets and that the LEA is clear about further actions.
- 109 Officers and service managers provide good leadership and contribute to the inclusion strategy with energy and enthusiasm. They are aware, in detail, of each other's role and work in close co-operation. Senior staff offer sufficient and effective means by which schools and parents are informed about special educational needs policies and about specific proposals for change in schools' provision. However, schools vary in their awareness of the strategic plan and their role within it as well as the level of staff confidence and expertise, to embrace the changes in mainstream schools.

Statutory obligations

- 110 The LEA takes all reasonable steps to meet statutory requirements for special educational provision. It has an effective administrative system that processes statements within the suggested time limit in over 95 per cent of cases. A minority of statements is delayed by late provision of medical advice and the LEA is striving to influence the relevant bodies to improve the position.

Effective computerisation of statements and monitoring of annual reviews result in good administrative procedures. Statements are well written and form a sound basis for schools' planning to meet individual pupil needs. Schools' annual review reports have been weak because pupils' targets lacked measurable indicators of progress. The LEA is appropriately piloting an improved format and recognises both the need for training in schools and further revision of the format to make it fully effective.

- 111 A suitable range of strategies is in place to achieve the LEA objective to reduce the number of statements it maintains. These include the transfer of funding to mainstream schools, the provision of outreach support from special schools and specialist resource bases in mainstream schools and, in 20 targeted reception settings, a teaching package for use with children showing early signs of literacy problems. All of these are designed to support effective early intervention. There is some indication of a slowing down of demand for new statements, but as yet no overall reduction in the proportion of pupils with statements. In 2000/2001, eleven statements were discontinued for pupils who had made good progress with learning targets. In the light of the LEA-wide pilot scheme to develop data on attainment and progress for each pupil with special educational needs (SEN), evidence for the discontinuation of statements is strengthening for the future.
- 112 The LEA provides good support and guidance to parents. A special educational needs parents forum is established for information and consultation and two telephone help lines are available. Guidance leaflets are clear and concise giving information on annual reviews, the work of education psychologists, SEN funding changes, support for literacy and pre-school SEN. However, the general SEN guide for parents is uninspiring and not well matched to the LEA's developing strategy for inclusion. The information on the LEA website is well presented and can be used by parents to access LEA forms.

School improvement

- 113 Support for school improvement has strengths and few weaknesses. Officers and service providers are working effectively together to improve the capabilities and confidence of mainstream staff to meet pupils' special educational needs.
- 114 From April 2001, the budget for statements of special educational need has been delegated to schools. Consultation with headteachers and special needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) produced a matrix of needs for the allocation of resources using a banded funding system. Schools, and particularly SENCOs, understand this procedure well and, although it is recent, they recognise its value in providing greater clarity on resources and flexibility in the school provision. Headteachers and SENCOs have the professional development opportunity to participate in statement panel decisions through which its rigour and transparency is demonstrated.

Recommendation

In order to ensure effective use of special educational needs funding:

- clarify with schools the LEA procedures for monitoring the use of delegated budgets for special educational needs.

115 Regular SENCO meetings and newsletters keep schools informed of developments and disseminate good practice. A programme to enhance the competency of all schools in dealing with specific learning difficulties in literacy is well under way. School improvement is at the core of the LEA plan to provide data to support assessment and target setting for pupils with special educational needs, in all settings.

116 Documentation and visits to schools indicate that the special educational needs service provides good guidance to teachers. Support materials are thorough covering the Code of Practice, LEA procedures and advice on specific disorders. Training courses, school in-service days and staff development meetings provided by educational psychologists and support service staff are often highly praised. Schools value the service flexibility that allows teachers to receive individual guidance if needed. Support for pupils is also of high quality, both for learning and tutorial support, as is the work with pupils who are sensorily impaired.

117 Monitoring, though improving, is underdeveloped in two respects. Procedures for monitoring annual reviews and the use of the allocated resources are appropriately carried out on a sampling basis in schools but not understood by headteachers and SENCOs. LEA monitoring of the progress of, and target setting for pupils with special educational needs is not in place. Pilot work has begun to use 'P' scales and the National Curriculum developmental profile to introduce a tracking system from the foundation stage to Key Stage 4. The intention to develop this into a countywide data system is clear.

Recommendation

In order to improve monitoring in special educational needs:

- Continue to develop the assessment and target-setting procedures for special educational needs across the county to secure effective monitoring of pupil progress.

Value for money

118 Overall special educational needs (SEN) expenditure in East Sussex is in line with the national average. Although numbers of pupils placed in out of county special schools had dropped in January 2001, these costs are very high and still rising. The recently established SEN business unit has clear objectives with a core purpose to monitor and control the SEN budget. It offers advice to schools on delegated funding for statements, has in place procedures for a significant review of special schools' formula funding and the development of resource packages attached to specific SEN activities such as re-integration

programmes. Performance management procedures are in place to evaluate the work of services and schools are informally invited to give feedback. The service has robust methods for the review of annual plans and targets. Inspections of schools by OFSTED indicate that the progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory or better. Schools have a growing knowledge of the SEN budget and the provision has considerable strengths. The LEA has in place sound strategies for achieving its inclusion targets and progress towards these targets is incremental, but satisfactory. The service gives satisfactory value for money.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

- 119 East Sussex manages the supply of school places satisfactorily. The issues are complex, as reflected in the 17 planning areas into which the county is divided in the school organisation plan. Schools' perceptions of the LEA's performance, reflecting their individual circumstances, is very mixed, though satisfactory overall. The continued involvement of schools in the decision making processes, particularly where difficult school planning issues have to be faced, is essential.
- 120 The school organisation committee works effectively, though as yet it has faced no difficult issues. The current school organisation plan is much improved on those previously published in setting out future planning issues far more clearly and thoroughly. It is underpinned by good, accurate forecasting of the future statutory school age population.
- 121 The total of surplus places in primary and secondary schools is seven per cent and four per cent, respectively. The primary school population is set to decline by some five per cent by 2006 and, though many schools have pupils on roll above their building capacity, at present there are 15 primary schools with more than 25 per cent surplus places. With no action, this will increase to 25 schools by 2006. No specific proposals are put forward for any rationalisation of primary accommodation in the school organisation plan, and no strategies are yet developed with individual schools to meet the reduced demand for places.
- 122 In contrast, the secondary population continues to expand by a further six per cent by 2006 as part of a growth of over 18 per cent between 1996 and 2006. In the secondary sector the predominant issue is how to provide new places. At present six of the 27 secondary schools have more than five per cent of pupils above their current capacity, 12 of them have more than ten per cent. In the context of new housing development, the LEA has done what could be reasonably expected to provide secondary places. Over recent years it has committed all approved basic need funds to that end and has made £850,000 revenue funding available in 2001/2002 to assist the capital programme. There can be no certainty for the LEA about the source of full additional funding to meet the basic need. However, the unease experienced by already overcrowded secondary schools anticipating additional numbers is understandable when there can be no certainty about the source of funding for the additional secondary places required over the next few years.
- 123 The LEA's infant class size plan has been implemented successfully in 2001.

Admissions

- 124 The LEA's management of school admissions and appeals is satisfactory and improving, against a difficult background in some areas of the county of

limited school places. The school survey demonstrated above average satisfaction, as did school visits, though it is clear that there remain concerns, in particular, about the processes for admitting pupils into already overcrowded schools.

- 125 East Sussex was commendably quick to establish an admissions forum and it has successfully co-ordinated admissions procedures with relevant admissions authorities. The 20001/2002 admissions booklet is clear and well written and is much improved on that published for the previous year. Admissions criteria for community schools were, correctly, much simplified in 2000, following consultation. Over the last three years, about 95 per cent of first preferences for primary admissions have been met and over 92 per cent for secondary schools. The LEA has faced an increasing demand for in year casual admissions, 2688 in 2001/2002. Helpful protocols have been agreed with secondary schools in the east of the county and Eastbourne, where there are particular pressures.
- 126 The appeals system is administered well but the timetable has been too long and the intended abandonment of the local review stage is welcome. The number of appeals for normal school admission is low, especially for primary education: in 2001/2002, 18 for primary schools, two of which were upheld, and 107 for secondary schools, 32 being upheld. The problems created by casual admissions are exemplified by their resulting in 168 appeals in 2001/2002. Continued regular reviews of admissions and appeals arrangements will monitor and improve procedures that operate throughout the academic year.

Asset management

- 127 Asset management is satisfactory with strengths outweighing weaknesses. The LEA has a good record in securing capital investment to improve its building stock. It has approached the introduction of asset management planning methodically, and progress has been satisfactory. This progress is reflected in schools' increased satisfaction with the LEA's management of assets in the school survey and school visits. The LEA has the capacity to address many schools' continuing concerns about the management of building projects and landlord responsibility for schools maintenance.
- 128 Growth in the school population is reflected in the major expenditure of over £66 million committed to education buildings in the last four years. The LEA has been able to increase its resources by the effective use of additional funding. Thus, £4.8 million for New Deal for schools four was increased to £6.3 million, and current LEA building work on site shows good use of schools' delegated capital funding. Though there have been some minor organisational difficulties, the LEA can be justifiably pleased with the success of its private finance initiative scheme in Peacehaven, providing much needed building improvements and a new school. Given the pace of housing development in the county insufficient use has been made, through operating procedures with all district councils, of planning agreements with developers for education provision.

- 129 Contractual arrangements entered into by the council to provide external consultancy for most building design work have not been successful, and this is reflected in schools' views. Proposed arrangements to provide a more flexible and wider choice of procurement options are heading in the right direction.
- 130 Asset management planning has been thorough and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) timetables met. Appropriate consultation has taken place with a representative asset management plan (AMP) advisory group, albeit late in the day. DfES approval of the LEA's asset management plan was withheld until March 2001, though it was accepted that this was due to technical problems with the transmission of school condition data, rather than the plan itself. The total estimated cost of condition work in categories one to three of £35 million can be properly addressed by the local resources available. Individual school suitability information has been monitored by the LEA to provide consistency. Schools received a composite AMP tailored to the needs of their school in July 2001, too late in the day. However, now that information has been published, the LEA has an opportunity to build schools' confidence in the AMP process, and at the same time improve the quality of the technical support available to them.

Recommendation

In order to enhance school building resources:

- agree with all district councils specific procedures for planning agreements with developers to support education provision.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

- 131 The provision for education otherwise than at school gives sound value for money. It is satisfactory overall with strengths outweighing weaknesses. The three pupil referral units (PRUs) provide primary and secondary pupils with a curriculum that equates to 12 hours or more per week. There are well-conceived plans to increase the provision to 25 hours by September 2002.
- 132 The LEA has an appropriate policy to develop provision for pupils excluded because of behaviour in a way that encourages and supports mainstream schools to reduce the number of permanently excluded pupils. Capacity has already been improved in 2001 through provision of part time PRU facilities for primary pupils. In recent months, procedures have been established to speed up the access to places in the PRUs and to provide a more coherent, efficient and flexible response to schools needs. To this end, major organisational changes and expansion of the specialist support at Cuckmere House and New Horizons are taking place. These include a good strategy for outreach work with mainstream schools, supported re-integration into mainstream and part-time primary placements at the PRUs with associated school support. The latter is very recent but there are evident successes with outreach and re-integration programmes for pupils transferring from

permanent places in the PRUs, especially at Year 6. Nevertheless, the current strategy and planning lacks specific milestones regarding the delivery of the future provision and details on its cost effectiveness. (See recommendation in Section 1).

- 133 Pupil referral systems are adequate, but can be too protracted. The LEA acknowledges this and is introducing improvements. Work with individual pupils indicates that the curriculum is secure and teaching at least satisfactory. Provision is augmented for Key Stage 4 pupils by access to link courses, bridging courses and in-fill opportunities at colleges of further education together with a sound programme of access to vocational and work experience. Liaison with other services in support of excluded pupils is satisfactory overall.
- 134 Policies and procedures for reintegrating pupils into mainstream schools are reasonably clear, though they have lacked a proactive and strategic approach. Schools are generally supportive of the reintegration policy, but there are concerns regarding the amount of support the LEA provides. The area reintegration officers, though recently appointed, detail early successes with regard to the new strategies. Quality indicators for reintegration are not fully in place, but a 15-day referral target is already having an impact. The need to develop and track pupils over time has been identified by the LEA as a key requirement.
- 135 There is effective provision for pupils requiring home tuition, for sick children and for teenage mothers. Contact time sensitively responds to the needs of individual pupils, though there is insufficient emphasis on the progress made by individual pupils and the provision for subject specialist support. The LEA monitors the progress and whereabouts of pupils who are out of school. Curriculum overviews and lesson plans plus key stage tests and public examination results of home-educated pupils, including pregnant teenagers, are monitored. The LEA recognises the need to provide more detailed tracking of the performance of pupils educated otherwise than at school. (See recommendation in Section 2).

Attendance

- 136 The LEA's support for attendance is satisfactory; it has more strengths than weaknesses and gives satisfactory value for money. The strategy for improving attendance is clearly stated in key plans, particularly in the well-conceived behavioural support plan. Challenging targets for improving attendance and reducing unauthorised absence have been set, but the LEA recognises the need for more focused target-setting and response to trends in attendance. Procedures for monitoring and analysing data are being developed, but a more rigorous approach to data management is needed to inform strategy.
- 137 The education welfare service (EWS) is well led and valued by most schools. Increasingly resources are deployed where they will have most effect. Although there is little evidence of the service's impact on attendance targets,

it offers effective support and guidance to individual schools on attendance and related matters. Where the LEA adopts a strategic and proactive approach key improvements are demonstrated, but evaluation of the impact is insufficiently rigorous.

- 138 Levels of attendance and unauthorised absence are broadly in line with national figures in both primary and secondary phases. There has been a small decrease in unauthorised absence in secondary schools, but significant increases in primary schools. A reduction in the number of referrals to the EWS reflects the service's improved strategy towards schools' action plans and truancy sweeps. The use of legal powers is growing appropriately; prosecutions for irregular school attendance have increased substantially over the last year. Co-ordination and liaison with services for minority ethnic and Traveller pupils is adequate, but lacks a strategic framework.
- 139 The need to improve the attendance of specific groups, including pupils in public care and minority ethnic pupils, has been identified. The EWS increasingly targets its work in those schools with high or increasing levels of truancy. Supportive and effective strategies include anti-bullying projects, support for pupils at times of transition, particularly those who have behaviour/attendance difficulties, and personal advisers in rural communities. The EWS works with all schools and also targets extra support as a result of regular data analysis, for example, half-termly truancy triggers in secondary schools. Whilst a great deal of progress has been made through effective work in schools some headteachers do not understand the amount of targeted support, for example, from the 'locum' service. When schools work flexibly with the EWS service to establish individual service agreements there are positive outcomes for attendance.

Recommendation

In order to improve schools' understanding of attendance support:

- clarify with schools the deployment of targeted support for identified needs.

Behaviour support

- 140 Support to improve pupil behaviour is satisfactory. Strengths outweigh weaknesses and the value for money is sound. The LEA has been successful in sharply reducing permanent exclusions. They have reduced from 105 in 1998/99 to 72 in 1999/2000 and this reduction has been maintained in 2000/2001. The target for reducing fixed term exclusions is challenging. The fixed term exclusion rate is above the national figure for primary schools and broadly in line with the national figure for secondary schools.
- 141 The behavioural support plan is good. As a document it is concise, acts as a clear guide to the range of services and outlines preferred ways of working, including a multi-agency approach. Targets and guidance to schools are clear and so too are the responsibilities of the LEA. Achieving key targets is dependent on support to schools for early intervention and reintegration.

Schools are concerned over the level of support received to manage behaviour within schools. There has been limited evaluation of the strategies to encourage re-integration and to achieve the challenging targets for reduced exclusions. Plans for this work lack detailed milestones by which the LEA can identify progress.

- 142 Progress in meeting the targets for exclusion and re-integration is monitored and there are suitable plans to improve data management through the introduction of a new system in 2002. The system will assist the LEA in developing more focused strategies to improve the attainment of excluded pupils, and to extend and raise the quality of provision for pupils not reintegrated into schools. The LEA has rightly identified the need to gather more information on the numbers of pupils at risk of exclusion.

Recommendation

In order to effectively target actions and resources to reduce exclusions:

- ensure that improved data management systems on excluded pupils are used to identify and resource areas of greatest need.

- 143 The LEA has a proactive and strategic approach to behaviour support. There has been good training on behaviour management through the inclusion project for teachers and learning support staff. The behaviour support officer and two full-time area reintegration officers work with schools and young people prior to any decision to permanently exclude. Schools are generally supportive of the LEA policy for inclusion and welcome these new initiatives. Other support includes alternative curriculum opportunities, increasing in-school support and a new training programme for behaviour management. These developments are very recent and it is too early to say whether the improvements are sustainable and will have a secure impact on reintegration and improved behaviour support in schools. The success will depend on schools building upon their own skills, together with a strategy for disseminating good practice.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

- 144 The authority's arrangements for health and safety, welfare and child protection are satisfactory with strengths outweighing weaknesses. Reasonable steps are taken to discharge statutory duties for health and safety and child protection.
- 145 Policies, procedures and guidance on health and safety in schools are extremely well documented and well regarded by schools. There are useful instruments for conducting risk assessments and very good training for governors, school health and safety officers and other members of staff. However, attendance at training is not sufficiently monitored to ensure regular coverage and updates. Headteachers are well informed and regard health and safety as an integral part of their management systems.

- 146 A rolling programme of health and safety audits operates on a three-year cycle. The audit of schools is based on targeting those identified by OFSTED as having health and safety weaknesses and those with new headteachers. This is inadequate because it provides insufficient management data to identify inconsistent practice between schools and does not alert the LEA to the need for intervention and support. The LEA recognises this and is reviewing the criteria for prioritising audits.
- 147 The council's arrangements for child protection are good. The service contributes to the local child protection committee at an appropriate level and plays a full role in developing agreed procedures and multi-agency staff training. Child protection training is generally well attended by schools and attendance is monitored and cross-referenced to the designated teacher list, child protection referrals and OFSTED reports. This enables the LEA to target training for individual schools to supplement the three-year rolling programme. An up to date list of designated teachers is maintained. The follow up of non-attendance at training by individual schools is less secure.

Recommendation

In order to ensure sufficient training in schools:

- develop a secure system to monitor that all schools are adequately trained with regard to health and safety and child protection.

- 148 There are clear and effective procedures for monitoring children on the child protection register and for taking necessary action. Child protection procedures are circulated to all schools. The East Sussex web site provides very good guidance on the role of the education service and its legal duty to assist social services. There are however no protocols or information with regard to the working relationship between education and the social services and how the partnership can function more proactively. (See recommendation in Section 3).

Children in public care

- 149 Provision for pupils in public care is satisfactory with significant strengths and few areas of major weakness, it provides satisfactory value for money. Support for the 479 pupils in public care, 319 of whom are at school in East Sussex, is continuing to improve. The council has set appropriate targets that are monitored and correspond to targets prescribed in the Quality Protects objective four. The proportion of young people leaving care aged 16 or over with at least one GCSE exceeded the national target in 2000. Attainment at Key Stages 2 and 3 is still significantly lower than county and national figures and action is being taken to address this through the recruitment of pupil support staff.
- 150 The council actively takes corporate responsibility to promote the educational achievements as well as the pastoral support of the children in their care.

Activities are well co-ordinated across key strategic plans. Education and social services have agreed procedures for sharing information, issuing guidance to schools outlining respective responsibilities and clarifying access to support services. Joint working at a strategic level is increasingly effective. The majority of schools regard the partnership at the operational level as poor and have very little knowledge of joint work. This is recognised as a high priority by the LEA. (See recommendation in Section 3).

- 151 Monitoring is thorough and data is analysed on changes in placement, exclusion, attendance and attainment. Schools receive information on changes of placement, but are unclear about the pupil monitoring process. The inclusion strategic management team and the adviser for pupils in public care analyse relevant data and activities and provide progress reports against targets. Each school has a designated teacher to support pupils in public care and pupil progress is evaluated on the basis of attendance and attainment. An appropriate appointment of a support worker has recently been made to monitor the curriculum and attainment of pupils in public care in targeted schools. There is very clear guidance for personal education plans. The LEA is not convinced that every child has one, but action to ensure this is clear. Data on pupils in public care is satisfactory, but systems for its management and effective use are underdeveloped.

Gifted and talented children

- 152 The provision for gifted and talented children is satisfactory with considerable strengths and few areas of weakness. Following a scrutiny review in 1999, the LEA was innovative in its commitment to providing for gifted and talented pupils.
- 153 There is a clear Education Development Plan priority to develop excellence and to challenge and support schools in relation to the most able. A wide range of opportunities for pupils is being organised by the LEA or in partnership with other LEAs, the Education Action Zone and the independent sector. These include master classes, annual awards and presentations, showcase events, children's university, science link courses, modern languages projects and specialist sports colleges' support. The out of school learning officer organises the successful summer schools and an innovative music programme has been developed with other south east counties. The extension of this work to primary schools is in its early stages. The strategies used to date have not been fully evaluated.
- 154 The impact of this work has indicators of success that include teacher assessment and OFSTED inspection reports. The LEA has set 2003 targets for Level 5 attainment in Key Stage 2 and the percentage of pupils attaining eight or more GCSEs at A* to C grades in Key Stage 4. An adviser has responsibility for gifted and talented provision that has included the organisation of a target-setting seminar and encouraging schools to set targets for their more able children. The recently developed school profile will enable advisers to analyse the performance of groups of pupils in the top ten-twenty per cent.

Minority ethnic children, including Travellers

- 155 Support for minority ethnic pupils including Travellers is satisfactory with more strengths than weaknesses, it gives sound value for money. The Education Development Plan (EDP) includes objectives for improving the attainment of minority ethnic groups and Travellers and promoting positive attitudes to cultural diversity and equality. However, ethnicity and the needs of minority ethnic groups are insufficiently integrated into the activities outlined in the EDP. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant action plan is cross-referenced to the EDP, but both plans lack clear actions for implementation. It is not clear how the ethnic minority pupil service (EMPS) relates to other services in the LEA, particularly the advisory and development services.
- 156 The EMPS is increasingly focused beyond language training, on the wider needs of minority ethnic pupils, though it is questionable whether the service has the resource capacity to deliver the broader agenda. The creation of a post to monitor the quality of teaching and learning that the pupils receive recognises the expanding role of the service. The expertise of mainstream teachers in teaching minority ethnic pupils is being effectively developed, the main emphasis being on language training. There is also sound training and guidance to schools on ethnic monitoring and issues of multiculturalism. Strategies that include targeting pupils for additional support are being developed and requests for individual pupil support are efficiently handled by the service.
- 157 The EMPS monitors the attainment and attendance of the pupils whom it supports. It has recognised that the reliability of the information on pupil performance analysed by ethnicity is questionable. Performance data is presently being improved and appropriate systems for collection and analysis of the data are being developed. There is insufficient emphasis on the tracking of individual pupils and the identification of the extent and reasons for underachievement. (See recommendation in Section 2).
- 158 Schools generally consider support from EMPS as at least satisfactory; secondary schools in particular have a high regard for this support. Nevertheless, information from school visits indicates that the change of role for the service is not fully understood.

Recommendation

In order to improve the understanding of schools and the LEA:

- make clear the changed role of the ethnic minority pupil service.

- 159 The LEA is particularly effective in identifying the children of asylum seekers and refugees to ensure that they are supported. For Traveller pupils the Traveller education service (TES), which works in consortium with Brighton and Hove, is effectively managed and well led and is also well regarded by schools. TES staff are flexibly deployed and undertake an enterprising range

of initiatives for example through the community development workers and specialist education welfare officers. The service offers well-targeted support for individual pupils and advice to schools on developing the curriculum to reflect cultural diversity. The TES gives excellent value for money. There is no corporate strategy on Traveller education and this limits the vision of the LEA's policy on inclusion.

Measures to combat racism

160 The LEA's work on measures to combat racism is unsatisfactory, with weaknesses outweighing strengths. There are sound policies on equal opportunities, combating racial harassment and bilingualism. The LEA has attempted to respond appropriately to the recommendations of the Macpherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence. Overall, however, there is little evidence of a strategy to build commitment and support for these policies. The corporate Stephen Lawrence working group identified clear key objectives for education, but the implementation of plans lacks rigour in clear timescales for action and clarity of responsibility. The directorate is committed to meeting the committee for race equality standards at Level 2, but there is insufficient awareness of the standards in schools.

Recommendations

In order to improve the LEAs approach to combating racism:

- specify the timescales and officers responsible for the implementation of the activities in the Stephen Lawrence action plan; and
- raise awareness of and establish the use of the committee for race equality standards in the LEA and schools.

161 The LEA adapted the corporate equal opportunities service delivery action plan to make it relevant to education. An equal opportunities monitoring database has been appropriately designed to monitor trends and changes in the area of staff recruitment. The LEA provides practical guidance to schools on recognising and dealing with racial harassment that suggests a common framework for schools to adopt.

162 The equal opportunities team in education considers issues relating to equality and diversity. Action in the last year included the development of a draft service delivery action plan on race that is intended to raise awareness in relation to asylum seekers and refugees, alongside a position paper on Travellers. A new equal opportunities group has been established in July 2001 that will contribute to the development of policy and the spread of good practice.

163 The Education Development Plan refers to the Macpherson report and linked plans include suitable developments in citizenship and leadership. Key objectives include the monitoring of racist incidents in schools, developing a racial harassment strategy and providing training on the implementation of the Macpherson report action plan and the Race Relations Act. All of these

objectives are commendable, but the impact of the policies and guidelines is not sufficiently evaluated.

- 164 The LEA attempts to monitor racist incidents, but it is difficult to do so from previous low returns from schools. In 2001, the return was 87 per cent, a rise from only nine per cent in summer 2000. The increase has been largely due to the new training and development opportunities officer raising the profile of racial harassment in schools. There is little evidence of a clear plan to both build the commitment and support of schools, and to use the available data to implement the LEAs strategies so that measures to combat racism make an impact in schools.

Recommendation

In order to raise the profile of and action on equalities issues in the council, the education department and schools:

- give strong leadership, guidance, training and support to LEA staff and schools to ensure that:
 - there are positive attitudes and actions for equality throughout the LEA; and
 - pupils are better equipped for life in a culturally diverse society.

Social inclusion

- 165 There are more strengths than weaknesses in the LEA's work to promote social inclusion; overall it is satisfactory. The council's equal opportunities policy covers employment and service delivery alongside a more recent strategy regarding dignity at work. The education directorate, appropriately, has an additional policy on equality in the curriculum, and an equalities opportunities group has met regularly to consider strategy.
- 166 The director of education actively promotes this work in a series of cross agency projects that offer a range of guidance and support for young people in areas of youth offending and drugs action, skills training and access to education; encouraging their re-inclusion. Senior officers liaise effectively with social services and the police, and co-operation is good.
- 167 Provision is improving for pupils with poor attendance and those excluded or at risk of exclusion from school. Cross agency partnerships provide valuable support to some of the most vulnerable children and the progress of pupils in public care is closely monitored and encouraged. The LEA is making considerable progress with its policy for the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools. The attendance and achievement of Traveller children is well supported and the TERTEX curriculum programme for Key Stage 4 pupils in a further education college is raising standards in GCSE.
- 168 For the county's small proportion of minority ethnic pupils and children of refugee and asylum seeking families provision is more variable. Advice and

learning support for the pupils and their families is effective and improving. However, the council has given unsatisfactory attention to equalities issues in general. It is clear that the stated aims of the education directorate to actively promote and value the cultural diversity of communities in East Sussex is far from being fulfilled. School based curriculum activities with equalities groups are reported to be very successful, but there is a lack of LEA strategic planning and direction for this work.

APPENDIX 1: THE BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HOME-TO-SCHOOL TRANSPORT

- 1 The council has undertaken a Best Value review of the home-to-school transport service, agreeing an implementation plan in June 2001. The review has been conducted satisfactorily. This review is now included in a corporate Best Value review of transport services.
- 2 The service is satisfactory and has both strengths and weaknesses. Costs are comparatively low, except for special education needs provision. Contracts with suppliers do not specify standards expected and so these are not monitored. Parents and schools show a good level of satisfaction with the service though information given to them could be improved. Service aims and targets are not sufficiently challenging to promote continuous improvement.
- 3 The review has challenged working methods and begun the process of considering whether the service could be better delivered by a centralised transport team. Consultation with key stakeholders has taken place and a measure of comparison, mostly about costs, has been undertaken.
- 4 The review has been thorough and has addressed key areas for improvement, including tendering and monitoring procedure as well as information for parents, schools and pupils. It has also considered how to assess transport needs effectively in conjunction with SEN assessment and review. To be secure that these improvements can be delivered, it will be necessary to identify appropriate resources, define key performance indicators and ensure a reporting mechanism to elected members if there are insuperable delivery issues.

Recommendations

In order to implement improvements in the home to school transport service, following the Best Value review:

- prioritise the improvement plan by including clear aims, targets and milestones for the future; and
- specify resource allocations, outcome indicators and committee reporting arrangements.

APPENDIX 2: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes a number of recommendations. The first three relate to the overall strategies of the LEA.

(1) In order to improve the implementation of Best Value:

- ensure that Best Value principles are used to underpin planning, development and evaluation throughout the department;
- improve schools' understanding of their Best Value responsibilities.

(2) In order to further improve the implementation of corporate and directorate plans and build schools' commitment to them:

- develop, through headteacher steering groups, a fuller understanding of:-
the Code of Practice for LEA/School Relations and its implications;
the objectives and expectations of the council's plans for education;
- develop with schools an agreed framework for sharing good practice.

(3) In order to improve the Education Development Plan and planning procedures overall:

- identify more precisely the needs of schools to enable more accurate targeting of work to raise standards and evaluate the impact of the strategies used;
- ensure that in all cases planning in the Education Development Plan, planning for education other than at school and for attendance, behaviour management and schools causing concern has:
 - specific and measurable success criteria;
 - clear timescales and milestones for monitoring progress; and
 - information on financial costs for core and traded services.

The remaining recommendations are derived from specific sections of the report.

SECTION 1:THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to align pupil funding in special schools more closely to national averages:

- revise the special school funding formula for 2002/2003.

In order to clarify and make transparent corporate charges:

- implement any amendments to corporate charges agreed following the external review in time for 2002/2003.

SECTION 2:SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to provide consistent and differentiated challenge to schools:

- improve the rigour of monitoring and challenge by contact advisers and refine the plans for differentiating this work.

In order to improve the use of performance data with schools:

- provide further training for contact advisers and school managers in analysing performance data;
- ensure that comprehensive data on pupil ethnicity is collected and implement systems for tracking the progress, attainment and target setting of minority ethnic pupils; and
- develop data systems for tracking the progress, attainment and target setting of those pupils who are educated other than at school.

In order to ensure appropriate information and communication technology support:

- establish comprehensive data on pupil attainment in information and communication technology and develop a more systematic means of monitoring progress; and
- provide greater consistency in curriculum advice and develop procedures for evaluating its impact.

In order to clarify resources and sharpen the scrutiny of schools causing concern:

- make more transparent for schools their entitlement to additional resources as a school causing concern; and

- enhance school support plans by including clear milestones with timescales against which progress can be measured. Clarify the criteria by which a school will no longer cause concern.

In order to offer a comprehensive continuum of professional development for staff:

- further refine proposals for training in the leadership and management skills required for school improvement.

SECTION 3:STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In order to improve corporate planning:

- strengthen with schools and social services the use of the agreed protocols for proactive joint work for pupils.

SECTION 4:SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

In order to ensure effective use of special educational needs funding:

- clarify with schools the LEA procedures for monitoring the use of delegated budgets for special educational needs.

In order to improve monitoring in special educational needs:

- continue to develop the assessment and target setting procedures for special educational needs across the county to secure effective monitoring of pupil progress.

SECTION 5:ACCESS

In order to enhance school building resources:

- agree with all district councils specific procedures for planning agreements with developers to support education provision.

In order to improve schools' understanding of attendance support:

- clarify with schools the deployment of targeted support for identified needs.

In order to effectively target actions and resources to reduce exclusions:

- ensure that improved data management systems on excluded pupils are used to identify and resource areas of greatest need.

In order to ensure sufficient training in schools:

- develop a secure system to monitor that all schools are adequately trained with regard to health and safety and child protection.

In order to improve the understanding of schools and the LEA:

- make clear the changed role of the ethnic minority pupil service.

In order to improve the LEA's approach to combating racism:

- specify the timescales and officers responsible for the implementation of the activities in the Stephen Lawrence action plan;
- raise awareness of and establish the use of the committee for racial equality of standards in the LEA and schools.

In order to raise the profile of and action on equalities issues in the council, the education department and schools:

- give strong leadership, guidance, training and support to LEA staff and schools' to ensure that:
 - there are positive attitudes and actions for equality throughout the LEA; and
 - pupils are better equipped for life in a culturally diverse society.

Appendix 1: Best Value review of home-to-School transport

In order to implement improvements in the home-to-school transport service, following the Best Value review:

- prioritise the improvement plan by including clear aims, targets and milestones for the future; and
- specify resource allocations, outcome indicators and committee reporting arrangements.

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