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IN EDUCATION**

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CONTENTS

PARAGRAPHS

INTRODUCTION 1 - 4

COMMENTARY 5 - 14

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context 15 - 19

Performance 20

Council structure 21 - 23

Funding 24 - 27

The LEA Strategy for school improvement 28 - 31

Implementing the strategy for school improvement 32 - 36

The allocation of resources to priorities 37 - 42

Structures for achieving Best Value (valid until April 2002) 43 - 44

Promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value (valid from April 2002)

SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Summary of effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement 45

Monitoring, challenge and intervention 46 - 48

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools 49 - 53

The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools 54 - 57

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement 58 - 67

Support for literacy and numeracy 68 - 72

Support for information and communication technology (ICT) 73 - 77

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 78 - 81

Support for ethnic minority groups including Travellers 82 - 85

Support for gifted and talented pupils 86 - 90

Support for school management 91 - 94

Support for governors 95 - 98

The effectiveness of services to support school management 99 - 100

Support for ICT in administration and management 101 - 104

Property services 105 - 106

The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers 107 - 110

Early years 111 - 114

Support for 14-19 education in Norfolk 115 - 119

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The LEA's strategy for Special Educational Needs	120 - 123
Statutory obligations	124 - 128
School improvement	129 - 131
Value for money	132 - 135

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

The strategy to promote social inclusion	136 - 141
The supply of school places	142 - 146
Asset management	147 - 150
Admissions	151 - 153
Provision of education for pupils who have no school place	154 - 161
Attendance	162 - 168
Behaviour support	169 - 174
Health, safety, welfare and child protection	175 - 182
Children in public care	183 - 188
Measures to combat racism	189 - 192

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Corporate planning	193 - 202
Decision making and leadership of officers and elected members	203 - 206
Partnership	207 - 209

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (December 2001)* which focuses on the effectiveness of the local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. It also draws on work done with and by other inspectorates as part of a pilot exercise on joint and co-ordinated inspection. Norfolk county council volunteered for this pilot and, as a result, the local education authority was inspected sooner than would otherwise have been the case. In particular, the sections on promoting social inclusion and partnership cover functions in greater detail than is normally the case. Partnership was inspected at the request of the local education authority (LEA). Some aspects of social inclusion were inspected jointly with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

2. The inspection was partly informed by data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with elected members, staff in the education and other council departments, other staff and governors and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 65 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through small group discussions with headteachers, governors, deputy headteachers and other staff from 140 schools. Visits were made to one first school, three primary schools, six secondary schools and two pupil referral units. The discussions considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in challenging and contributing to developments in the school and provides value for money.

4. In order to assess the LEA's partnership work, visits were made to the two Education Action Zones and the Excellence Cluster in Norwich. Inspectors visited and held discussions with the Youth Offending Team. They met staff and students from the family learning service and users of the museum service.

COMMENTARY

5. Norfolk is a large shire authority. It is mainly rural in character and has pockets of deprivation. There are three conurbations, one large and two of medium size. The population overall is growing. Many areas are geographically isolated, sparsely populated and have poor transport arrangements. In these communities particularly, educational aspirations are too low.

6. Performance in Norfolk schools has improved at all key stages since the last inspection and standards are now slightly ahead of the national average at all stages except Key Stage 2. Exclusions have greatly reduced, but attendance figures have not improved since the last inspection. In particular, authorised secondary absence is too high.

7. Crucially, those charged with leading education in the county have understood the need to change attitudes and create a hunger for educational success. They have set about this task with intelligence, determination and good judgement. An effective, long-term, lifelong learning strategy, based on partnership, has been put in place and is already raising aspirations. An honest and accurate evaluation of where they are and how far they need to travel has underpinned their approach. They have prioritised sharply and tackled their priorities systematically.

8. The last inspection judged the LEA to have more strengths than weaknesses but stated that much still needed to be done. Taking the recommendations of the report as an agenda, the LEA has put in place highly effective arrangements for challenging under-achievement and tackling under performing schools. Sharp targeting of effort and resources on school improvement has borne fruit.

9. Overall, strengths now greatly outweigh weaknesses. Norfolk is a highly effective LEA in relation to school improvement. In particular, the LEA's approach to monitoring, challenge and intervention and its work with under-performing schools are exemplary, amongst the best nationally. There are also particular strengths in:

- the strategy for school improvement and its implementation;
- monitoring and challenge to schools including the use of performance data;
- support for literacy and numeracy;
- support to ethnic minority and Traveller children;
- support for school leadership and management;
- the leadership, planning and performance management of services to support school improvement;
- support for assuring the quality and supply of teachers;
- expertise of staff to support school improvement;
- effectiveness of services to support school improvement;
- support for children in public care;
- combating racism;
- corporate planning;
- procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans;
- effectiveness of decision making;
- leadership by senior officers and elected members;

- the quality of advice given to elected members; and
- partnership.

The following functions are not discharged effectively:

- services for information and communication technology in school administration;
- support for gifted and talented pupils;
- the provision of school places; and
- asset management planning.

10. Past failures to address the strategic responsibilities for school places and asset management planning have left the LEA with a difficult legacy and there has been insufficient progress in resolving these issues. Decisive moves have now been made to tackle age of transfer issues through reorganisation, and premises deficiencies through a Private Finance Initiative. New leadership in this area signals a much-needed approach to strategic planning for these functions. Until recently, this was lacking.

11. All other functions are performed to at least a satisfactory standard. But in the areas of special educational needs and access, progress to date is not consistent and the LEA recognises that much remains to be done for the provision to be good overall. The LEA has adopted a systematic approach to improvement in all its work, using Best Value reviews to map out future directions, for instance in the arrangements for supporting attendance, and the most recent points a clear way forward for services to individual pupils.

12. There is strong agreement in Norfolk that partnership is fundamental to the agenda for change. Innovative and sharply targeted partnership working in some of the most deprived areas has created strong networks of professional support and expertise focused on schools. Evidence shows that this is combating social exclusion. The recent Best Value review points the way forward to better clarity and cohesiveness between the LEA access services.

13. The LEA's capacity to deal with the most difficult access issues is limited by weaknesses in information sharing and co-ordinated approaches with other agencies, notably the police and social services. Nevertheless, recent initiatives such as the work done with children in public care have demonstrated the considerable potential that exists in Norfolk. Staff have high levels of professional expertise, experience and commitment. The development of sound systems will enable their energies to be expended to better effect.

14. The LEA's track record in initiating and managing change is good. Clear and decisive leadership from the top has already accomplished much. Members have a strong will, evidenced by the current proposals for re-organisation, to progress. The LEA's honesty and self-knowledge, coupled with its proven ability to tackle issues systematically, mean that it is well placed to move forward. It clearly has both the will and the capacity to address the recommendations of this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

15. Norfolk is a mainly rural county. Because transport links are poor, some areas are isolated. More than a third of the population lives in the three conurbations of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn, leaving much of the rest of the county sparsely populated. The majority of the 539 parishes have fewer than 250 people.

16. The population is rising and there are increasing numbers of older people. Incomes are generally lower than average, and a higher than average proportion of the working population, 8.5 per cent, is employed in agriculture, fishing and forestry. Tourism is also economically significant, so seasonal employment is widespread. There is a significant skills gap between Norfolk and the UK average. Participation in learning post-16 is low, 2.2 per cent below the national average.

17. Economically, this is a county of contrasts. Large estates and affluence are a feature, but one quarter of the rural population exists on the edge of poverty. Fifteen per cent of primary aged pupils and 12 per cent of secondary aged pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is slightly below the national average, but above that for shire counties. There are also pockets of significant urban deprivation, with two wards featuring among the 100 worst nationally. A sizeable Traveller community is based in the county and 524 Traveller children attended Norfolk schools in 2000-01. Over seven per cent of pupils speak a first language other than English. The ethnic minority population is small and scattered and the largest single group is Chinese.

18. The total number of pupils in schools in September 2001 was 112,148. The pupil population has increased by an average of 991 each year in the last five years. Ninety two per cent of four year olds and 56 per cent of three year olds have places in pre-school provision. There are 453 schools of which 335 are primary (including three nursery), 52 middle, two first and middle, 52 secondary and 12 special. Four pupil referral units serve the four areas of the county. The number of foundation schools is 27. There is a large number of small rural primary schools, including 38 with fewer than 50 pupils each. Eighteen of the secondary schools have sixth forms.

19. There are 15 beacon schools and 16 specialist schools. Eight of these are technology colleges, three are language colleges, two are arts colleges, two are sports colleges and one is a science college. Since the last inspection school structures in four areas have been changed to reflect National Curriculum key stages and further re-organisation is planned.

Performance

20. Performance in Norfolk schools has improved at all stages since the last inspection and standards are now slightly ahead of the national average at all stages except Key Stage 2. The proportion of primary schools judged to be good or very good is broadly in line with the national average though below that of similar authorities. The proportion of

secondary schools judged to be good or very good is broadly in line with both the national average and that of similar authorities.¹

- On entry, Norfolk pupils perform at levels similar to the national level, but lower than those of similar authorities.
- Norfolk is broadly in line with national standards at Key Stage 1, having improved at a higher rate than nationally. Improvement has been faster than that of similar authorities and, with the exception of reading, the gap has now been closed at Key Stage 1.
- At Key Stage 2, performance is broadly in line with the national averages and that of similar authorities, but improvement has risen at a faster rate than nationally and in similar authorities, and the gap is closing.
- At Key Stage 3, performance is broadly in line with national averages. The gap is closing between Norfolk and similar authorities in English, but it is widening in mathematics and science.
- At Key Stage 4 performance is improving steadily at the national rate. In 2001, 50.2 per cent of pupils achieved five or more A-C grades at GCSE, more than the national average. This is still below the rate of similar authorities and the gap is not closing.
- Post 16 performance at GCE A level is in line with the national and similar authorities. For pupils taking fewer than two A levels, it is better than both.
- Attendance in primary schools is in line with the national average. At secondary level it is slightly below, with authorised absence higher than the national average. The most recent figures show deterioration in attendance in both phases. Permanent exclusions have greatly reduced, from 176 in 1998-99 to 64 in 2000-2001. These figures are now comparable with those of similar authorities, except in special schools, where they are higher.

Council structure

21. Norfolk County Council has 84 elected councillors. There was a change of control at the last election, when a Conservative administration was returned. The council has recently moved to a cabinet-based structure consisting of full council, cabinet, review and scrutiny committees and area committees. Cabinet and all committees meet in public. The full council meets approximately six times per year and the ten-member cabinet approximately 12 times a year. Each of the nine portfolio areas has a review panel which reports to cabinet or to full council. The cabinet scrutiny committee is chaired by the leader of the opposition and includes parent governors and diocesan representatives, who have voting rights in relation to education matters.

22. The cabinet scrutiny committee can call in decisions taken by the cabinet and decisions taken by individual cabinet members or officers. It has the power to refer such

¹ Norfolk's statistical neighbours include Lincolnshire, Cornwall, Somerset, East Riding of Yorkshire, Northamptonshire, Devon, Suffolk, Worcestershire, Cumbria and Dorset.

decisions to full council. The call-in procedure does not apply to urgent decisions. Review panels, including the education and cultural services panel, have an extensive remit which includes specialist scrutiny and advice on policy development, but they cannot call in decisions.

23. The openness of these new arrangements, with all meetings held in public, is characteristic of Norfolk's approach. It has served to secure high levels of public participation in debate on education matters.

Funding

24. Norfolk's education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) in 2001/02 (as are all figures unless otherwise stated) is below the national average, but above average for shire counties. The council has consistently spent at or slightly above the education SSA.

25. Expenditure on non-school items such as adult education and the youth service is lower than national and shire comparators. This leaves the Local Schools Budget (LSB) at £2837 per pupil, slightly higher than the shire average of £2821 but below the national average of £2928 per pupil.

26. Overall central retention of funds under Fair Funding regulations is slightly lower than the shire average at £423 per pupil compared to £427, and £433 nationally. Within this amount most expenditure is in line with averages. However, central administration at £48 per pupil is higher than shire and national averages, and school improvement at £34, and transport at £133 are much higher. The latter is a consequence of rurality and has a significant effect on reducing the funds available for delegation to schools. However, delegation of school meals and statements of special educational needs reduces the overall retention to below average. The delegation level is higher than average at 87.5 per cent. The resulting average pupil funding delegated to schools in Norfolk is £2450 compared to £2394 for shires and £2496 nationally. The council has been successful in drawing down significant amounts of external grant funding. In addition to the standards fund, a public service agreement (PSA), a private finance initiative (PFI) and a range of other cross directorate funding streams are providing considerable extra revenue and capital resources.

27. Capital expenditure has increased substantially over the last five years from £9.8 million to £24.2 million. Most of this latter figure is due to a large increase in capital grant in the current year.

The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the Education Development Plan (EDP)

28. The EDP audit is thorough, detailed and clear about what has been achieved and what remains to be achieved. The analysis of strengths and weaknesses draws on an adequate range of data and on the self-review done in preparation for the cross cutting LEA inspection. It links to national priorities. Local priorities are well chosen and appropriate.

29. The targets are suitably challenging, particularly for mathematics at Key Stage 2, where a 17 per cent increase will be needed to reach the 2007 target. This may prove difficult to achieve. However the trend of improvement is mostly above statistical neighbours and at the national rate, so the targets are not generally unrealistic.

30. The school improvement programme is fully justified by the audit. The strategy is clearly laid out, related well to the corporate context and carefully cross-referenced to other plans. In 2001, Norfolk signed a three-year Public Service Agreement (PSA), with four education targets. These are incorporated in the new EDP. Education Development Plan priorities feed through logically into the education key goals in the Best Value Performance Plan(BVPP). Links between priorities, activities, targets and success criteria are clear, as are responsibilities and accountability. There is good planning for teacher supply, ethnic minority support and social inclusion. Costs are broken down by activity. The plan does not differentiate between targets and expected outcomes, nor does it adequately distinguish the latter from success criteria. Clarity is reduced by the detailed description of what needs to be done, which is then laid out again in the action plans. This duplication, in what is already a lengthy plan, adds nothing.

31. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation are clear, detailed and rigorous. Overall the plan is comprehensive, honest and logical. If implemented, it should lead to the desired outcomes.

Implementing the strategy for school improvement

32. The LEA made good progress on nearly all of the priorities set out in its 1999/2002 EDP. Standards have improved in all of the priority areas except attendance. Attendance is broadly in line with national averages although there was a slight fall in 2001. The reduction in exclusions has exceeded the target. The LEA was 2 per cent short of its 2001 targets for eleven-year-olds in English and mathematics, leaving an 8 per cent gap to be made up in 2002. It is confident that this can be achieved in numeracy, but, despite intensive targeted support in schools, it is unlikely to meet the 2002 target for literacy. Support for raising standards in ICT has been hampered by technical problems with access, but nearly all of the planned actions have been delivered. Too little progress has been made in the actions linked to gifted and talented children.

33. The latest evidence from school inspections shows that there has been considerable progress made in improving leadership and management of schools, in reducing the number of schools requiring improvement and in increasing the number of good schools. This is closely aligned to the very effective work that the LEA has undertaken in its under-performing schools. It acted promptly and effectively on the recommendations regarding school improvement made in the last inspection report and has put in place a consistent and finely graduated system of moderated school self-review. This has caused the number of schools found to require special measures to fall significantly and is allied to effective procedures for supporting schools causing concern, which means that schools rarely remain in this category for undue periods. Two schools previously found to require special measures have since been designated as Beacon schools.

34. Particular attention has been given to standards in two areas of the county, Great Yarmouth and Thetford, in which Education Action Zones have been created and they work in very close association with LEA school improvement strategies and staff. There is a high level of commitment to developing school-based approaches to raising standards and to tackling disaffection in the two zones. The LEA is active in supporting the different approaches and links well with the EAZ, particularly through its work on disseminating successful outcomes and sharing practice with all schools in the LEA. Further, innovative, work has been undertaken in West Norwich through the formation of the Excellence Cluster in Earlham, and its links to community development projects, including a major New Deal pilot for community funding in the area. This area is also the subject of the PSA with its four education targets. Some of these are attainable but others are very stretching, probably unrealistically so.

35. The LEA undertook a detailed and thorough evaluation of the implementation of the 1999/2002 EDP, involving members in reviews and using the outcomes to inform the establishment of the priorities and targets for the 2002/07 EDP. Partly in response to the findings of the previous inspection, a thorough and detailed performance management system is now in place. This means that success criteria, both at an individual and at a service level are in place and that regular assessments of performance against identified outcomes are undertaken. These assessments are made at a high strategic level, at a service level and during the regular line manager reviews of individual staff.

36. Schools understand the LEA's strategy. They draw on it well in their school development planning and the level of engagement between schools and LEA advisers and school improvement officers has increased significantly since the last inspection. This is a hallmark of the shift away from a business unit culture, defined by financial contracting arrangements, to a more mature, planned relationship that emphasises a strategic approach to school improvement and targets school improvement resources more acutely to identified needs.

The allocation of resources to priorities

37. This function is performed satisfactorily. A major strength lies in the fact that the new administration continues to make education its top priority in the face of considerable budget pressures from other services, and the consequent need to increase council tax by more than nine percent. As a result of receiving the full increase in SSA, education, uniquely in the current budget round, was not required to find up to two per cent savings. Furthermore, education is in line for higher percentage increases than other services over the next three years.

38. Although budget planning across the council follows secure and increasingly corporate processes, the effects have been largely incremental. There is commitment at the highest levels in the council to aspire to a planning approach which more clearly links improved service delivery with greater cost effectiveness. However, the mechanism by which this will be achieved is still being devised, although a medium term financial plan does exist at service level.

39. Within the education service, all government financial targets have been met and levels of delegation to schools are higher than average. For example, support for pupils with additional educational needs based on a school audit, and primary school meals,

were delegated ahead of many other LEAs. As the department establishes its role as a strategic partner rather than a trading service, it has found it necessary to increase its capacity and the funds retained under Fair Funding regulations have increased. However, these are still lower than average. An appropriate and well-conceived five-year development plan has now been agreed, but its associated financial plan is underdeveloped, as is that for the recently introduced framework for delivering special needs over a similar time frame. Lack of transparency in areas of budget reports prevents some senior managers from making a robust evaluation of the value for money of their services.

40. The school funding formula is straightforward, transparent, targeted well to need, and has been revised with good consultation in line with the recommendations from the previous inspection. The recommendation to review the lump sum in the special school funding formula has also been addressed. However, elements such as the resources for the bandings used in funding special needs, have not been reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate. The council sets its budget in good time, and schools are provided with timely, clear budget allocations, benchmarking and financial planning data.

41. Budget monitoring and control within the department are good, with out-turn expenditure matching plans in almost all cases. However, insufficient analysis of wide variations in the financial standing of schools is a weakness. School deficits are small and few in number, although those in secondary schools with sixth forms are growing; all have agreed recovery plans. School balances overall are at a sensible level of five per cent, but those in primary schools are too large at 11 per cent. Until recently, insufficiently rigorous action had been taken to ensure that governing bodies comply with the requirement to provide expenditure plans for balances in excess of five per cent. Although later than in many LEAs, Norfolk schools are now trialling a financial alert system which will enable the LEA to fulfil its role in systematically monitoring and challenging schools. A useful series of workshops designed to improve schools' resource management capacity has also recently been introduced.

42. Insufficient resources to carry out capital projects over many years have left a legacy of too many temporary classrooms. The attempts being made to secure additional resources via PFI and capital grants, and recent concerted action to address the poor income from property developers have been very successful. Some £850,000 has already been secured with potential for a further £20 million in the medium term. However, the amount of capital resource from the council's own revenue and capital receipts is modest, variable, and has been reduced by around £7 million pounds this year, thereby reducing the potential to retrieve the situation.

Recommendations

In order that service managers can establish value for money measures:

- clarify the construction and reporting of service budgets:

Strategies to secure continuous improvement, including Best Value (BV)

43. Norfolk has satisfactory corporate procedures to ensure improvement, with no significant weaknesses. Since his appointment, the chief executive has worked systematically to create attitudes and processes within the council that support improvement. The result is a track record of measured, secure improvements evident throughout the council. One very important aspect of this is the way in which self appraisal is open and honest, and a no-blame culture results in shortcomings being accepted as the first stage in improvement. A secure and consistent performance management system operates across the council, and is effective in linking corporate, department, and service plans to individuals' work programmes. This was very evident in the education department, where the whole system is being further developed into a very good management tool available on-line. The council has also worked hard to define for itself credible scrutiny procedures which are beginning to produce discernible improvements.

44. The Best Value process got off to an uncertain start with early reviews proving poor value for the effort invested. However, recent improvements to the selection of reviews, their scope, methodology, scrutiny by senior elected members and quality of improvement plans, has markedly improved their value. Evidence from recent Best Value inspections supports the judgement. The Best Value Performance Plan and its annual review are easily understood. The development and reporting of improvements to local performance indicators help to convey to residents how the council is trying to improve their lives. This is also enhanced by a very cogent description of how the council's various improvement strategies link together. Shortcomings in the collection and validation of performance indicators reported by the external auditor are being successfully addressed.

SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Summary of effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement

45. Three of the six recommendations, and the majority of the action points, in the report of the previous inspection, carried out in March 1999, related to the LEA's support for school improvement. The LEA has been assiduous in tracking its response to these recommendations and has addressed them successfully in every respect. The director of education, supported by the assistant director for advisory services, has successfully led the department in the development of a strategic approach to school improvement that embraces all aspects of the department's operations. They have had a demonstrable impact on school improvement, meeting nearly all of the service targets set and achieving the priorities set out in the service plans. Against most of their key performance indicators, the services to support school improvement are making good progress.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

46. The LEA has established a very good strategy that has been developed over the last four years and is in line with the Code of Practice for LEA/School Relations. It is understood well by schools. The LEA has focused on promoting self-managing schools, a necessity in a sparsely populated LEA in which many schools are isolated and serve large rural areas. In so doing it has developed an excellent means of defining and targeting its interventions in schools. This is a considerable improvement on the position at the time of the previous inspection, when its work in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory.

47. Challenge to schools to improve is the central tenet of the school self-review process, although some schools regret losing elements of what they perceive to be the pastoral role of the RDAs. In this they are misguided, as the support role is clearly there, but is only focused on schools in which the management capacity, as identified by the carefully designed monitoring procedures, is weak. Mostly, the rationale is understood by schools, as is their entitlement to support and the purchasing arrangements that exist for this support.

48. Documentation for schools is of high quality. It sets out clearly and succinctly what the LEA is setting out to achieve and the means by which it intends to achieve these ends. Most headteachers welcome the balance of external review and challenge and its interaction with their own development planning.

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

49. The LEA has developed a highly differentiated and carefully planned monitoring programme that categorises each school using a matrix of pupil attainment outcomes and the types of LEA intervention. The programme draws upon a wide range of high quality performance data and leads to the precise identification of areas for improvement. An annual target setting discussion results in an agreement between the school, now more routinely including the governors, and the LEA, through the offices of the RDA.

50. The introduction of the full moderated school self-review process has had a very positive impact on school development planning, one that is universally recognised by headteachers. This represents considerable progress since the previous inspection when the process was in its inception. The definition of monitoring, challenge, intervention and support and the use of performance data to support these activities were both unsatisfactory. The effectiveness of the LEA in this aspect of its work is now good.

51. The need for the LEA to intervene is reducing and it is now able to focus its efforts on raising the thresholds for intervention in schools. The number of schools designated as causing concern has almost halved in three years to less than 12 per cent of schools. Fewer than three per cent of schools (11 schools) have been identified by OFSTED school inspections as having serious weaknesses, and fewer than two per cent of schools (seven schools) are deemed to require special measures.

52. The 'improving school performance step-by-step' database provides an excellent range of performance and benchmarking data. It is a highly interactive electronic system that enables a school to compare its performance against different benchmark groups and to identify the other schools in these groups. The data are available at all times from remote access points and are updated regularly. The principal weakness is that infrastructure failures during the development of the new ICT platform sometimes prevent easy and full access. The electronic system is augmented by high quality, paper-based, management information sheets sent to schools. A lack of robust data analyses for pupils with special educational needs, and the under-representation of data relating to social inclusion has been identified by the LEA and steps are being taken to address these developments in the next round of school review.

53. Review and development advisers are trained well in the use of the data, and their proficiency in its use is monitored carefully. They are supported well through the provision of high quality, pupil-level data that are generated by the LEA through its collaboration with a charitable trust. They ensure that target setting is robust, based on the attainment of pupils in the school. The LEA is highly effective in challenging schools to improve.

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

54. This aspect of the LEA's work was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now very good. Its policies and procedures have developed over time and have resulted in a very precise method of identifying areas for improvement in schools and communicating them well. Schools with below average levels of pupil attainment are the focus of its work, and these are the schools that are making the greatest improvement. The effective monitoring strategy identifies concerns early and targets intervention effectively. For example, as a result of its identification of concerns about the gap between school targets and the LEA's analysis of pupil attainment in literacy at Key Stage 2, the LEA is now targeting intervention in some schools that are otherwise classified as having above average pupil attainment.

55. Area groups review each school's categorisation annually and make recommendations to a senior management group, chaired by the director of education. This group designates the school's category. It meets regularly to monitor the progress

of under-performing schools and to target LEA support and intervention in them. Regular reports are made to elected members.

56. The numbers of schools identified by school inspectors as requiring special measures has dropped sharply since 1999, and the speed with which schools are removed from the category has improved. The LEA has highly effective procedures, based on close collaboration between the RDAs and the area-based school improvement support officers for planning, co-ordinating and monitoring the support for under-performing schools. An effective feature of the RDAs' work in under-performing schools is the detailed and informative notes of visit that are supplied to headteachers and governors following each monitoring visit. A project board oversees the arrangements made in schools subject to intervention and monitors the progress made by the schools and the work of the LEA officers and advisers.

57. The LEA has used the full range of powers for intervention. Weak management and teaching have been tackled firmly and with a clear focus on supporting the development of both teachers and senior managers, sometimes through a carefully negotiated temporary or permanent move to another establishment. Good use is made of the county headteacher service to provide interim management in schools, and the secondment of teachers and headteachers to under-performing schools is a well-developed aspect of the LEA's work. Governing bodies are often augmented through the secondment of additional governors. These governors are drawn from a wide range of appropriate backgrounds and include serving and retired headteachers, LEA officers and experienced governors from other schools. Delegation has been removed from school governing bodies but importantly, with a strong focus on building the school's capacity to govern itself. The LEA withdraws its intervention judiciously and very few schools have slipped back once intervention has ceased. Many schools have proceeded to reach the higher categories of performance following LEA intervention.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement.

58. Following the 1999 report, the greatest impact of the action plan drawn up has been in the work of the advisory service. The outcomes of the work of the service are clearly seen in the reduction of the numbers of schools identified by the LEA as having weaknesses, in the reduction of the numbers of schools identified as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures as a result of OFSTED school inspections, and in the percentages of schools which have improved since their previous inspections. The attainment of pupils, particularly lower attaining pupils, is improving. This has been achieved through the implementation of a sophisticated process of moderated school self-review, which has at its heart the LEA's challenge to each school to raise standards. It is based on extensive, pupil-level data used by the review and development advisers (RDAs) in the annual target-setting meeting with headteachers and governors.

59. The data used in the school self-review process is being updated annually and the LEA is now strengthening the elements that deal specifically with the progress made by pupils with special educational needs and the indicators used to evaluate the effectiveness of schools' strategies to promote social inclusion. These areas have been under-represented in the process to date.

60. Schools understand the LEA's strategy and, for the most part, welcome it. Some, mostly successful schools, understandably but wrongly, regret the increased differentiation of RDA time allocated through the operation of the school self-review programme. However, the overwhelming response from schools is that the LEA's strategy since 1998 has increasingly strengthened their management capacity and is rightly focused on raising standards. Consequently, the interactions between schools and advisers have increased, relationships are good and the level of buy back from schools, particularly secondary schools has increased. This reflects a greater clarity on the part of the schools about what needs to be done, and a perception that the quality of advice and training offered by the LEA has improved.

61. The leadership of the advisory service is good. It is characterised by the clarity of the vision for school improvement set out by the director and assistant director, advisory services. They have succeeded in aligning support for schools with a clear focus on school improvement. The assistant director is held in deservedly high esteem by schools and has been successful in sharing widely the LEA's approach to school improvement. There is a strong focus on building schools' capacity to improve and on reviewing the impact of the advisory service's work. The LEA is successful in identifying the areas it needs to develop, but has yet to have the full impact it wishes in some areas, particularly support for ICT and for gifted and talented children.

62. Strategic planning for school improvement is explicitly in line with council and departmental priorities and is matched closely to schools' needs. Targets in services plans are valid, measurable and give good performance management information to inform strategy. The review and evaluation processes adopted by the LEA are effective. They involve elected members appropriately and give a solid foundation to the work of the education department. Its self-evaluation is rigorous and is based on sound evidence. There is, for example, a close match between the evaluation provided by the director of education for the inspection team and the team's findings as set out in this report.

63. Work allocations for all education advisers are based on a detailed analysis of priorities and planned actions. They are set by the assistant director, subject to close monitoring and changed during the year through the supervision and review procedures undertaken by line managers. The LEA's effectiveness in deploying support to meet needs has improved since the last inspection, and in the advisory service is now good. A lack of clarity in the leadership in associated aspects of the department's provision for schools, combined with recruitment and resource difficulties, means that some services such as ICT support and support for children with special educational needs are not deployed as effectively in line with schools' needs.

64. The performance management of the advisory service was unsatisfactory in 1998. It is now very good. There is an impressive system that draws together individual and team targets; monitors, reviews and changes them as appropriate and is linked closely to advisers' induction, training and development. The expertise of advisers is matched well to the tasks and duties they are asked to perform. The expertise of the service, another weakness identified in the previous inspection, is now good. A successful recruitment strategy has ensured that incoming staff bring a good blend of senior management and curriculum leadership expertise. Good attention has been paid to securing a consistently high quality of skill and expertise across the services that support school improvement.

While this is particularly the case in the advisory service, it is also true of other service areas, as is evidenced by the high quality staff involved in the pupil referral units, the visiting teacher service and those responsible for the attainment of children in public care.

65. The costs associated with school improvement are above the national average, and the average for similar authorities. They have also increased each year since 1999/2000. This reflects an increased investment in support targeted at areas where under-achievement has been identified, and an increase in the capacity of the centrally retained services to monitor and intervene in under-performing schools. For example, financial services now retains staff to monitor school financial management, to advise schools and officers where financial management is weak, and to provide expertise in schools when delegation is withdrawn, or to project management boards for under-performing schools.

66. There has also been a significant increase in central expenditure to fund the step changes sought in both the central ICT systems and in the hardware and communications system for schools. At the time of the inspection, this latter investment had still to bear fruit and considerable frustration was evident in the failures of the systems to demonstrate good value for the size of the investment made.

67. These considerations apart, the advisory service costs are still above average, although within acceptable boundaries. The service has been refocused, and retrained. It has been effective in preventing and remedying failure, and is making a discernible contribution to strengthening school leadership and management. It is an effective service. Overall, the LEA's school improvement services offer satisfactory value for money.

Support for literacy and numeracy

68. The LEA's support for raising standards in both literacy and numeracy has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Support for numeracy is now more consistently effective and better targeted to need.

69. Between 1998 and 2001, the rate of improvement has been greater at both Key Stages 1 and 2 than it is nationally and when compared with statistical neighbours in both English and mathematics. Results in 2001 at Key Stage 2 mirrored the national picture, with no advance in English and a small decline in mathematics. Targets for 2002 are very challenging in both subjects, though the mathematics target matches the schools' aggregate target and the LEA's close monitoring indicates that it is within reach. Criteria for intensive support place emphasis on those schools with capacity to improve where targets are not high enough and where more pupils have the potential to achieve higher levels. In the last two years, those schools receiving support made noticeably faster gains than the LEA average.

70. Two years ago, the literacy and numeracy teams were brought together under an overall strategy manager who provides strong leadership. This has led to greater coherence and consistency in systems and approaches, as well as improved communication between the teams and with schools. Both teams have highly credible and experienced advisers whose expertise and flexibility are welcomed by schools. Both

teams provide good quality training and support that are increasingly closely matched to the needs of individuals and schools. The literacy team has been successful in counteracting initial resistance to the National Literacy Strategy in a significant number of schools and in those schools where expectations are not high enough. The numeracy team is very highly rated by schools for its enthusiasm and innovative work. Support for numeracy is considered to be a real strength of the LEA.

71. There is a very close and effective working relationship and very good communication between the literacy and numeracy advisers and the review and development advisers. This has led to a common approach of rigorous monitoring and evaluation and sharper target setting backed up by the availability of high quality data analysis. This in turn has led to well-focused and differentiated support in the right schools and regular feedback that enables the support in each school to be fine-tuned. Both teams have established successful links with many other services that directly enhance EDP activities, notably the early years partnership and the schools' library service.

72. Good use has been made of leading literacy and numeracy teachers to spread good practice, although the formation of cluster groups has been slow. The excellent partnership with both Education Action Zones, through shared appointments, has been instrumental in piloting new approaches before extending them across the county, such as the Catch Up programme in reading and assessment and target-setting in writing and numeracy. The numeracy team has taken substantial account of 'thinking schools, thinking children' in its training, which has been used to good effect. Both teams work closely with parents and governors and are actively involved in family learning. Good attention has been paid to planning issues for small schools through action research in literacy and a joint working party with Hertfordshire to develop short-term planning in whole key stage classes and to tackle planning issues in mixed key stage classes.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

73. Since the last inspection there has been progress in improving the support for curriculum use of ICT, which is now satisfactory. However, although advisory support is generally sound, significant weaknesses exist in respect of infrastructure, overall strategic management and technical support.

74. The authority has come from a low base in terms of ICT and has commendably high aspirations for its future development in the curriculum. However recent performance suggests that some aspects of the development plan are over-ambitious, particularly timescales. In addition to infrastructure and hardware developments, it contains reference to many exciting innovations, including the LEA's own EsiNet website, work with the University of East Anglia and a project with Norwich city football club. The authority does not lack imagination but its wish to innovate is not currently accompanied by the capacity to ensure delivery through a sound technical infrastructure.

75. All schools have produced ICT development plans for the successful implementation of the National Grid for Learning.(NGfL). Although some schools experienced frustration in having to wait for NGfL resources, the authority strategy was sound in that it helped to achieve compatibility in equipment and software. All schools have signed up to receive the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training by 2003. The

advisory service has given good support to schools where the training was felt to be inadequate. The providers chosen by the schools were the main cause of dissatisfaction but there were also instances where training had been delayed because of poor technical support by the authority.

76. The percentage of pupils at Key Stage 4 successfully completing nationally accredited ICT courses was 22 per cent. Although overall targets have been set in EDP2 for the raising of achievement in ICT, there is not yet a systematic approach to agreeing individual targets at school level. Although plans exist, the authority is not yet able to collate and analyse the performance of individual pupils. Specific links to raising attainment are not yet sufficiently clear in the development plan. There is a developing range of appropriate professional development opportunities available to schools and regular road shows to keep schools up to date.

77. There is a lack of well co-ordinated strategic management of ICT across the whole council. Well-considered curriculum development and advisory support have little point unless they are accompanied by an infrastructure that works. Despite the LEA's well-intentioned efforts, schools lack confidence in its plans and the provision of technical advice. As a result, their view of the impact of the authority's ICT strategy upon learning in the classroom is understandably negative. This was evident in the school survey and in the meetings held with headteachers and teachers.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

78. The LEA's support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. It is too soon to judge the impact of the strategy, but detailed plans provide a generally sound agenda for change. Although a satisfactory start has been made to its implementation in secondary schools, there are limitations in the strategy in those areas of the county where pupils transfer at the end of Year 7. Rates of improvement present a mixed picture, rising more quickly in English than in similar authorities, but more slowly in mathematics and science. However, the rate of improvement for boys in the three core subjects is slower when compared both with the national data and with statistical neighbours, and the gap is widening in English.

79. The strategy is well managed and has gathered momentum since the appointment of a Key Stage 3 manager in April. The LEA has put in place a satisfactory management structure with clear lines of accountability. Three area teams are linked to named review and development officers to ensure that there is coherence and consistency. Since Easter, robust systems for monitoring, evaluation, recording and reporting have been put in place. Strategy managers provide comprehensive feedback to consultants on their work in schools and there are detailed written notes of support visits, which clearly identify what has been achieved and what actions have been agreed. The LEA is monitoring the use of funds closely and has introduced signed agreements with dates, review meetings and outcomes.

80. Good quality data analysis has facilitated accurate identification of those secondary schools needing additional support. There is more work to be done to raise expectations across the county. The targets set for 2004 are very challenging; the aggregate schools' target falls short of the LEA target. Training has been well received and there is sound co-ordination between Key Stages 2 and 3 in English and mathematics. Consultants

have made a very positive start in secondary schools, providing high quality support and fostering good relationships, although it is too early to gauge their impact on standards. Leading English and mathematics departments have been identified, but the slow identification of leading English and mathematics teachers and advanced skills teachers has limited the LEA's ability to promote good practice and to introduce flexibility into the curriculum.

81. The LEA does not track attendance and exclusions by key stage although it is in a position to do so. Although primary schools with Year 7 pupils have access to all training, limited resources constrain the LEA's ability to provide in-school support at the same level or consistency. The transfer of documentation is improving between schools, but is still an issue in parts of the county. Local networks have been established to promote transition and to share good practice. This year, there has been improvement in the tracking of individual pupils and the LEA is actively monitoring groups of pupils by gender and socio-economic data. However, although RDAs are working closely with secondary schools to monitor progress and identify areas of strength and weakness, this has yet to be implemented in middle schools.

Recommendation

In order to raise standards at Key Stage 3 :

- Ensure that strengths and weaknesses in primary schools with Year 7 pupils are identified accurately and progress of pupils is closely monitored.

Support for ethnic minority and Traveller children

82. The LEA has improved the quality of support it provides to schools in raising standards of attainment for minority ethnic pupils and Traveller children; this support is now good. The county has about 1000 Traveller children on both official and unofficial sites, as well as a number of housed travellers. Traveller children attend a quarter of Norfolk's schools, with a few schools admitting a significant number. Although the number of minority ethnic pupils is small compared with the total number of pupils, it is increasing year on year. Across the county the number of languages spoken now exceeds 70. The largest groups come from the Chinese and Bangladeshi communities, with a number of Portuguese families who come for seasonal work. Norfolk has welcomed a number of asylum seekers and refugees, including some unaccompanied young people. Their numbers have decreased in the last two years. Approximately seven per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language.

83. The LEA is committed to providing high quality education that meets the needs of pupils from minority ethnic communities in a climate of respect and trust. The strategy outlined in EDP2 is effectively focused on both these aims and backed up by detailed action plans. Support is provided by the English Language Support Service (ELSS) and the Traveller Support Service (TES). Both services are well led and managed and employ experienced teachers and learning support assistants. The services work closely together and are highly regarded by schools. They are responsive and flexible, working

with individual pupils and providing training and support to staff in order to enable schools to develop greater autonomy. The TES, in particular, has produced some excellent guidance to schools. The role of both services as mediator between schools and Traveller and asylum-seeking families is widely appreciated and has led to greater understanding in many schools and enabled individual pupils to make good progress. In order to improve communication with minority ethnic families, the LEA buys into a translation service for schools.

84. Good working relationships exist with the pupil attendance service, admissions, and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. As a result, the TES has been highly successful in increasing the percentage of Traveller children participating in pre-school provision, asylum seekers have been admitted rapidly to school and an alternative work programme for disaffected Traveller girls at Key Stage 4 has achieved good levels of attendance. A wide range of curriculum initiatives includes links with QCA, involvement as a pilot authority in 'Learning for All' and the development of study units that acknowledge and reflect Traveller culture and issues. Homework clubs that have been established for asylum seekers in Great Yarmouth and for Bangladeshi pupils in Norwich are proving popular.

85. The LEA has worked actively and sensitively to monitor the number of ethnic minority pupils in each school. Targets set for each group reflect LEA targets in EDP2 because the quality of data is not yet sufficiently reliable to target specific groups. The TES has made good progress on data collection, both of individual pupils and comparative data. This has enabled the service to increase the level of challenge, alongside the high quality support it provides. The ELSS targets under-achievement and has clear criteria for prioritisation that are understood by schools. There is a comprehensive tracking document for each Traveller child and pupils speaking English as an additional language are also monitored regularly. However, there is inconsistency in the way the review and development advisers monitor the achievement of minority ethnic pupils in school.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

86. Support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory. The LEA has been slow to implement a coherent strategy, only recently identifying the resources to improve the quality of education for gifted and talented pupils as a priority within EDP2. Detailed analysis has identified under-performance at the higher levels at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 as well as low levels of pupils staying on in further education and has set challenging targets to bring results to at least level with similar authorities.

87. Some progress has been made in support for gifted and talented pupils but the pace of change is not fast enough. An infrastructure is partly in place, although the allocated resource is limited and there is no detailed action plan to underpin the activities in the EDP. A senior adviser with expertise and awareness of the issues was appointed in 2001 and has responsibility for co-ordinating provision, although the amount of time he can allocate is inadequate at present. The LEA has recognised the need to increase his time allocation from September, and to involve two primary advisers in order to ensure that provision is broadly based. In addition, the appointment of co-ordinators for both Education Action Zones and the recently formed Excellence Cluster in West Norwich will

enable a core team to be formed. Until this team is fully operational, progress is likely to be slow. The LEA has not been proactive in brokering support to schools.

88. A working group of headteachers from the primary and secondary phases has been established to develop a document outlining policy, principles and procedures for teachers, governors and parents with input from the advisory service and the education psychological service. This provides a sound framework, but is in rough draft form. Awareness raising training has taken place. Subject specific training is planned, as well as the introduction of an annual conference early next year. To date, there are no plans to extend work to special schools and pupil referral units.

89. Initiatives such as 'challenging education' and 'thinking schools, thinking children' provide additional challenge in the curriculum and there are pockets of emerging good practice in a few schools and clusters. The creative partnership, sports education, the music service and environmental education are all involved in encouraging the performance of gifted and talented pupils. The senior adviser for gifted and talented pupils has just assumed responsibility for the co-ordination of summer schools. This year an expanded programme, part financed by the LEA, is planned to build on last year's evaluation and to address identified areas of weakness.

90. The LEA is not yet in a position to monitor schools' activities or to identify needs systematically. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is part of school self-review, but this aspect is at an early stage of development and is not consistently managed by RDAs. Schools do not identify pupils in a consistent way and, consequently, the transfer of information is also an issue for most schools. Much remains to be done to spread good practice. The LEA has been slow to support the appointment of advanced skills teachers, although this is being rectified. Insufficient consideration has been given to the part specialist schools can play in the strategy. There are plans for a website, but there is no time scale attached.

Recommendations

In order to enrich the curriculum and to raise standards for gifted and talented pupils:

- Publish and implement a policy and procedures urgently and provide guidance to RDAs in order that strengths and weaknesses are accurately identified in all schools; and
- bring together a core team as soon as possible to improve communication, to generate momentum across the county and to ensure that there is sufficient resource and a detailed action plan to achieve the planned outcomes in the activity in EDP2.

Support for school leadership and management

91. The LEA has given high priority to support for school leadership and management, which is now good, having previously been unsatisfactory. The main vehicle of change is the school self-review programme, which has been vigorously introduced. This major tool for bringing about school improvement now provides a means by which schools can measure their own progress.

92. Review and development advisers routinely report the outcomes of their visits to headteachers and chairs of governors. There is also an annual meeting with the whole governing body to provide an external view on school development. The impact of this process has been particularly evident in re-establishing weak schools in recovery. The LEA has now started to work effectively with those schools that are under-achieving but not formally recognised as having weaknesses. The “Improving Schools” package of professional development provides important support. The LEA also uses external providers, but it does not have secure quality assurance arrangements to advise schools about alternative providers. This partly reflects the rural nature of the county and the relative sparsity of alternatives

93. A rigorous approach has been adopted in supporting schools where weak leadership and management have been identified. The LEA now responds vigorously and is brave in using its powers of intervention where needed. It has the ability to produce immediate support for schools through use of the county headteacher service which provides experienced headteachers for acting appointments in schools causing concern or during some critical event.

94. The LEA supports new headteachers effectively, including a system of mentoring. Review and development advisers, who now have good intelligence about schools requiring particular support, play a significant role. There has been increased connection with national developments including National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) and work by the National College for School Leadership. The LEA was also licensed by OFSTED to run a 3-day self-evaluation course. Whereas the programme of professional development opportunities for senior managers is sound, support for middle managers is still developing in response to criticism in the last inspection report. There is increasing use of beacon schools and advanced skills teachers.

Support to governors

95. The LEA’s support to school governors is satisfactory with significant strengths and one area of weakness that is being comprehensively addressed. Since the last inspection, when support was judged to be good, the roles and responsibilities of governing bodies have increased and the LEA has found it a challenge to change the way in which a number of governing bodies perceive their role. The LEA has improved quality assurance procedures in relation to training and support, but has been slow to identify strengths and weaknesses in school governance across the county. In section 10 inspections, governing bodies are judged to be less effective against all LEAs and similar authorities.

96. Governor support services are well-led and managed. There is a sound action plan with specific and appropriate targets to improve the quality of governance across the county. An experienced core team and a number of associates provide good quality training, advice and support at venues around the county to meet a variety of needs and deliver a large and growing number of tailor-made courses to governing bodies. Communication to governors and clerks is clear and comprehensive, but not unnecessarily burdensome. The recent introduction of a bought-in clerking service has been well received and is used by a growing number of schools. The number of vacancies for LEA governors is reducing and a bank of experienced governors has been established to support schools causing concern.

97. Support for schools in special measures and for those with serious weaknesses is good. Two additional governors are appointed to each school, many of whom are LEA officers prepared to give up additional time. The governor support service has worked extensively with schools to draw up development plans for each governing body. Both measures have proved to be effective in enabling governing bodies to understand their role and to fulfil their responsibilities. In those few cases where delegation has been withdrawn, governing bodies have made good progress in demonstrating their ability to have powers restored.

98. In the last year, sound strides have been made in formalising the role of review and development advisers in promoting effective governance and in encouraging the involvement of governors in school self-review meetings and in target-setting with the provision of good quality benchmarked information. EDP2 sets out a sound strategy with proper emphasis on developing the expertise and accountability of governing bodies. The governor support service has developed robust plans and procedures to identify strengths and weaknesses in governance across the county within a year, through a detailed review framework which leads to intensive work with individual governing bodies on identified areas of weakness. There is clear potential for further improvement.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

99. Apart from ICT, schools show greater satisfaction than average with most aspects and rate Norfolk in the top 25 per cent both for services and the LEA's advice to schools on how they get good value for money from services.

100. No fieldwork was carried out in the areas of personnel and financial services. The previous report rated these services as highly satisfactory, but focus groups and the school survey suggested that these are now good.

Support for ICT in administration and management

101. This aspect was criticised in the previous report, and considering the amount of effort and resource deployed since then, very poor progress has been made. Schools report widespread dissatisfaction with systems. They rated the LEA as poor in focus groups and in the bottom 25 per cent via the school survey. Despite some good work by individuals, much activity, and the expenditure of significant amounts of money,

consistent failure to get systems to work efficiently has resulted in little discernible benefit to schools. Overall, performance is poor.

102. Attempts at progress have been made. Hardware has been installed and connected, a single point for accessing technical support has been established, electronic transfer of material is becoming the norm, and capacity has been increased by the use of a range of external contractors. Unfortunately, on all counts, the LEA has encountered problems, which have seriously impeded success. Systems work erratically, response times for support are too unpredictable, inaccuracies in the electronic transfer of some data wastes time and contracts have failed to deliver fully on time and to specification. Although much responsibility lies with the contractor, this issue does raise concerns about the effectiveness of the LEA's client function. The lack of clear leadership and accountability is a major weakness. It is unreasonable that such a major area of strategy and operation should account for only part of a senior officer's time. This in part accounts for the pattern of contracts nearing crisis point before resolution.

103. There is a further major weakness in poor communications between systems and databases which drastically reduces the potential for utilising data to inform management decisions. For example, school financial and personnel data do not interact with council based systems, generating significant errors, which take school staff far too long to resolve. Although a process for upgrading corporate systems to enable more complex analyses to be carried out was mentioned by officers, no clear plan showing the considerable resources needed to effect it, or timescales was produced. Furthermore, although the variable capacity of school managers to appreciate fully the capability of ICT as a management tool was acknowledged, no systematic strategy to develop these skills is in place. This, along with the unreliability of systems, is undermining the very good work in establishing a web-site on which schools can access some useful management information.

104. Schools generally are sympathetic to these problems but they are understandably frustrated, their patience is fast running out, and some are seeking support from external providers. The introduction of a system of cluster based technicians available as a traded service is a welcome sign and schools involved report improved service. A recovery plan with one of the main contractors has also recently been agreed although schools, based on past performance, will remain understandably sceptical until the plan delivers the promised improvements.

Recommendations

In order to improve ICT support in schools and to raise pupils attainment:

- Revise the ICT development plan to ensure that the programme is achievable, affordable and develops progressively so that curriculum and management developments are supported by an infrastructure which works;
- establish a coherent approach across the whole authority in respect of strategic management, infrastructure development and technical support;
- develop a systematic training programme to improve headteachers' understanding of ICT capabilities; and
- develop pupil-level monitoring to support the EDP2 targets.

Property services

105. The performance of Norfolk property services (NPS) to support schools in their day to day maintenance is satisfactory with some strengths. Notwithstanding the number of mobile classrooms referred to earlier, the physical condition of school property in Norfolk is better than average, with a backlog of work required costing £680 per pupil against a national average of £901 per pupil.

106. Primary schools in particular rate the support highly, with around 80 per cent of schools being satisfied or better with the service. Schools overall in Norfolk rate the service in the top 25 per cent of LEAs. About 85 per cent of schools have joined a maintenance pooling scheme. As indicated by the outcome of the condition survey, this is working well and school maintenance is better than average. However, schools' abilities to make secure value for money judgements are hampered by an unsystematic approach to providing them with comparative data on what has been spent on their property, compared both to the money they and others in the scheme have invested.

Recommendation

In order to satisfy schools that they are getting both good value for money and their agreed investment from the maintenance pool:

- Provide them with regular reports on the expenditure on their own site and others within the pool.

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

107. The performance of the LEA in assuring the quality and supply of teachers is good. The strategy is well thought through and led by an effective team steered by a well-established recruitment and retention strategy group. They ensure that initiatives across the breadth of the LEA are brought together coherently and are linked to both local and

national initiatives. The quality and supply of teachers is rightly identified as a high priority within EDP2. There is a good database which identifies both short-term pressures and future trends.

108. A variety of marketing and recruitment strategies are used to attract teachers to Norfolk, including an on-line registration system with plans for further development. Working with a neighbouring LEA, a School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) project is being extended to address teacher supply in areas of difficulty. Despite restrictions imposed and the frustrations caused by the allocations there is active involvement in the graduate and returner teacher programmes and in PGCE validation. Arrangements for the recruitment and induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are good and include an innovative approach linking them with leading mathematics teachers in primary schools. There has also been action to ensure the effective induction of teachers from overseas and, working with diocesan authorities, of refugees whose residency has been agreed.

109. Some of the immediate challenges of teacher supply in a rural county are met by the maintenance of a high quality county headteacher service, a small number of permanently employed supply teachers and an "on call" supply system. Priority is given to schools with greatest need. The EAZs have also shared their expertise in teacher recruitment.

110. Important initiatives to support the professional development of teachers have been undertaken. For instance, the innovative "Well-being" project has been widely adopted by schools and a professional record system is being developed to encourage career development. The staff development needs of headteachers are identified and discussed at the time of appointment and their induction includes both mentoring and specific support for those with a teaching commitment. A review of headteacher appointment arrangements has been undertaken in order to improve the quality of the process although the low number of applicants remains a problem.

Early years

111. Support for early years is satisfactory with a number of strengths. From a low base, the LEA has made significant progress since the last inspection. It has developed a clear and coherent strategy that dovetails with the corporate strategy for social inclusion and regeneration. The strategy is well resourced and funding is increasingly targeted on areas of urban and rural deprivation to improve the life chances of young families and their children.

112. Progress was accelerated two years ago by the joint appointment to the education and social services departments of a senior officer to lead the work of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership EYDCP. This has been critical in improving relationships in Norfolk. The senior officer has worked skilfully through open communication to eradicate competition and dispel mistrust between settings. The partnership has been restructured to provide greater clarity and direction to its work. The wide representation on sub-groups is beginning to break down barriers. In addition, a sub-group to monitor inclusion has been established to ensure that all activities supported by the EYDCP are inclusive to all children. The LEA has met its targets in

relation to four-year-olds and is well on the way to ensuring that there is sufficient provision for three-year-olds and that it is where it is needed.

113. The EYCDP strategic plan is founded on a comprehensive audit. It articulates a clear vision for childcare in Norfolk that takes account of the local context and has established local quantifiable targets. The implementation plan is clear and comprehensive, has specific time-related performance indicators and promotes social inclusion. Significant progress has been made in enabling Traveller children to benefit from pre-statutory schooling. There are strong, explicit links between this plan, EDP2 and the Behaviour Support Plan. By 2004, all relevant plans will be fully integrated.

114. There is increasingly effective team working at the centre and in the field, with co-operation between the maintained, voluntary and private sectors so that work is clearly targeted across settings to meet the needs of local communities. The range and quality of written communication are very good. There has been effective joint working with the early years inspectorate in developing the foundation stage in all settings. Children with special needs are well provided for in all settings through the introduction of an advice and consultation service for pre-school providers by the pupil access and support services and Early Years Support Network and the provision of a team of support workers for children with additional needs in pre-school settings.

Support for 14-19 education in Norfolk

115. The education department's work in this area is an integral part of the council's commitment to playing a key strategic role in promoting lifelong learning in the community. Relationships with the Norfolk Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are positive and constructive. They build on the good working relationships established within the Norfolk Learning Partnership.

116. Local education authority officers play an appropriate role in the LSC area reviews of 16-19 provision, they co-operate fully on matters regarding planning and financing school sixth forms, and have signed a memorandum of understanding which sets out respective roles in the strategic partnership between schools and colleges, the LSC and the LEA. Good links have been forged between RDAs and LSC personnel.

117. The LEA takes a leading role in the development of the 14-19 curriculum. It facilitates and supports schools in the development of vocational partnerships and in extending opportunities for work-related learning. Strategic conferences, led by the LEA, focus on topical 14-19 issues and are well-supported by schools and other providers. LEA officers have produced helpful guidance to schools on a range of topics, including health and safety. They are also involved in the evaluation of vocational provision, the introduction of applied GCSEs and in developing distance learning opportunities through specialist schools. Central to the LEA's role is the challenge to schools to develop courses that are student-focused and lead to identifiable progression and accredited outcomes.

118. Links with employers are good, although those with training providers are less well-developed. A successful joint initiative with local businesses is the scheme for mentoring young people. Over 440 mentors are now part of the scheme, working voluntarily in some 50 schools.

119. The LEA's influential work in the 14-19 area is driven by two considerations. One is to raise achievement at Key Stage 4, particularly in young people for whom the curriculum appears to have little to offer. The other is to address the low post-16 participation rates in education and training in Norfolk. The sparsely populated nature of the county means that many young people are faced with considerable distances to travel to pursue vocational interests post-16. Too many give up at this stage. In contrast, those that do stay on tend to do well. Advanced level passes and GNVQ scores are at least in line with, and often better than, national averages and those found in similar authorities.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The LEA's strategy for SEN

120. Norfolk's strategic approach to special and additional needs has significant strengths with a few remaining weaknesses. The success of the strategy, which enables schools to identify and support many pupils' needs without moving to a statement of special educational need, is reflected in the eight per cent reduction in the numbers of statements maintained. Furthermore, there has also been a 13 per cent reduction in the numbers of pupils being put forward for assessment in the last two years. The percentages of pupils with statements, and the rate of new statements, are now average compared to statistical neighbours, whereas prior to the introduction of the strategy they were higher. Prospects for further improvement are good, as the new framework for supporting pupils with special needs becomes implemented. Schools broadly welcome the approach to inclusion advocated by the LEA and all aspects of SEN provision were judged to be satisfactory in the school survey.

121. The LEA was in the vanguard of delegating resources to school level with a well conceived audit of need in every school. This generates funds with which schools can develop support strategies for pupils across the ability spectrum. Accompanying it is a thorough mechanism for ensuring that schools are challenged to illustrate how they have used these resources. This mechanism is accepted as being too resource intensive and plans to build the audit into the RDA visits are well conceived, but currently, the self-review process and RDA visits give too little attention to inclusion in general and to the inclusion of pupils with SEN in particular.

122. The LEA recognised that there were shortcomings with the system and subjected the service to a thorough, well consulted Best Value review which has been endorsed by the cabinet. The findings of the review, along with other research carried out have been amalgamated into a very good framework for the delivery of special needs support over the next five years. This addresses all the issues raised by stakeholders and provides the LEA and schools with a coherent way forward. This had been circulated to schools just prior to the inspection, so no evidence of impact could be felt, although those school representatives who had read it agreed with the proposals. However, although implementation dates and officer accountabilities are built into the implementation plan, most of the targets are process based, and there is insufficient financial detail.

123. The range of provision for the spectrum of pupil needs is generally adequate, with a balance of mainstream, special schools and learning support units in mainstream schools. These latter are rightly highlighted by the Best Value review as in need of rationalisation and re-assessment, as some are not fully utilised. The shortage of places for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties has been recognised and plans to reduce the expenditure incurred in seeking provision in private and out of county schools are being developed. However, a secure financial strategy to effect this is not apparent, nor are all special school headteachers fully supportive of the implications of the strategy for their schools. Some good projects have been trialled which explore a range of outreach activities and dual placements to extend the impact of special schools, and the networks of special needs co-ordinators based around special schools are good in principle. Their effectiveness is too variable, however, and places too much reliance on special school headteachers to service the groups. The parent partnership is effective. A

small team of officers liaise with volunteers and are improving parental involvement and knowledge in a highly professional, sensitive and non-adversarial manner. Schools are increasingly asking for their advice, and SEN tribunals in Norfolk have reduced from 35 to just five in the last two years as a result of their efforts.

Recommendation

In order to ensure the new framework for supporting SEN pupils has its maximum effect:

- A detailed plan showing how it will be resourced should be quickly produced, along with some specific output targets for pupils.

Statutory obligations

124. The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN is satisfactory but with a significant weakness in the recent completion rate for statements.

125. In most respects the authority remains well positioned to perform its statutory responsibilities. It made a sound decision four years ago to delegate the majority of resources for special educational needs to schools so that they would be able to meet need without resorting to formal assessment procedures. Subsequently requests from schools for assessment have reduced significantly and the overall number of statements is also beginning to decline. The school survey indicates that schools are generally satisfied with SEN procedures, although that view was not unanimously supported in discussion groups with headteachers during the inspection.

126. Statements of special educational needs are well written. The quality of correspondence with parents is generally good and key events, such as the annual review, are monitored effectively. Processes are currently being reviewed in collaboration with the parent partnership to ensure that the requirements of the new code of practice are met.

127. Greater partnership with parents is developing very effectively. Independent parental supporters have been trained. A new structure for local support of children with special educational needs provides a pupil entitlement support officer in each of the four geographical areas, supported by caseworkers. This is in line with a recommendation of the Best Value review. The intention is to enable earlier collaboration with parents, greater continuity of local contact and facilitation of inter-agency working. The new structure will also enable greater local authority input to annual reviews than is currently possible.

128. However, the current rate of completing statements is unsatisfactory. Including all agencies, the rate fell to 27 per cent in 2001/02, compared with a national average of over 60 per cent. The rate of completion allowing for exceptions has also fallen, to a level of 87 per cent, compared with more than 95 per cent in 1997/98. Most of the

deterioration has taken place during the past year and is attributed to staffing difficulties rather than delays in working with other agencies.

Recommendation

In order to meet identified needs which require the process of formal statementing:

- High priority should be given to achieving within one year the national rate for the completion of a statement without allowing for exceptions.

School improvement

129. This aspect of work is carried out satisfactorily. Criteria for both statutory assessment and delegating resources to schools are applied consistently, although the mechanism for generating funds to support pupils with statements is obscure and poorly understood by schools. The mechanism is also time-consuming at transfer ages and is not fully integrated with transition planning. However, the LEA is aware of these weaknesses and reasonable plans exist for improving this situation and involving schools more effectively in the process. Overall, Norfolk has achieved a good balance between resources under school control and those kept centrally to provide additional support.

130. Available support is via the senior SEN adviser and/or the extended school support teams managed by the education psychological services. When delivered by skilled staff, both services are rated highly by schools, but availability of both is a key concern. Support from the adviser is spread too thinly, and the support services suffer from inadequate cover arrangements when staff are unavailable. As a result, the quality and effectiveness of SEN support are too variable throughout the county. These shortcomings have been recognised by officers and a reasonable attempt has been made to overcome them by developing multi-skilled teams of support teachers and assistants. Schools are still dissatisfied with the arrangements as individuals' skills do not necessarily match school needs, causing frustration and delay until the appropriate support worker is available. Higher turnover of staff is also adversely affecting continuity of delivery.

131. In-service training is improving with an appropriately wide target audience involving senior managers, special educational needs co-ordinators, learning support assistants and governors. A comprehensive range of courses is on offer, including several accredited by external bodies, and the annual SEN conference is well attended and highly rated by schools. Course evaluations are favourable, but further evaluations of impact are underdeveloped. The general advice offered to headteachers and special needs co-ordinators by the senior SEN adviser is very good but the value and quality of that given by more generalist advisers is less highly regarded. Target setting for relevant pupils is firmly established and operates via individual education plans which are generally sound. Individual pupil tracking systems are developing well, as is the LEA's ability to help schools measure individual and cohort value added scores. Neither schools nor the LEA are fully utilising the potential of these analyses, and the RDA visits

do not sufficiently challenge schools about their effectiveness with pupils who have special needs.

Recommendation

In order to improve the provision made by schools to pupils with special educational needs:

- Improve the effectiveness of RDAs in challenging schools to meet pupils' special educational needs.

Value for money

132. The delegation and thorough audit of resources for all pupils with special needs in mainstream schools, unlike those in many LEAs, means that Norfolk's SEN budget is not susceptible to annual overspends. However, the resource levels for each type of need have not been thoroughly reviewed, and the precise mechanism for allocating resources to pupils with statements of special educational need remains unnecessarily obscure and cumbersome. In response, the LEA is proposing that such resources be delegated to headteachers at a cluster level and is helpfully establishing some pilots to test this.

133. Reasonable criteria for establishing pupils' needs are consistently utilised. However the rationale for the subsequent placement of pupils is not systematic, and the value for money of the various settings within which pupils are taught has not been thoroughly investigated. One result is that the unit costs at a range of learning support centres within mainstream schools can vary greatly, especially since they are on the basis of places rather than pupil numbers.

134. The overall level of resources allocated to SEN is in line with comparator groups and reflects overall need as measured by proxy free meals indicators. Norfolk commits 14.9 per cent of its local schools budget to SEN which is about two per cent more than statistical neighbours and one per cent less than national averages. However, insufficient provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties results in considerable extra expenditure for these pupils out-of-county. This and other issues have properly been identified by the Best Value review as in need of resolution. The resulting five-year framework for the provision of special needs outlines how these issues will be tackled. However, the accompanying resource plan lacks the necessary detail and is too reliant on the council providing as yet uncosted amount from its 'invest to save' account.

135. Pupil access and support services are increasingly able to provide data to show their effectiveness, and the specific and general improvements so demonstrated, compared to the level of funding and detailed financial audit at school level, means that the LEA is securing satisfactory value for money.

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

The strategy to promote social inclusion.

136. Support for social inclusion has some major strengths. There is a strong and credible strategy, sharp targeting, some exemplary partnership and strong emerging evidence of effectiveness. However, these strengths do not apply across the board, although the support overall is never less than satisfactory.

137. The council has a clear view of the need to tackle both rural deprivation and the problems of the conurbations. There is a very clear understanding at the top that long term and sustainable educational improvement in Norfolk is dependent upon a shift in culture that leads to a greater valuing of education by the whole community. Members and officers believe that the council should lead on achieving this shift, by implementing its lifelong learning strategy, by working in close and sustained partnership with regeneration initiatives and by focusing resources and collaborative projects on communities at risk of social exclusion.

138. The council has been active in securing funding from a number of sources including New Deal, the Single Regeneration Budget and Public Service Agreements. Underperforming schools in disadvantaged areas have been sharply targeted for intervention and support from the advisory service, from Education Action Zones (EAZs) and from associated parts of education such as family learning, community education initiatives and the youth and community service. This targeted work is clearly bearing fruit in Norwich and Great Yarmouth, where there is evidence of improved achievement in some schools as well as a new engagement by parents and other adults with both their own education and that of their children.

139. Some very good work on developing the alternative work-related curriculum for disaffected Key Stage 4 pupils, in conjunction with a diverse range of partners, has opened up opportunities for young people who might otherwise be lost to education. Much of the work of the youth and community service (YCS) is targeted on the most disaffected and those excluded or in danger of exclusion from school. The work is improving attitudes to learning, supporting the transition to college or work, making an important contribution to citizenship by involving young people in decision making and deflecting them from crime. The YCS contribution to an alternative curriculum at Key Stage 4, including summer activities programmes, has been effective in building their self-esteem and in motivating pupils in Years 10 and 11 who are in danger of exclusion.

140. However, more remains to be done. The LEA does not currently have a strategic overview of all the work being done in relation to access issues nor is the work well knitted together. Some schools in disadvantaged areas are struggling to bring together all the LEA sources of support.

141. On the wider front, though there are examples of good cross-departmental or cross-agency working, as in the contributions made by the cultural services department to adult literacy and literacy in schools, or the work with the LSC and the Youth Offending Team, there is limited evidence of multi-disciplinary planning that capitalises on the work of social services, health and the police.

The supply of school places

142. At the time of the last inspection, this area was judged to be satisfactory. The CEO's self-evaluation suggested that it was now unsatisfactory. Although improvements are being made, these are too recent to have had any significant effect, and performance is poor in this strategic function.

143. Norfolk is now adopting an appropriate strategic role, however it did not take this role seriously enough until the late nineties. The result in terms of the planning of school places can be seen throughout the county, where expedient solutions to school accommodation have left a legacy of too many mobile and temporary classrooms. These account for about 15 per cent of the pupil population, are costly to maintain and are generally poor learning environments. Spare capacity at a county level is not unduly high at around ten per cent, although the variations at school and area level are too wide. The complex range of transfer ages across the county until very recently was also symptomatic of the lack of a strategic approach to these matters.

144. Forecasting methodology has been too simplistic and school-based pupil projections have had limited value. Headteachers are sceptical of forecasts and rate the LEA in the bottom 25 per cent on place planning, with only 35 per cent of secondary schools being satisfied with the system.

145. The most recent version of the School Organisation Plan was being circulated to stakeholders for consultation at the time of the inspection. It is an improvement on the previous version, in that it now contains area-level pupil data which has at least some agreement from headteachers, and respondents can see the intentions for all areas of the county. However, in other respects the document is light on the details needed to make informed comments. Although links with SEN, school improvement and asset management are all mentioned, they are covered in a cursory manner, giving no indication of the detail of the council's plans. This is symptomatic of poor liaison between the relevant sections on this issue, as pointed out by the department's own Best Value review which reported in 2001 that: 'there is no overall co-ordination of the work'..'this limits the effectiveness not only of the pupil planning process, but also of other sections'.

146. However, things are now improving. The Best Value review provided an action plan which has stimulated improvements in forecasting methodology, which is now satisfactory and further sensible developments are planned. The School Organisation Committee is well run, sensitively chaired and is proving to be a useful vehicle for promoting the required changes. School re-organisations are being effectively dealt with. The deputy chief officer has taken responsibility for, and recognises the importance of, the issues and what needs to be done to improve the situation. A coherent action plan is designed to address all the key issues, although the inspection was too early for much impact to be discernible.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic planning for school places:

- Develop the dialogue with individual schools so that detailed local knowledge is incorporated in the forecasting system; and
- incorporate more detailed planning relating to SEN, school improvement and asset management in the School Organisation Plan.

Asset management

147. Asset management is unsatisfactory.

148. The council carried out a Best Value review of its approach to property management, which reported in 2001. The outcome was a useful and coherent set of recommendations to address most of the major issues identified by the review. However, it did not generate a resource plan to accompany the recommendations, and the element of competition was glossed over. The rationale given in the report was unconvincing and the outcome was inevitable, given the restrictive council policy that all council-funded work must be processed through Norfolk property services (NPS), a company which is wholly owned by the council. Although NPS is required periodically to demonstrate value for money to the council, it has not convinced many schools of this and scepticism about the fee structure is hampering good customer relations with schools. Transparency over value for money is further impeded by an inappropriate expectation that education staff should not support schools in testing the market. Similarly, the service level agreement between NPS and the education department is not sufficiently clear in its operations.

149. The condition survey of schools was carried out efficiently. A re-survey is helpfully planned for this year but beyond this there is no systematic mechanism for keeping the database up to date. The suitability survey was badly organised, and relied solely on schools whose staff were poorly prepared to complete the necessary paperwork. The operation had to be re-run and has now generated a consistent database. Furthermore, access by education personnel to the property database, which is held by NPS is too restrictive. The local policy statement and the overall asset management plan (AMP) are adequate, and have been graded as such by DfES, but links with other statutory plans and strategic priorities are tenuous.

150. The AMP is well linked to the council-wide property plan, and some very good work is being done to secure significant resources through the PFI scheme. However, although a resource plan does exist in outline, it is not sufficiently detailed at school level, nor does it indicate that enough money is available to secure all the improvements required. Although a sensible prioritisation procedure for projects exists, schools have not been sufficiently engaged in it, nor have they been given enough information to enable them to reconcile their asset plan with the council's. This is a significant weakness that is preventing schools from making best use of their own capital resources. There is an acknowledgement by officers that schools need further support in developing their asset management capabilities, but no programme to address this is in place.

Fortunately, officers have recognised most of these shortcomings, and the deputy CEO has sound plans to address them. However, implementation is being impeded by the inability to recruit an appropriately skilled senior manager.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that schools are getting good value for money from NPS on building projects:

- The council should encourage and assist schools to test the market.

In order to improve school property and advice to schools on asset management:

- The service level agreement between education and NPS should more clearly set out the respective roles and responsibilities of the two services.

Admissions

151. Norfolk's arrangements for admissions, as at the time of the previous inspection, are satisfactory. Over most of the county, admissions follow traditional lines as most pupils move into and through the schools which serve their local community. However, inadequate provision of places acceptable to parents, especially in the larger, growing settlements has caused problems, which have inappropriately been ascribed to the admissions process.

152. Information for parents is clear, available in a variety of languages and covers all relevant statutory requirements, and the criteria for deciding priorities are satisfactory. Latest data show that where the council is the admissions authority, well in excess of 90 percent of parents get their first preference at both first entry and subsequent transfer. Complexities for parents arising from different transfer ages across the county, which were pointed out in the previous inspection, are systematically being resolved by the move to a unified, two-tier system; as the latest re-organisation unfolds only Norwich will be left with a three-tier system. The re-organisation programme has cross party agreement, and the recent procedure was carried out efficiently after extensive consultation.

153. Relationships with the other 79 admissions authorities are improving, although not to the point where agreements over final application dates, sharing of pupil lists or co-ordinating secondary parent's open evenings are routine. Good work has resulted in the LEA brokering agreements between secondary schools who now helpfully share between them admissions of excluded pupils. Admissions appeals overall, are below average, and are resolved in a timely fashion. However, those at secondary level, mainly in the central area, have increased fourfold in the last two years where the LEA has been unable to improve the acceptability to parents of some schools in the Norwich area.

Provision for pupils with no school places

154. Education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) is satisfactory, as before, with some considerable strengths. Statutory requirements are met and the provision gives value for money. The well-developed strategy is based on four pupil referral units (PRUs) managed by area headteachers and consisting in each case of a number of centres. Staff teach in these, run outreach in-school preventative programmes, and offer support and training to schools. Pupil referral units cater for the education and reintegration of pupils permanently excluded at Key Stages 1-3 and reintegration for Year 10 pupils. Last year, 38 per cent of the 106 pupils who attended PRU core groups were reintegrated and 35 per cent progressed to Key Stage 4 Links4 provision. Sessional attendance at the PRUs is highly effective in reducing permanent exclusions; last year only three per cent of sessional attenders were permanently excluded. Pupil referral units currently provide 22.5 hours of education, (core and sessional) and co-ordinate provision for pupils excluded for 15-45 days. By September, they will offer 25 hours of provision. PRUs enjoy good links with the RDAs. OFSTED reports judge the education provided in all the PRUs to be of good quality. Children being educated at home by parents or by parental choice are monitored systematically.

155. The visiting teacher service (VTS) runs Links4 projects. These provide an alternative curriculum for Key Stage 4 permanently excluded pupils, school phobics, pregnant schoolgirls and children who are out of school for medical reasons. All pupils are offered at least 20 hours of individually planned provision with a range of providers, including local colleges. Programmes incorporate study support from the youth and community service and are predominantly work-related. There are FOUR projects one in each education area of the county, managed by the VTS Area co-ordinator and a project worker. There are sound systems for monitoring attendance and progress and in 2000-01, 64 per cent of excluded pupils attended for more than 10 hours while 36 per cent attended for less than 10 hours a week. Commendable efforts are made to involve parents and there is regular reporting back to them.

156. Links4 programmes are creating better progression prospects for students not motivated by traditional school offerings. In the first full year of operation, all those who completed programmes at age 16 had a place to go in work, training or college, though not all took these up. Many had at least one accredited outcome.

157. Taken as a whole, this is a thoughtfully planned and largely high quality provision for children out of school. But the service faces some unresolved and difficult problems. Some schools find it difficult to identify a single point of contact to access the system. On occasion there are no PRU places available where the children are, leading either to lengthy journeys or provision not being made within 15 days. Not all schools welcome all children and many are full, so there is some evidence of children moving out of one school and remaining in limbo while efforts are made to find another place. Securing full time education for children in the public care of London boroughs but placed in Norfolk, is not always easy. A shortage of specialist EBD provision results in difficulties in providing adequately for some children.

Multi-agency issues

158. The social services inspection reported on a consistent perception by social workers and others that large numbers of children in Norfolk were either "excluded" from school or simply not attending. However, official exclusion figures have reduced significantly and the LEA is able to account convincingly for the children concerned. There were also reports from the Youth Offending Team(YOT) of children out of school and with very limited educational provision. These cases included a non-attender whose family were being prosecuted by the education department, a school refuser for whom provision was being organised, and a child deemed in need of a special school place but for whom no place was available.

159. Clearly, there are some inconsistencies in the process of securing provision for pupils out of school. The attendance of various agencies at the area education fora responsible for progressing arrangements is variable, communications between schools and the agencies are neither consistent nor reliable and the forums do not minute or record their deliberations and decisions in a consistent way.

160. Furthermore, though virtually all children out of school and known to the authority are allocated to programmes, it is not necessarily the case that all are in fact consistently attending. Although there are systems and clear responsibilities for monitoring this provision, staffing difficulties and the inherent problems in monitoring customised programmes involving a range of providers have resulted in performance that differs across the county. In one of the four areas staff are able to provide detailed records on the status, attendance and progress of all children out of school whereas in another, monitoring has been inadequate at times.

161. The outcome of these communication problems is not that young people are lost to education or unaccounted for, but that they are not necessarily where they should be. In the words of one headteacher, "everyone knows who they are, but not where they are". Children out of school stopped by the police could in fact be on Links4 programmes and not attending. Similarly, children telling social workers that they have been excluded could be truanting and playing one agency off against another, or could be on alternative programmes. Clearly, agencies need to share information on a systematic basis and according to clear protocols.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that children out of school have access to education and attend programmes regularly:

- Decisions made by the area education fora should be clearly minuted and promptly communicated to all relevant agencies; and
- information about educational arrangements for all children out of school should be shared between agencies routinely.

Attendance

162. Support for attendance is satisfactory, with some strengths. Nonetheless, attendance in Norfolk schools is not improving. Though it is in line with national averages in primary schools, it is slightly below in secondary schools, with authorised absence higher than the national average. Unauthorised absence is an issue in some of the schools in disadvantaged areas. The most recent figures show deterioration in attendance in both phases. Though this could be in part due to improved electronic collection systems, it is clear that there is no upward trend in attendance,

163. This picture differs little from the last inspection, but the LEA has not been idle in relation to attendance. School attendance targets have been set. Following a best value review, the education welfare service was reorganised as the Norfolk pupil attendance service, with a stronger focus on attendance, a core and an operational arm, and devolution of operational staff. Devolution to secondary schools and associated clusters of primary schools was conducted on the basis of attendance data and with clear service specifications. The service is soundly managed and fulfils its statutory responsibilities. Staff based in clusters work on individual cases and in many cases have an impressive knowledge of local communities and their clients, which is valued by schools. A pilot scheme to focus the efforts of education social workers on the 25 most difficult cases in their areas looks promising and is currently being evaluated. There are good links with the visiting teacher service and with PRU/psychological service staff.

164. The core team supports the devolved workers by issuing guidance and model policies to schools. It also conducts detailed audits with an element of training and advice to schools, when devolved staff indicate there is a need. Links with the RDAs and with school self-review are good and there is a protocol for work with the Traveller education service. Joint working with the police is underdeveloped and though discussion is currently underway to set up truancy sweeps, none have yet taken place.

165. The service is active in initiating prosecutions. Parenting orders have also been used on a number of occasions. Most parents respond to warning letters. Nonetheless, 71 cases were taken to court last year, an increase of four. The service has carried out some research on the use of the legal process. This indicates a success rate of 50 per cent in improving attendance where parents were found guilty. However, various sources including schools report that fines levied are so low as to render prosecution ineffective as a sanction in some cases. Cases of multiple prosecution with little or no effect were cited, as were cases of families whose children rarely, if ever, attended school. Delays in the prosecution process with many adjournments and parents not turning up in court has on occasion extended the time that a child has been out of education. At the root of this lie cultural problems, which the Norfolk pupil attendance service cannot address alone.

Recommendation

In order to reduce unauthorised absence:

- Move rapidly to carry out truancy sweeps in those areas of the county where unauthorised absence is high.

Multi-agency matters

166. Joint inspection with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary(HMIC) revealed a fragmented picture of contacts with young people who are poor attenders, and their families. In some cases young people were known to the police or to the Youth Offending Team but there were no protocols or standard procedures for notification, exchange of information or joint action related to attendance issues. Good liaison arrangements between community police and particular schools in some areas did not link into operational police arrangements nor were there mutually agreed strategies for combating or preventing truancy.

167. Though a number of schools noted with regret the disappearance of their community police officers, others had retained theirs and valued the link. Overwhelmingly, schools welcome police involvement and would like more of it on a structured basis, with a protocol for joint working on truancy and related matters.

168. Education social workers often do not know which other agencies are involved with families, while the families themselves are often unclear about the role of the professionals with whom they are dealing. Time is wasted tracking other professionals. There are no regular meetings or protocols for exchange of information with other agencies.

Recommendation

In order to improve attendance:

- Agree a joint strategy for combating truancy with protocols governing the exchange of information and standard procedures for notification.

Behaviour support

169. Support for behaviour was judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection. It remains satisfactory, with some strengths. The revised Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) sets out a sensible strategy, which sits well alongside other plans and LEA priorities. Targets, responsibilities and expected outcomes are clearly laid out.

170. Exclusions have reduced dramatically over the last three years, from 176 in 1998-99 to 64 in 2000-01 and Norfolk's rates are now on a par with those of like authorities. A range of measures has been instrumental in reducing exclusions.

171. Protocols for managed moves have been negotiated with schools and are now operant in some areas and under discussion in others. Pupil referral units provide sessional placements to support school based strategies for working with pupils at risk of exclusion. A graduated range of school support is offered through joint teams of education psychologists and learning support specialists who work in schools, targeting children at risk of exclusion and disseminating specialist expertise to teachers. For children at risk of exclusion in the primary phase, there are also specialist support assistants who support children through transition on occasion. Once accessed, this range of support is effective and valued, but demand has greatly exceeded supply in

some areas. Weaknesses in the clarity and coherence of SEN support arrangements also impact at the point where behaviour and SEN matters intersect, specifically around children with EBD. On occasion this leaves schools unclear as to how and from whom to access support.

172. Specific training programmes on anger and behaviour management topics have been successfully delivered to staff and governors and achievement boosting projects such as Project West have been run in a number of schools. The psychological service has also developed and disseminated an anti-bullying strategy, which includes advising schools on the development of anti-bullying policies. Facilitated by the Norfolk Psychological Service, secondary and primary behaviour forums in the four areas meet regularly to update themselves and discuss key issues. Nonetheless, referrals to the psychological service for support with pupils' behaviour remain high. Evidence from a variety of sources shows that some schools remain reluctant to engage with young people whose behaviour is not good, for instance those who are clients of the YOT, and would prefer other agencies to take responsibility for them.

Multi-agency matters

173. The LEA enjoys good strategic links with the Youth Offending Team. Links between the work of the team and that of the LEA are identified as important within the BSP and some targets within the plan relate to joint operations. LEA staff from the youth and community service work jointly and fruitfully with the YOT on a regular basis. Useful inputs from the YOT were mentioned by a number of schools. Nonetheless, recently commissioned research identifies a number of difficulties in communication and collaboration between the two agencies.

174. Joint inspection with HMIC confirmed the research findings and indicated particular difficulties related to locating special school places for children with statements of EBD and offending. Reintegration for these young people was also problematic, as schools were reluctant to admit or readmit them.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

175. Provision for health, safety, welfare and child protection is satisfactory with a few remaining weaknesses. The education department meets its responsibilities for child protection and makes a substantial contribution to the work of the Area Child Protection Committee(ACPC). The head of the Norfolk pupil attendance service chairs the ACPC training sub committee, which runs multi-agency training. Programmes are organised monthly for designated teachers and other staff within education including the review and development advisers, staff of the Norfolk psychological service and staff from the Norfolk youth and community service. Specific training has been developed for governors and take up is good. Child protection matters are built into the school self-review process. Each school has a designated teacher and an increasing number have more than one. The LEA maintains a regularly updated electronic list of designated teachers which indicates when updating is required or when a designated teacher is replaced. Schools are then targeted for the offer of training. Most respond well, though around six per cent have not taken up updating training in spite of repeated offers. In these circumstances, the LEA currently has no powers to insist, though the legislation currently being enacted will give it a statutory responsibility to do so.

176. Working arrangements between schools and social workers have gone through a difficult patch in the last two years. In the past, child protection concerns from schools were routed through the education welfare service, as it then was. With the reorganisation and sharp refocusing of this service on attendance issues, schools with child protection concerns found themselves dealing directly with an overstretched social services department with high thresholds for intervention. A social services reorganisation meant that familiar faces and longstanding relationships had in many cases disappeared. This, coupled with a complex and lengthy pre-referral form which was not well explained to schools, and with the high levels of anxiety in schools around child protection issues following a recent high profile case, resulted in disaffection and mutual misunderstanding between schools and social workers. In response, the education department has recently set up a hot line for schools to help them to understand whether or not the situation in question is one where children are in danger of significant harm. This line is taking around 10 calls a week from schools. Where referrals are pursued, schools still report frequent failures to respond by social services within the prescribed seven days.

177. Relations between schools and social workers are not yet where they need to be, nor where the respective departments, both of which recognise the need for better communication and collaboration, would wish them to be. Nonetheless, there has been progress on the use of agreed procedures.

178. The LEA has clear policies for health and safety and supports schools well in developing their own. Health and safety is currently a corporate priority. Policy statements are available to schools both in written form and on the web site, where there is a model policy statement for adaptation by individual schools. Schools also have access to guidelines to help in risk assessment and separate advisory documents for appropriate curriculum areas. There is a regular programme of schools visits by a specialist member of the authority's internal audit team to check health and safety arrangements, including risk assessment. An annual report on Health and Safety reviews the performance of schools and the central department. A specialist consultancy is used to provide training which includes courses for newly-appointed headteachers.

Recommendations

In order to improve child protection:

- Develop and deliver joint training for schools and social workers designed to dispel stereotypes and create mutual understanding of respective roles, procedures and cultures; and
- ensure that schools receive a response to referrals within seven days.

Multi agency matters

179. Early in 2002, senior officers from education and social services met to try and create a basis for better understanding and improved communication between the services. Though this has resulted in better understanding at the top, the social services inspection in January/February still judged communication and inter-agency working at an operational level to be problematic. Schools were reluctant to use the pre-referral form and complained of difficulties in getting a response from the social services phone line. Social workers complained that schools were too quick to exclude children in difficulties, a complaint that is not supported by the evidence.

180. Underlying these complaints is an area of mutual professional misunderstanding. Education provides a universal service, social services a targeted safety net service. The arms-length relationship of LEAs and schools is not well understood in social services, nor is the role of social workers well understood in schools.

181. There has been some progress since then. Schools are now using the form and the phone line, but there are still consistent reports from a considerable number of schools indicating a lack of feedback or very delayed feedback from social services on referrals. In addition, there are a number of documented cases concerning secondary aged children who schools believe, with good reason, are at risk. Thresholds in social services are set so high that they are unable to offer schools support with these cases.

182. This threshold issue has implications for other agencies. In one such case, a pupil sleeping rough was advised by the school to report himself to the police as homeless. The police then invoked police protection. On occasion, the police have themselves been confronted by situations in which they felt compelled to invoke police protection and this has been an issue in their relationship with social services. Relationships between schools and the police on child protection matters are generally characterised by mutual respect with a few minor caveats. Police have not always found it easy to speak to a child on the premises in school on a child protection matter. Occasionally, a referral from a school to social services has resulted in a police visit to the family and the school has not been informed. The police do not have access to the database of teachers with designated responsibility for child protection.

Children in public care

183. Provision for children in public care is good. It has been given high priority for joint action by education and social services. Joint targets have been agreed for Quality Protects, the BSP and the EDP. Joint committees and groups have been established at both strategic and operational levels, relevant joint funding arrangements agreed and some good co-operative working initiated. Members take their corporate parenting role seriously. Scrutiny committee considered the academic achievement of looked after children in March and has since considered a report on corporate parenting. A members' corporate parenting conference has been organised.

184. The LEA's database provides good management information about the arrangements for individual children. None were permanently excluded in the last year. All schools have designated teachers and the database also records their training status. Training is offered in twilight sessions and to date 80 out of the 450 designated teachers

have been trained, some in the writing of personal education plans. Termly forums offer designated teachers the chance to identify their training needs and have face-to-face contact with social services staff.

185. The provision of education, attendance and attainment are all systematically monitored by education co-ordinators, who liaise between education and social services and act as effective advocates on behalf of children in public care. Monitoring of children placed out of county has presented some difficulties but good information has been collected on their Key Stage 4 achievement and work to complete the picture continues. Educational achievement compares favourably with that in like authorities, but is well behind that of the peer group. Expectations are high and challenging targets have been set for raising achievement. Work is underway to analyse the locus and causes of under achievement in order to target support more sharply. At the same time, good monitoring arrangements mean that staff know where children are being educated and why they are out of the mainstream, if they are. Review and development advisers are supplied with lists of children in public care and education social workers track their attendance.

186. A range of good initiatives to support the education of children in public care has been undertaken. Children themselves have been consulted about their needs and have contributed to training, including the joint training of residential social workers and foster carers to raise expectations. At a major conference in March they organised workshops, including one on bullying at school and were presented with certificates from the directors of education and social services. An analysis of the causes of non-attendance has led to an action plan. A common framework for monitoring children placed out of county has been developed. Dowries are available to support children with educational difficulties. All Norfolk children's homes have a designated librarian and there are additional loan collections for the homes. A newsletter for carers, "Education Matters", is produced regularly and circulated. High quality committed staff are working hard to raise expectations and performance and create an ethos that values and supports education for children in public care.

Multi agency matters

187. The Lifescope inter-agency team, a Quality Protects initiative, consists of education, health and mental health professionals and provides a health and education service for children looked after and their carers. This joint approach is valuable. Working arrangements with social services have evolved and are evolving further, with improvements in communication and better sharing of some information. Mutual access to databases has been agreed and a system implemented for flagging all children in public care on education databases. Nonetheless, some problems persist around information sharing. Joint action panels set up to establish joint decision making have suffered some disruption as a result of reorganisation in social services and education issues are not always considered when planned moves for pupils are undertaken in-county.

188. There is good close working with the Youth Offending Team, for instance around arrangements for children returning from secure units who cannot always be found a placement within the agreed 15 days. The Youth Offending Team have identified children in public care and their education as a priority in their work. A small number of children in public care, mostly from residential settings, have been responsible for a disproportionate

number of offences in the past. Successful liaison between the YOT, social services and the education co-ordinators for children in public care has supported a 38 per cent reduction in offending by this group. Recent research commissioned by the YOT and education service analyses some difficulties in joint working and makes proposals for improvement. Although police officers seconded to the YOT are integral to collaborative approaches, and the police sit on the children's services operational group, they are not involved in joint planning or operations for these children.

Recommendation

In order to enhance access to education for children in public care:

- Set up joint planning and working arrangements regarding children in public care between the police, the education co-ordinators and the Youth Offending Team.

Combating racism

189. The LEA has a strong commitment to promoting race equality and provides good leadership in combating racism as part of its programme for addressing equal opportunities. This has all party support from members. There was a swift and unequivocal response from the council and the police authority to the recommendations of the report of the committee of enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. Sound structures and protocols are in place at corporate and departmental level to challenge perceptions and new legislation is anticipated in planning and welcomed as a way of furthering social inclusion.

190. The appointment, 18 months ago, of a corporate senior officer with responsibility for equalities has increased the momentum. All policies and procedures have been revised, with an increased emphasis on race equality in recruitment and selection, harassment, and awareness training. Very close working relationships have been established with the local race equality council (REC) All district councils have adopted a multi-agency protocol and the education department has been at the forefront in establishing a multi-agency approach in work with Travellers and asylum seekers. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is small, but it has grown substantially since the 1991 census and is diverse and widespread. The LEA is working with the REC on community empowerment projects in order to improve communication and consultation. Equality targets have been set in order to achieve a healthy ratio of minority ethnic staff at all levels. It is recognised that more needs to be done to encourage members of minority ethnic groups to apply to work in Norfolk, and most departments are at an early stage of developing a strategy to address this.

191. The importance that the LEA attaches to race equality is demonstrated by the appointment of a senior adviser to lead race equality work. This has led to the implementation of comprehensive guidance of good quality. Close collaboration between the department, the police and the REC ensures that incidents do not fall through the net and that a strong line is taken on the reporting and recording of racist incidents. Almost all schools have agreed an anti-racist policy. There are mechanisms in place for the advisory team to follow up issues identified by monitoring, although these are not fully formalised.

192. Training and support for schools are developing well and take good account of all recent legislation. Training is planned for headteacher and governors on the implications of the Race Relations Amendment Act. A pilot group of 17 schools is implementing the curriculum project 'Learning for All' as the first stage in a countywide programme. The advisory service is proactive in tackling specific racist issues that arise in schools. One example is the making of a video, developed in conjunction with a middle school and Norwich city football club, which enables pupils to confront their own prejudices and to look at ways of discouraging racist attitudes.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Corporate planning

193. Corporate planning in Norfolk is good. It is underpinned by a very clear analysis of the history and the particular circumstances of the county. Following an era of low performance, hands-off local government, which was characterised by a culture of competitive business units, the chief executive has presided over a change of climate leading to a largely successful, though not yet complete, programme of overhaul and modernisation of services. In education a sharp focus has been given to improving standards of service delivery.

194. The strategy is now moving into its second phase and the intention is to shift the focus from functional delivery to improving the quality of life for the people of Norfolk. Services are to be delivered by whatever combination of public, private or voluntary agencies is best equipped to do what is needed. Partnership working, both internally and with external agencies, is central to this vision. Hence a much more corporate way of working is to be established within the council itself. This will entail radical though gradual change, attuned to Norfolk's "step by step" way of working. Thus the council is currently in a state of transition: the pragmatic future vision has not yet been disseminated and the mechanisms to enable its realisation, particularly on the financial front, are just being developed.

195. Nonetheless, the council has clarified its immediate intentions and embarked on programmes to develop closer engagement with local communities, more and better consultation, clear communications and greater transparency, all of which are central to the strategy. This is proving successful. Staff at all levels, as well as members, are open and honest in their approach to discussion and the sharing of information. The push to e-government has resulted in council business being transacted much more openly with minutes of meetings and many other documents easily accessible on the website. Public participation in some council meetings has been considerable. A very large citizens' panel is operating effectively.

196. Driven by the chief executive, the strategy also involves demonstrating that Norfolk is ready to change, to challenge low expectations and to engage with central government in so doing. In 2001, Norfolk signed a three-year Public Service Agreement (PSA) with four education targets. Also in the PSA are a number of cross cutting targets, which are achievable only through joint working. Hence the PSA demonstrates clearly that corporate targets are everyone's targets and in so doing contributes to greater corporateness .

197. The approach to community planning and local strategic partnerships (LSPs) involves working pragmatically through the seven district councils. Local strategic partnerships are being established in the districts and community strategies are at varying stages of development. The diversity of the county, both geographical and economic, dictates differential arrangements. Thus there will be seven district community plans. An overall county wide partnership body, drawing on these and supported by themed groups, will feed through into county planning. Chief officers are each linked to a district, as are cabinet members.

198. In the latest Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP), there has been a sharpening of focus and a reduction in the number of key goals. A strategic commitment to partnership permeates the thinking. Five core values underpin eight key goals, two of which, learning throughout life and increasing achievement by Norfolk school children, are education related. Other key plans reflect the BVPP with service aims feeding into BVPP goals. Individual objectives are linked into service aims and traceable through the various levels of planning back to the BVPP. This has enabled performance management systems to be embedded across the council. Thus the pragmatic vision articulated so clearly and convincingly at the top of the organisation is translated conceptually into the formal planning processes.

199. But that vision has still to be embedded in financial planning which remains in essence on an annual cycle and a historical basis. Though there are moves towards zero based budgeting and the development of a review system for measuring the outcomes of expenditure, these are still at an early stage. Furthermore the council still operates too separately with respect to corporate and service department activity, dealing corporately with central concerns, rather than sharing directorate concerns in order to establish common agendas. There is a development programme designed to move this forward, but it is still at an early stage. It is at the education/social services interface that the need to move forward in corporateness is most clearly demonstrated and is indeed acknowledged by both directors.

200. "Achieving Excellence" is the overall education service plan. Its five key service aims reflect the goals of the BVPP. They are:

- to improve schools and increase learning opportunities for all;
- to help more people to be active learners and to feel included in society;
- to provide an integrated education service with a culture of working in partnership with others;
- to provide coherent support and challenges for schools; and
- to communicate well and develop use of new technology.

201. They are to be achieved through ten strategic objectives, which include "increasing the impact on society through the work of the service". For each of the service objectives, outcomes and specific achievements have been defined and individuals identified with responsibility to co-ordinate, monitor and report. The plan, the implementation timetable and regularly updated monitoring reports on progress are available on the intranet. This gives the whole planning process a higher public profile than is usually the case. Annual service plans such as that for the youth and community service feed through into the main plan. Reviews are built into the process, which also links to the departmental staff training and development plan. The transparency, clarity and coherence of these processes are a strength of the authority. The one weakness concerns the linkage to the allocation of resources and financial planning which has not yet been clearly made within these planning processes.

202. Nonetheless, it is clear that the work of the education service is clearly defined, appropriately focused and well understood by officers. There is a common vision, which focuses strongly on improving schools, but goes beyond this to an explicit commitment to learning for all as a means to increasing social cohesion and inclusion. The commitment

to partnership working is more than aspirational, it is actual. There is ample evidence of effective joint working across the broad field of education.

Decision making and the leadership of elected members and officers

203. The fruits of clear strategic thinking and good leadership are evident within education. The LEA has reinvented itself and built its new role in line with modernisation and the central government education agenda. Business units have been abolished and staff encouraged to see themselves as part of a common endeavour in which policy and operations are two sides of the same coin.

204. Sound structures and processes for consulting and communicating with schools and governors have been systematically put in place. The LEA is evaluating their effectiveness, inviting feedback from schools and analysing it in order to further develop the arrangements. Schools acknowledge the radical change that has taken place, the strong support and challenge on school improvement and the continuing efforts made to improve structures for communication. Some feel well consulted, whilst others regard consultation as lacking substance: there is no consensus view. Leadership is generally perceived as being strong and principled.

205. Members support education strongly and have accorded it high priority. Their commitment is to ensure that every school in Norfolk is a good school and they are prepared to grasp nettles, such as reorganisation, in pursuit of that goal. They understand their own roles and responsibilities and those of officers. The leader is clear that "the buck stops with me", but that officers manage. Thus the current consultation exercise on reorganisation is fronted by officers but driven, very publicly, by members. For their part, officers provide good advice to members and brief them thoroughly. Cabinet members and chief officers have joint away days, there are regular meetings between the chief executive and the lead member and between cabinet members and their chief officers. The current administration, in post since May, has already taken some major education decisions, for instance on a large PFI. It has also agreed a substantial council tax rise, with the proviso that the current system of financial planning be subject to radical change.

206. Politics in Norfolk are fairly consensual - "we only argue over crucial things"- with commitment to the county weighing more heavily than party divisions. The modernised constitution has just been agreed after a two-year pilot and the new arrangements are still bedding down. A characteristic commitment to transparency is reflected in open cabinet meetings with public participation. Nonetheless, there is some ambivalence about the changes, in particular vis-à-vis the role of backbenchers, and a degree of nostalgia for the previous arrangements. On occasion the education review panel leans towards an education committee modus operandi and the definition of its role to include policy development does nothing to help it focus sharply on scrutiny. Nonetheless, the cabinet scrutiny committee can and does pose sharp questions in any sphere, including education. Despite reservations from a number of sources, it is clear that the new arrangements have increased transparency, attendance and participation and have speeded up decision making.

Partnership

207. Partnership working is fundamental to the future vision for Norfolk and the work of the education department serves it well. At its best, it is very good indeed. It has also been built into the short and medium term strategy. For instance, it underpins the PSA, joint cultural services/ education approaches on lifelong learning, joint social services/ education work on early years and looked after children, approaches to socially excluded young people involving the Youth Offending Team, education and youth and community service, the two education action zones and in Earlham, the link between the Excellence Cluster and the New Deal. Involvement in joint initiatives is feeding into incremental cultural change. In some areas and within some services, joint working is already deeply embedded. In Great Yarmouth for instance, partnership is already a way of life, with some schools integrally meshed in with other agencies and schools generally working more and more closely together.

208. Elsewhere in the system, agencies are at early stages with partnership working. For instance, multi-agency working with young offenders or those at risk of offending is largely driven by the youth offending team with the youth and community service routinely involved, schools involved very differentially and neither the police nor social services involved on a systematic basis. Both schools and social services regard joint working with the police on child protection as highly effective, but the partnership between schools and social services themselves is not yet all that it needs to be.

209. Much of the work with external agencies is already demonstrably contributing to the public good. Some is bolstering educational achievement by creating a network of professional multi-agency support for teachers in hard-pressed schools. Elsewhere, the partnerships are enabling a dialogue with communities which is creating a context supportive to schools in their efforts to raise achievement.

APPENDIX 1

Education action zones (EAZs)

1. The LEA has two action zones; one in the market town of Thetford, the other in Great Yarmouth, an area of multiple deprivation. Both zones are led with a clear vision of what they expect to achieve and are examples of excellent partnership with the LEA. Plans focus sharply on the school improvement agenda and on social inclusion in order to bring about long-term gains for pupils, staff and the wider community. Because the zones and the LEA share very good knowledge of where weaknesses lie through collaborative planning for self-review, they are able to take robust and co-ordinated action.
2. Zone action plans and EDP 2 are well integrated in order to meet needs and spread good practice. Schools welcome the seamless partnership in Great Yarmouth, which provides them with coherent and consistent advice and simplifies communication. Jointly, the LEA and the zone are doing a great deal to counter the negative image of working in Great Yarmouth and in encouraging headteachers and other staff of calibre to work there. Collaborative work with the youth and community service and with family learning has made a visible impact in Great Yarmouth in involving parents in their children's learning and in countering disaffection. Attendance is improving and exclusions are dropping significantly. There are also very good links with corporate plans relating to lifelong learning. Thetford EAZ has worked closely with the department of cultural services, to develop a sense of cultural and community identity in a town which grew on account of London overspill.
3. The zone in Great Yarmouth has implemented a highly prioritised and innovative strategy. Two major initiatives are beginning to transform schools. "Challenging education" has involved LEA and zone personnel as accredited trainers in introducing teaching methods that challenge pupils in all the zone's schools to think for themselves and to work collaboratively. This has had a discernible impact in the schools visited in motivating pupils and staff, and in raising pupils' self-esteem. In two of the schools visited, very high rates of both fixed-term and permanent exclusions had been virtually eradicated. Staff and governors have also used the philosophy and techniques to challenge their own thinking.
4. The other major initiative is a three-year development programme, the first of its kind in England and Wales, for an integrated full service school operating in partnership with other statutory agencies including health, social services and lifelong learning. Improvements in behaviour, attendance and achievement are already apparent. The Great Yarmouth zone's director is also working with great intelligence and sensitivity to ensure that the concerns brought about by the LEA's reorganisation proposals do not set back the good progress that many schools have made on a number of fronts.

Links with other LEAs

5. Norfolk works closely with neighbouring LEAs on a number of issues. In the last two years, the EYDCP has moved from reacting to national initiatives to harnessing government funding and effective partnership working to further their vision. A good

example of innovative work to meet the needs of hard-to-reach families is the joint proposal from Norfolk and Cambridgeshire for a rural Sure Start mini programme in the Fen border that will build on the development of neighbourhood nurseries. Good links have been set up with neighbouring LEAs on teacher recruitment and, where practicable, on staff development. A child protection development officer has recently been appointed jointly with Suffolk.

Lifelong learning

6. Lifelong learning is at the heart of Norfolk's vision to promote social inclusion by developing the capacity of its diverse communities. It provides a focus for the increasing number of externally funded initiatives. There is coherence and consistency between the lifelong learning plan and the EDP. The clearly defined strategy to promote self-managing learning communities is derived from a detailed evaluation of local needs and takes very good account of both urban and rural dimensions. It draws on a diversity of models to build local learning structures that suit the specific needs of each community. Each community education project has the firm commitment of the local secondary school, dovetails with the work of the district and borough councils and is closely linked with local businesses, adult education and the youth and community service.
7. The appointment of a senior officer who reports jointly to the directors of education and cultural services has been highly effective in meshing together the aims, objectives and working practices of the two departments and has led to a step change in the rate of progress. In the visits made to schools and units in different parts of the county, there was very strong evidence of capacity building through learning partnerships forged between voluntary agencies, schools, and the LEA. Those schools that are leading the way have become adept at working with a range of partnerships and making the best use of every available resource. Pupil achievement has risen and parents have acquired qualifications, new skills and enhanced employability.
8. The youth and community service is a key player in the education department's mission to promote social inclusion and lifelong learning through close working relationships and collaborative projects. Secondary school sites are access points for services but outreach working is also undertaken to meet the needs of hard-to-reach groups such as asylum seekers and young parents and carers. Effective working relationships have been established at a strategic and operational level with a wide range of agencies and organisations, which has put the authority in a strong position to move ahead with its Connexions service. Most importantly, it has enabled professionals from different spheres to learn from each other by challenging assumptions, understanding different working practices and gaining important insights into the skills and knowledge they each bring to their work with young people. For example, the 'Sorted' information, advice and counselling project undertaken by the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the youth and community service is of mutual benefit to both organisations in understanding and meeting the needs of young people between the ages of 11 and 25.
9. Links between the departments of cultural services and education have further strengthened the impact of the work of the school library service and the Norfolk

Museums and Archaeology Service in schools and in the wider community. The jointly appointed senior officer has provided a much needed steer in championing and managing interlocked projects involving both departments, such as Creative Partnerships, and in developing understanding across departments.

10. The school library service is an integral part of the LEA's strategy to raise standards of literacy and to combat social exclusion. A management liaison group meets termly to set and exchange objectives and priorities for staff development areas and joint activities. There are explicit links between objectives in the school library service development plan and EDP2. This draws on collaborative work with the advisory team and the psychological service and relates to most priorities in the EDP2 from raising standards in the early years to improving the quality of education in the EAZs and developing family literacy. Improved sharing of intelligence between school library service staff, school improvement support officers and RDAs means that issues arising from section 10 reports or in schools causing concern can be rapidly identified and addressed.
11. The school library service offers a comprehensive service to schools and has developed a very flexible approach, offering both full and bespoke packages to meet their diverse needs. Activities are promoted through a wide range of teaching and learning strategies in partnership with heads, teachers, pupils and parents and carers, through training, advice and support and the development and provision of a wide range of resources many of which support and extend the national literacy strategy. The service is proactive in identifying needs arising from local and national initiatives in order to enable schools to supplement their own resources from the good quality project collections and loan sets. The public library young people's service works to support homework and to broaden young people's reading. Library staff work directly with young people and their teachers.
12. The Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service education department, a significant player in lifelong learning, has developed its outreach work in areas of significant deprivation. Good links have been made with SRB projects and the EAZ in Thetford. Education programmes encompass the needs of all ages from pre-school programmes held at the Castle Museum or in early years settings for under-fives, where they can explore museum objects, to programmes for older people involving reminiscence work and hands-on craft activities. Recent initiatives include the imaginative and meticulous development of family learning packs so that parents and carers visiting the museum with their children can talk to them about the paintings in the permanent and loan collections. Over 20 primary and secondary schools worked together with museum staff to look at the history of Norwich castle and what it should provide for visitors when it reopened in 2001. The schools programme is developed in consultation with teachers and has recently included literacy, numeracy and science. The work of the department is very highly rated by users.
13. The adult education service targets its family learning work to support the raising of achievement in schools. Good links with the literacy, numeracy and ICT advisers ensure that their work supports the national strategies. They work directly with parents, enabling them to gain skills and understanding to support their children's learning. They also accredit schools to develop family learning themselves and to develop links with parents. In the New Deal area of Norwich, parents who had started

out with the family learning service had successfully gained accreditation and moved on to more demanding ICT provision at the local community based technology centre.

APPENDIX 2: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has made a number of fundamental recommendations, which are key to the further progress of the LEA. Work should begin on them immediately. They are:

The allocation of resources to priorities

In order that service managers can establish value for money measures:

- Clarify the construction and reporting of service budgets

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

In order to raise standards at Key Stage 3

- Ensure that strengths and weaknesses in primary schools with Year 7 pupils are identified and progress of pupils is closely monitored.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

In order to enrich the curriculum and to raise standards for gifted and talented pupils:

- Publish and implement a policy and procedures urgently and provide guidance to RDAs in order that strengths and weaknesses are accurately identified in all schools; and
- bring together a core team as soon as possible to improve communication, to generate momentum across the county and to ensure that there is sufficient resource and a detailed action plan to achieve the planned outcomes in the activity in EDP2.

Support for ICT in administration and management

In order to improve ICT support in schools and to raise pupils attainment:

- Revise the ICT development plan to ensure that the programme is achievable, affordable and develops progressively so that curriculum and management developments are supported by an infrastructure which works;
- establish a coherent approach across the whole authority in respect of strategic management, infrastructure development and technical support;
- develop a systematic training programme to improve headteachers' understanding of ICT capabilities; and
- develop pupil-level monitoring to support the EDP2 targets.

Property services

In order to satisfy schools that they are getting both good value for money and their agreed investment from the maintenance pool:

- Provide them with regular reports on the expenditure on their own site and others within the pool.

The LEA's strategy for SEN

In order to ensure the new framework for supporting SEN pupils has its maximum effect:

- A detailed plan showing how it will be resourced should be quickly produced, along with some specific output targets for pupils

Statutory obligations

In order to meet identified needs which require the process of formal statementing:

- High priority should be given to achieving within one year the national rate for the completion of a statement without allowing for exceptions.

School improvement

In order to improve the provision made by schools to pupils with special educational needs:

- Improve the effectiveness of RDAs in challenging schools to meet pupils' special educational needs.

The supply of school places

In order to improve strategic planning for school places:

- Develop the dialogue with individual schools so that detailed local knowledge is incorporated in the forecasting system; and
- incorporate more detailed planning relating to SEN, school improvement and asset management in the School Organisation Plan.

Asset management

In order to ensure that schools are getting good value for money from NPS on building projects:

- The council should encourage and assist schools to test the market.

In order to improve school property and advice to schools on asset management:

- The service level agreement between education and NPS should more clearly set out the respective roles and responsibilities of the two services.

Multi-agency matters

In order to ensure that children out of school have access to education and attend programmes regularly:

- Decisions made by the area education fora should be clearly minuted and promptly communicated to all relevant agencies; and
- information about educational arrangements for all children out of school should be shared between agencies routinely.

Attendance

In order to reduce unauthorised absence:

- Move rapidly to carry out truancy sweeps in those areas of the county where unauthorised absence is high.

Multi-agency matters

In order to improve attendance:

- Agree a joint strategy for combating truancy with protocols governing the exchange of information and standard procedures for notification.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

In order to improve child protection:

- Develop and deliver joint training for schools and social workers designed to dispel stereotypes and create mutual understanding of respective roles, procedures and cultures; and
- ensure that schools receive a response to referrals within seven days.

Multi agency matters

In order to enhance access to education for children in public care:

- Set up joint planning and working arrangements regarding children in public care between the police, the education co-ordinators and the Youth Offending Team.

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