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City Learning Centres

An evaluation of the first year

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Introduction

1.   The network of City Learning Centres (CLCs) is one element of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme run by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). CLCs have been set up to provide learning opportunities based on information and communication technology (ICT) for pupils and teachers in schools and for the wider community.

2.   There are currently 80 CLCs across 46 EiC areas. Some EiC partnerships have more than one centre, serving distinct areas of the local education authority (LEA). In the majority of cases the centres are in a building attached to a host school and serve a network of schools in the area. In some EiC partnerships, a 'hub, spoke and rim' approach has been used, where the main centre is supported by outreach centres or sub-centres in partnership schools.

3.   Up to £1.2 million for each CLC is available for capital and initial start-up costs, with recurrent funding of £220,000 a year. In addition, from their first full financial year of opening, CLCs receive capital redevelopment funding of £150,000 a year.

4.   A typical centre has two or three large open-plan areas equipped with computers and associated equipment with several smaller rooms for group work using more specialist equipment, such as recording and video-editing suites.

5.   The CLC does not belong to the establishment in which it is located but is under the control of a centre management board. The centre is a shared resource for all its partnership schools, which should play a role in the management of the centre.

6.   CLCs are intended to:

- improve access to and use of the latest educational technology for pupils, teachers and the community

- improve attainment levels through use of that technology

- reduce truancy from school

- improve the quality of teaching and learning and act as test-beds for innovation and new ways of working.

7.   These objectives can be achieved in a number of ways, but CLCs are expected to:

- provide additional courses and opportunities for individual pupils that involve ICT-based teaching and learning materials

- provide access to state-of-the-art ICT equipment that is attractive and motivating for young people

- deliver outreach services to a wider network of local schools

- provide extension activities and study support for gifted and talented pupils

- disseminate best practice across the local network of schools, linking with and supporting other EiC and ICT provision.

The inspection

8.   The inspection evaluated the progress CLCs are making in achieving the objectives of the programme. It covered: the quality of provision; access to and use by pupils, teachers and the wider community; management; monitoring and evaluation; effect on motivation, attendance and attainment; innovation and dissemination; and partnership working.

9.   During the summer and autumn term 2002, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) visited ten centres. They were: Frankley (Birmingham), Hartlepool, Highwire (Hackney), Lewisham, North Manchester, Rawmarsh (Rotherham), Sheldon Heath (Birmingham), Southfields (Wandsworth), South Leeds, and Tower Hamlets. All of the centres had been running for at least one year.

10.   During the 3-day visits HMI looked at a wide range of documents and records, held discussions with centre staff, interviewed a range of centre users – school staff, pupils and adults from the local community – and observed different teaching and learning activities.

Main findings

- The quality of accommodation and facilities in the CLCs visited was very good and generally well matched to the needs of partnership schools and the wider community.

- In each centre the host school is currently the main user. Pupils from primary schools make up the next largest user group. Despite efforts made by centre managers, secondary schools do not make enough use of the centres. The wider community made significant use of ICT facilities in only three CLCs, generally as the result of arrangements with other agencies.

- Management is at least satisfactory and often good, but there are significant weaknesses in strategic planning in half the CLCs visited. Some management boards do not provide sufficient strategic direction for their CLCs.

- A particular deficiency was the absence of a strong active link with the EiC partnership's key objectives, with the main omission being a specific focus on raising attainment and improving teaching. While there were some examples of good links seen, the full potential contribution of CLCs to school improvement has yet to be explored, particularly through the contribution of ICT to raising standards.

- Processes for monitoring the use of CLCs and evaluating its effect are poor, particularly in relation to teaching and learning. There is no clear approach to judging how the CLC programme demonstrates value for money. No information is available in relation to the objective of improving school attendance.

- In half the CLCs visited the level of innovation in the use of ICT was good or very good. Developments in the use of multimedia and computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture (CAD-CAM) are providing opportunities to explore methods of teaching and learning in many CLCs.

- In many of the lessons observed, pupils were engaged in work using ICT that was of a higher level and greater breadth than is usual in their schools. Their responses were generally good. ICT capability was above average in six out of the ten CLCs, with pupils involved in both guided and experimental learning with high-quality results.

- CLCs have become important centres for ICT-related professional development. They are establishing productive relationships with other educational providers and services in order to support work with schools.

- More needs to be done to make productive links with local education authority (LEA) ICT support services for staff training. Links with beacon and specialist schools are also underdeveloped. CLCs' engagement in research on the use of ICT varies between outstanding and non-existent.

Quality of provision

Key findings

❑ The quality of provision in all the CLCs was good. There was a close match to the needs of schools and the wider community. The architectural brief has been fulfilled well in the design of new and adapted accommodation in the majority of cases.

❑ Headteachers of partnership secondary schools have influenced the choice of specialist curricular provision available in their centre. All the centres provide a wide range of ICT resources for the specialist curricular areas they offer to support schools.

❑ In nine of the ten centres, permanent staff are experienced teachers and have good ICT skills.

❑ Some centres do not have staff with primary teaching experience and this limits their effectiveness when supporting work in Key Stages 1 and 2. CLCs have become important centres for professional development, following that provided by other national initiatives.

❑ Opportunities for out-of-hours learning varied between centres.

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11.   CLCs are functional, bright and spacious in their design and provide high-quality environments for teaching and learning. Many room layouts have been designed to allow flexible working arrangements in order to satisfy the demands of a wide range of users from partnership schools and the wider community. These groups often use the facilities at the same time, working comfortably together.

12.   Some centres have effectively incorporated spaces for small-group activity, including specialist facilities for recording and sound editing, 'cyber cafés' and video editing suites. Most centres offer at least one specialist area as part of their provision. Examples include CAD-CAM, language laboratories, dance, drama and music studios and conference and video-conference facilities.

13.   However, in some buildings, subsequent adaptations have been necessary because the original design was impractical for teaching particular aspects of specialist work such as CAD-CAM. Some further work is necessary in several centres to provide work spaces for small groups undertaking more advanced activities. There is good disabled access to all facilities in each of the centres visited.

14.   Each centre has very good quality ICT provision which consists of workstation computers and associated hardware, including electronic whiteboards. Centres are at various stages in developing direct electronic communications links to partnership schools and to pupils. The appointment of a suitably qualified network manager in each centre is facilitating developments and electronic links with schools.

15. A number of factors have influenced the choice of provision. In each EiC partnership, headteachers have been consulted on their curricular needs. In addition, provision has often been aligned with existing projects and national initiatives, especially those operating within the EiC partnership and the LEA more generally. In some LEAs the strategic support for ICT and associated professional development has been very influential in directing the centres' work.

16. All the centres provide a very wide range of software to support the specialisms they offer as support to schools. This provides teachers with an opportunity to use and evaluate software before choosing to adopt it for school use.

17. All CLCs have a network manager or equivalent person. Such staff provide prompt and high-quality technical advice to schools on setting up and maintaining intranet services, the majority of which are now connected to the centre's web site, and related resources. This reliable support is particularly valued by primary schools.

18. The staff in nine of the ten centres includes qualified teachers with recent relevant expertise in schools and in the use of ICT. This has enabled the centres to explore fully how ICT can be used to support teaching and learning and to develop strategies to support schools in the partnership. To varying degrees, CLCs are already achieving this and are leading the development of ICT use within the curriculum.

19. The number of staff in CLCs with primary school teaching experience is relatively low and this limits the type of support that can be given to teachers of Key Stages 1 and 2.

20. Although centres have some spare capacity for schools or pupils to use the facilities, time available for teaching is very restricted because of existing contracts. This limits the effectiveness of the centres and the support they can give schools by working in classes with teachers, both in the centre and in relation to outreach work.

21. All CLCs are involved in the continuous professional development of teachers and other staff. In many CLCs these training opportunities supplement very effectively those provided by other national initiatives by working with schools and targeting those staff who need it most. In the most effective cases, centre staff work with teachers who are not confident users, initially taking the lead teaching classes visiting the centre until the teachers have acquired the skills and then working to support them.

22. The provision of out-of-hours learning varied. Most CLCs tried to offer access to facilities for homework. In some centres the time spent working was structured and based on clear objectives. In others, pupils were given opportunities to carry on with coursework or other assignments. The time provided in each centre was mainly determined by staff availability. Pupils generally used the time well and were engaged in worthwhile and productive activity using ICT.

Use by schools and the community

Key findings

❑ Where CLCs are located in a host school, the school is the main beneficiary and user of the centre, sometimes for as much as 70% of the available time.

❑ Too many secondary schools are not using the centres other than for centralised partnership activities such as for gifted and talented pupils. These pupils make good use of the centres.

❑ Although an original aim was to enhance teaching and learning with a particular focus on secondary schools, primary schools are the largest user group after the host school.

❑ Restrictions to schools' use of centres include the availability and cost of transport, travelling time and timetable disruption.

❑ There is considerable variation in the use made of centres by the wider community. In three centres members of the local community made good use of the opportunity to use facilities.

❑ Some managers have established good links with other providers of adult education who now use facilities during and beyond the school day.

❑ There is some spare capacity in the centres visited. The availability of staff and the terms of their contracts frequently restrict the full use of facilities.

23.   Each manager has made strenuous efforts to encourage and promote use of the centre by partnership schools. To a large measure this is paying off, with increasing use particularly by primary schools and agencies supporting the local community. Some schools, particularly those situated some way from the centre, have to be determined and enthusiastic to make the effort to use it. Where difficulties have been identified, the centre manager has tried to help the school to resolve these if possible. Some centres help with transport costs and arrangements.

24.   In several CLCs, groups from both the host school and other secondary schools have regular weekly timetabled sessions in the centre. These were mainly to support and deliver courses leading to qualifications in ICT, although a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) business studies course was also timetabled in one centre.

25.   The gifted and talented programme makes good use of many CLCs. Examples include special projects such as a design challenge, video editing, Key Stage 3 test revision classes. Some centres are exploring video conferencing for collaborative

work with gifted and talented pupils. Many centres are used effectively for cross-phase work for gifted and talented pupils and for school co-ordinator meetings.

26.   CLCs are generally successful at attracting local primary schools. This is due to a number of factors such as their proximity, more flexible timetables and a desire to have access to technology facilities. A range of activities was seen with primary school children, including use of presentational software, control technology and video editing.

27.   Secondary schools tend to be interested in taking part in cross-curricular projects which are organised and co-ordinated by the centre and use other agencies such as museums, theatres or the media. Some CLCs were used effectively during school holidays for revision sessions for both Key Stage 3 tests and GCSEs as well as summer schools for work with pupils on transition projects and gifted and talented programmes.

28.   There is considerable variation in use of the CLCs by the wider community. Some centres have delegated responsibility for organising adult classes to organisations working in further, higher or adult education. There is recognition of the need to work through other organisations rather than compete with them. In one centre, very good use by the community was the result of strong links with many community groups and an energetic approach to securing additional funds.

29.   Several CLCs have successfully explored drop-in provision for adults who can work on distance learning packages such as a Learn Direct course or work towards the European Computer Driving Licence. Some centres provide 'cyber café' learning areas to allow adults flexible use.

30.   Community users included senior citizens, parents of pupils in local schools, mental health patients, children in care homes and young parents through a Sure Start project. Although CLCs were responsive to community group, most could be more proactive in canvassing community groups in order to promote and develop their community role.

31.   In some centres, use by the wider community is limited by their location, available public transport and travelling time. In some areas there is already good alternative access to ICT through adult education programmes in the LEA, libraries and charitable organisations. In some centres, work with the wider community is restricted by their opening hours.

Management

Key findings

❑ The quality of operational management was at least satisfactory and often good, but strategic planning was unsatisfactory in as many as half of the centres visited.

❑ Some management boards do not provide sufficient strategic direction. Fewer than half of the development plans made a clear reference to the centre's role in contributing to EiC partnership objectives, particularly school improvement programmes.

❑ Recruitment of full- and part-time teaching staff with the required level and range of expertise remains a problem in most CLCs.

❑ Good working relationships have been established with other providers of community education in at least half of the centres, to make best use of the resources available and to avoid duplication.

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32. Centres and their work were generally well managed from day to day. However, there were fundamental weaknesses in the development planning of half the CLCs visited. A particular deficiency was the absence of a strong, active link with the EiC partnership's strategic objectives or the aims of the DfES programme, with the main omission being a specific focus on raising attainment and improving teaching.

33. Examples of good working links with school improvement or similar support services in the LEA were observed in four of the centres. The LEA was able to provide performance data as a starting point for identifying schools where support was needed for raising attainment. The full potential contribution of the work of CLCs to school improvement has yet to be explored.

34. The membership of management boards is representative of the secondary schools in the cluster group or EiC partnership. Primary schools are now represented on management boards. Special schools depend on the contact made by staff from the centre for any representation they wish to make.

35. Centre managers have been effective in forging working relationships with the majority of headteachers and establishing their centre's role in supporting schools through the use of advanced technology. Several CLCs have developed good marketing approaches. Examples include web sites, the use of publicity in public places and on buses, and contacts with key community representatives. However, in some partnerships, dissemination to all staff in the school is not guaranteed and this limits take-up.

36. All managers work well with their host school despite the possible tensions that can arise because of the competing claims for access. Staff in each centre have tried various approaches to consult teachers about their needs, both as individuals and in

phase and subject groups. However, it is often the most confident who take up the opportunities rather than those who need help. Work with co-ordinators of the gifted and talented initiatives is well advanced in all centres.

37.   Several centre managers have developed good networks with other agencies that support education, such as museums, the media, theatres, adult education services and libraries in order to widen the scope of project work, to capture pupils' interests and to make learning more relevant.

38.   In four CLCs, sound working links have been formed with the LEA ICT support service in order to raise standards in ICT and to provide staff training. There is much scope for development in this respect.

39.   In five of the centres visited, good relationships have been established with a range of providers of community education and support programmes in order to provide new courses or to build on and facilitate learning opportunities. Examples included agencies managing the Sure Start programme and adult education. In three of the centres the community programme was planned, managed and delivered by other agencies. In these instances the centre provided access to the facilities but did no teaching.

40.   All CLCs have clear and effective arrangements for organising and managing resources and bookings on a day to day basis. Each centre operates an equitable booking system. In the majority of CLCs this is done on a termly basis. The best systems require schools to state the objectives of the activity and give some indication of the intended outcomes, in order to facilitate evaluation.

Monitoring and evaluation

Key findings

❑ In most cases the data collected by CLCs are only basic and do not provide the information necessary to support planning and development.

❑ Despite isolated examples of good practice, difficulties over monitoring and evaluation are related in many centres to the absence of clear objectives and targets.

❑ There are several useful and appropriate approaches to the assessment of pupils' ICT capability in some CLCs. These could be used for evaluation and to provide a lead for others.

❑ CLCs' engagement in research about the use of ICT varies from outstanding to non-existent.

❑ There is no clear approach to judging how the CLC programme will demonstrate value for money.

41. Procedures for monitoring the use of centres and evaluating their effect on teaching and learning are currently underdeveloped at both CLC and EiC partnership levels. They are fragmented, frequently uncoordinated and not based on clear criteria. All CLCs are gathering data on use by schools and the community, but systems for recording and analysing patterns are not well developed.

42. Current approaches to monitoring progress made by pupils attending CLCs are basic and do not provide the information necessary to support planning and development. Some centres have attempted to tackle the process in a systematic way, while others have failed to go much beyond the collection of data.

43. All CLCs are collecting some information on use by various groups but the level of detail, the degree of analysis and the use to which this is put vary widely. Examples of monitoring and data collection at a basic level include gathering information on occupancy of facilities in the centre, use by schools in the partnership or clusters served by the centre, and pupils' attendance categorised by gender, ethnicity and year group. Where the centre is sub-let to community users, CLCs do not always maintain adequate records of use and effect. It is therefore difficult to prove what benefits are arising.

44. Seven CLCs have well established and formalised procedures for involving teachers in the evaluation of projects undertaken and professional development courses provided by the centre. The effectiveness of these is frequently limited by the absence of clear and agreed objectives and criteria and the information provided is not used to inform planning in a systematic way.

45.   Some centres are trying suitable approaches to monitoring. Examples included monitoring the effect of use of the centre on schools' budgets, using qualitative as well as quantitative indicators to evaluate effect, and evaluating the degree of challenge and relevance of the activities. In at least three CLCs, pupils and students were involved in evaluating the quality of provision and support.

46.   One centre attempted an evaluation of the impact of 'hub, rim and spoke' provision but was not adequately supported by the schools where these facilities were located. The opportunity to reflect on progress and assess how well this model was delivering the objectives was missed. This indicates a lack of commitment by the schools to partnership objectives.

47.   One centre has developed a comprehensive table of ICT levels for Key Stages 1 and 2, which it uses to assess the individual competence of each pupil in a group before and after participating in activities at the centre. In this way a precise measure of gains in skills, knowledge and understanding can be made as a result of attendance at the centre.

48.   Engagement by staff in CLCs in national and international research on the use of ICT varies from outstanding to non-existent. Staff in one centre regularly contribute to debate on the development and use of ICT in education and are acknowledged specialists in this field.

Outcomes

Key findings

❑ In the lessons observed, standards of attainment in ICT were above average in six out of the ten CLCs. There were few activities where standards were unsatisfactory. The learning and achievements of pupils of all ages and abilities were improved and extended by the use of ICT facilities.

❑ Pupils' attitudes and standards of behaviour were good or better in the majority of activities observed. There were several examples of purposeful engagement in learning from pupils who had often exhibited disaffection in school.

❑ Where adults from the local community were observed working, their skills in ICT were being greatly enhanced, demonstrating achievement in the use of several aspects particularly the use of e-mail and the Internat. Many were working towards recognised accreditation in ICT.

❑ No information was available to indicate whether CLCs were having any effect on school attendance.

49.   Standards of ICT capability, use and application were good in most of the sessions and work seen in the CLCs visited, with primary and secondary pupils engaged in both guided and experimental learning. The advanced equipment enabled pupils to achieve high-quality results, whether on paper from colour laser printers, video or other materials, or from CAD-CAM applications, and to gain a sense of achievement.

50.   In one centre, Year 6 pupils were involved in video-editing work, having acquired the necessary skills and understanding of technical terms, following a teacher-led demonstration using a data projector. Primary pupils were often able to achieve a high standard of proficiency with presentation software. With the teacher's help, they were capable of critical evaluation of their own and others' work.

51.   In other CLCs some secondary pupils with mild or severe learning disabilities showed increased levels of concentration and a great sense of achievement in their work. A group of Key Stage 4 pupils with severe learning difficulties was able to produce word-processed documents including text and graphics. A post-16 group of students with profound and multiple learning difficulties worked with a graphics programme that required high-level spatial skills.

52.   The prospect of acquiring new skills did not deter older members of the community, many of whom were keen to understand and use new technology. In one centre a group of senior citizens was motivated to produce pages for a web site on the theme of the Commonwealth that would be used by Year 9 pupils as part of their work in history. This drew on the life experiences of the people involved and gave a clear focus for their work.

53.   Using sophisticated technology is not sufficient to ensure good teaching and learning. Teachers need to have defined the learning objectives, have a good command of the subject and be clear about the role of the technology. Where this was not the case, learners often became detached and even disenchanted. This was evident in one example where adult learners were not given any context for the development of their skills. The same was true with a group of Key Stage 3 pupils who were entering formulae into a spreadsheet with little understanding of their function.

54.   The advent of new technologies has presented CLCs with a number of challenges in the acquisition of related skills. Presentation skills are easily mastered using current software. This gives primary school pupils access to word-processing, desktop publishing, presentation software and video editing. CLCs offered whole-class access to resources not available in school. Work in control technology and CAD-CAM enabled pupils to produce impressive results while bypassing much of the detailed understanding previously necessary to achieve this. National competitions such as the 'F1 Challenge' provided a strong focus for some secondary pupils to use CAD-CAM to design and make individual models.

55.   Access to tasks such as writing macros, writing formulae in constructing spreadsheets and aesthetic considerations involving higher-order thinking skills were not often seen. High-quality presentations produced with some software were not always accompanied by solid learning gains.

56.   The vast majority of pupils viewed the centre as a special place to visit. Host school users appear to have a higher regard for the centre when its premises and operation are seen as quite distinct from the school. Most users respect the CLCs, particularly the large amount of space, the adult environment, the freedom to walk around and the state-of-the-art equipment they are using. Some centres are using the facilities to enrich the curriculum of low-achieving pupils and provide a range of vocational opportunities that are not available in their school.

57.   One of the objectives of the centre programme was to improve attendance. No information was available to indicate whether CLCs were having any effect in this area.

Innovation and dissemination

Key findings

❑ In half of the CLCs the level of innovation was judged to be good or very good. Developments in the use of multimedia and CAD-CAM are springboards for exploring methods of teaching and learning in many CLCs.

❑ CLCs are complementing major initiatives by providing opportunities for some teachers to develop their classroom practice in ICT to higher levels. Enthusiastic and confident teachers in partnership schools are taking full advantage of the opportunities to exploit the advanced technology available.

❑ The provision of 'learning zones' provides an adult environment which promotes self-directed learning.

❑ Some centres are in danger of duplicating the development of the curriculum materials which are soon to be available through 'Curriculum Online' and the 'Teacher Net'.

❑ There were some good examples of effective dissemination, but the quality and range varied widely.

58.   Teachers using the centres appreciate the opportunities, sometimes previously unavailable, to experiment with teaching approaches and also to evaluate new software and hardware such as electronic whiteboards. However, the perceived complexity of advanced ICT is discouraging some less confident staff from asking for support.

59.   Examples of innovation include multi-media applications with digital video and music, the use of electronic whiteboards, CAD-CAM, web page design and electronic learning. Some CLCs have also been involved with imaginative developments such as mobile classrooms and furniture design.

60.   In a number of centres the innovative application of multi-media, including digital video, to a range of topics was highly effective in enhancing learning and raising pupils' levels of engagement. The linking of ICT to media literacy combined two areas that interest pupils and enabled them to express themselves effectively. The use of video was most productive when linked with wider curriculum aims. For example, work on video with one primary school concentrated on videoing a drama, linking work in history on the Second World War with work on *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Another group of primary school pupils produced a video as a surprise leaving present for their headteacher.

61.   A further example of effective video work was seen with a community group of young people who had been excluded from school. They were involved in a project to film themselves and then edit the film, adding titles, transitions and sound with the twin aims of developing ICT skills and raising self-esteem. The young people were

absorbed and involved, quickly becoming confident with the software. They succeeded in completing their video clips and took pride in showing the results.

62.   Most centres have electronic whiteboards and some are also exploring the use of tablets as input devices. There were some good examples of work on large screen displays, including video conferencing, but few instances where teachers fully exploited the interactive element of such systems.

63.   All centres have their own web sites. These are at various stages of development. Access was frequently restricted by the absence of a broadband or a reliable connection. Opportunities for web-based learning and sharing of resources are being explored in some centres. In one centre that is enthusiastically pursuing e-learning, over 100 registered users share resources within their own schools or more widely within the partnership, subject to quality control checks by a co-ordinator. CLCs need to be aware of the danger of duplication of effort by teachers in the light of the imminent arrival of 'Curriculum Online' and the existence of other similar resources.

64.   All CLCs are to some extent test-beds in the design of the learning environment to reflect new needs and advancing technology. Many continue to advance thinking in these areas. One centre was involved in a particularly innovative desk design, now patented by the partner design firm, which allows for quick and easy storage of a flat screen, keyboard and mouse, leaving clear desk-space for use with a laptop or other work. The same centre has pioneered the use of laptops as a mobile classroom. A specially converted vehicle that can lift the storage trolley containing up to 30 laptops is used to transport them to local schools, thus overcoming the difficulties associated with pupils travelling to the centre.

65.   Innovative layouts, availability and use of space generally provide a relaxed but engaging climate for learning. Pupils appreciate the adult environment, which contrasts with that at school. Good design of learning zones allows young people and adults to work comfortably together and to share resources.

66.   These examples demonstrate that there is an exciting range of innovative activity being explored within the centres. It is important, however, that this innovative use of advanced technology is allied with a rigorous analysis of learning gains. CLCs should be aware of and be involved in research into how ICT supports teaching and learning. In the lessons observed there were examples of such use of technology, although some work failed to fully exploit the opportunities.

67.   There are good examples of effective dissemination of the work of CLCs through teachers using the centres and publicity, involving leaflets, web sites and promotional visits to partner schools. CLCs are able to strengthen schools' use of the training funded through the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) and the New Opportunities Fund and, in some cases, gaps are being filled.

68.   Typically, teaching staff at a centre encourage visiting schools to become independent users of facilities over time and to integrate the activities into work done in their school. At one centre this was achieved in ICT with primary schools. Having brought pupils to the centre to work on aspects of control in ICT, through sessions led by the centre staff, the teachers wanted to develop this approach in school in

subsequent years. They learned the necessary skills by observing the centre staff teaching their class and are now confident to take on the responsibility, with equipment provided by the centre.

69.   ICT technicians and network managers in CLCs support schools in network management. Primary schools place a high value on this advice. This helps ICT coordinators to develop their technical understanding and to make well reasoned choices when expanding their ICT resources.

70.   Most of the CLCs are producing reports that promote their work as well as celebrate the achievements of users. The quality of these reports and other promotional leaflets and flyers is generally good. One centre produced a high-quality CD report that included a CD-ROM, with copies of the centre's web site for off-line viewing. As well as providing information about the centre and examples of good practice, the better web sites are also a showcase for pupils' and other users' work.

Partnerships

Key findings

❑ The quality and range of partnership working were judged to be at least satisfactory in all CLCs, and were good in seven of those inspected.

❑ All centres have well-established working relationships with primary and most secondary schools, and a range of other agencies and professionals that support education.

❑ Managers maintain good contacts with the schools in their cluster. As this interpersonal level, partnership headteachers feel fully involved with the work of the centre. Two-way communication is less well developed between the management boards and the schools they represent.

❑ Links with groups in the local community are variable. About half of the centres have made sensible arrangements to work with these groups to meet specific needs.

❑ Some LEAs have recognised the potential of CLCs to raise attainment, and are working with centres on aspects of their school improvement strategy. Such connections are yet to be made in other cases.

❑ Links with beacon and specialist schools are underdeveloped.

71. The quality and range of partnership working were judged to be at least satisfactory in all CLCs, with examples of good practice in seven of those visited.

72. All centres work well with their host schools, which have the obvious advantages of proximity and easier access. Centre managers attempt to redress this imbalance in a number of ways to offer all partnership schools equivalent access.

73. One of the centres visited is located in a further education college. This fosters a positive perception of all schools' joint ownership and equality of access. In another, the centre and host school share ICT facilities and they plan regularly and systematically to allow reciprocal flexibility.

74. Well-established working relationships exist between centre staff and EiC primary and secondary schools. Special schools used facilities regularly in four centres and had established regular links in another three. The most obvious benefit from schools' use of the centres is that groups of teachers collaborate to develop ideas and share good practice.

75. All CLCs have formed effective working relationships with a wide range of other agencies and professionals that support education, including museums, theatres, the media, libraries, writers, actors, artists, musicians, and multi-media producers. Many of these agencies, which often already support local work in ways such as through

the Sure Start Project and the adult education service, provide an important link to community and lifelong learning programmes. Where CLCs are using agencies outside the range of normal educational contacts and facilitating events in the partnership, schools value their contribution in improving the image of education and opening up opportunities.

76.   Increased collaboration with schools has established local study support for pupils and students and increased enrichment opportunities for cohorts of gifted and talented pupils through summer schools at the centre.

77.   All centre managers consult with headteachers from their cluster schools on a regular basis. At this operational level, they feel fully involved with the centre's work. However, communication is less well developed between the management boards and the schools they represent. Not all partnership schools are consulted fully on the priorities in their centre's development plan.

78.   Although there are purposeful working relationships between the CLCs and individual schools, various LEA and EiC officers, advisory staff and consultants, there is a need for greater concentration on matters relating to school improvement, specifically raising attainment. In half the areas there was some evidence that this is starting to happen through sharing performance data so that needs could be identified and subsequently included in the centre's support programme.

79.   CLCs are not yet forming sufficiently close working relationships with beacon and specialist schools in their partnerships, although valuable opportunities exist. Three centres were located in host schools which had specialist designation but in only one was there evidence of a connection with the school's specialist development plan.

Conclusions and recommendations

80.   This initial inspection of ten CLCs which have been working for just over a year indicates that they are beginning to establish themselves as an important strand of the EiC programme. Much good practice is emerging. Managers have enthusiastically embraced the challenges of exploring ICT as a vehicle for extending learning opportunities and are delivering a diverse range of activities.

81.   The CLCs have no existing models to follow. They are to a large extent exploring new territory. Developments are taking shape and progress is positive. However, some aspects of CLC work need to be refined and strengthened if they are to promote greater collaboration between schools and contribute fully to raising standards. Among other things, a clear basis is needed for evaluating the extent to which CLCs are providing value for money in meeting the aims of the programme.

Recommendations

82.   The **DfES** should:

- set up links between CLCs in order to share best practice and explore new developments

- define clearly the basis and mechanisms for monitoring the use and impact of CLCs

- expand the engagement of CLCs in research into the use of ICT in teaching and learning.

83.   **EiC partnerships** should:

- guide and support the work of CLCs in relation to school improvement

- work closely with centre managers to identify pockets of under-achievement in schools and encourage more effective targeting of resources

- promote greater collaboration between CLCs and beacon and specialist schools, and thus broaden the range of resources and good practice available to all its schools.

84.   **CLC management boards** should:

- provide better strategic direction to CLC work

- ensure that development plans have clear objectives that meet the requirements of the programme and the relevant objectives of the EiC partnership, particularly with regard to raising

attainment, improving teaching and addressing attendance in schools

- develop more effective two-way communication with all the partnership schools to ensure their views are represented and their needs and priorities are considered.

85. **CLC** managers should:

- work with the EiC partnership and the LEA school improvement service, or equivalent agency, to identify schools that need support

- develop the role of the centre in co-ordinating and disseminating subject-specific ICT projects across EiC partnership schools

- ensure that all activities involving ICT lead to learning gains beyond the acquisition of technical skills

- explore creative ways of ensuring equitable use of centre provision by all partnership schools, particularly where inadequate transport is a barrier to use

- explore ways of encouraging greater use by secondary schools, for example by targeting a wider range of subject leaders

- explore fully how facilities can be made available to the local community during and beyond the school day, working with other agencies to complement existing provision

- continue to see CLCs as agents of change, taking a leading role in developing in the opportunities presented by ICT in education

- take account of existing and new national initiatives and strategies when developing their locally devised curriculum materials

- ensure that monitoring gathers information in a form that can support planning

- look at ways of increasing primary expertise in the centres so that they can offer more effective support to teachers in Key Stages 1 and 2.

86. **Schools** should:

- look at ways in which they can make further use of the facilities and expertise of centre staff to improve the quality of provision in ICT for their pupils

- explore with centre managers ways of overcoming difficulties of transport and timetabling.