



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection report
ISLE OF WIGHT
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: September 2003

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Basic information about the LEA

Name of LEA:	Isle of Wight Local Education Authority
Address of LEA:	Isle of Wight Council County Hall, Newport Isle of Wight PO30 1UD
Lead inspector:	Jean Samuel
Date of inspection:	September 2003

Introduction

1. This inspection of Isle of Wight local education authority (LEA) 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)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which were provided by the LEA. That material also included: school inspection information; Her Majesty's Inspectorate monitoring reports and audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, the LEA's officers and members and focus groups of headteachers and governors, staff in other departments at that local authority, and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and LEA partners submitted written evidence of participation and joint working and participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the previous Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA (published in October 2000). A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to 69 schools and two pupil referral units, and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 86%.

3. For each inspected function of the LEA an inspection team makes a judgement, which is converted into a numerical grade. An inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made against criteria for each inspected function of the LEA. These criteria, and the guidance notes on functions of an LEA that may be inspected by Ofsted, can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report, along with short explanations of what each numerical grade represents. Judgements on inspected functions of an LEA are made during the inspection of the LEA and indicate the effectiveness of the LEA's performance of individual functions at the time of the inspection. The numerical grades awarded by the inspection team complement the areas of the report that comment on the individual functions scrutinised on this inspection, and, as such, must be considered in the light of those comments.

4. Some of the grades are used in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be updated regularly so that the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next assessment.

5. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of several aspects of the local service, including pre-school provision and adult education. The CPA for education is composed of a number of inspection judgements, as well as other performance indicators, such as improvement trends at Key Stage 3. The assessment, published in December 2002, gives star ratings for each local authority for a range of local services, for example social services, benefits, and environment; this report focuses on the local authority's work to support school improvement.

Commentary

6. The Isle of Wight is a predominantly rural area. Unemployment is high compared with the regional level, and low wages predominate because of a reliance on seasonal industries. The island has pockets of disadvantage. The percentage of the population from minority ethnic groups is well below the national average.

7. The LEA provides education through a three-tier system of school organisation, with pupils transferring at the ages of nine and 13 to middle and high schools respectively.

8. Educational standards are variable across the key stages and within subjects. While standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are in line with similar authorities and in line with or above national averages, progress between key stages is below the national average rate. Provisional results for 2003 demonstrate a welcome improvement at Key Stage 3 but a serious reversal in progress at Key Stage 2. The small improvement at GCSE is unlikely to close the gap with the national average.

9. The previous inspection, conducted three years ago, found weaknesses in the council's strategic planning and within the Education Development Plan (EDP). These weaknesses have been addressed. Strategic plans now provide a coherent framework for action and for improved monitoring and accountability. The scrutiny role of elected members, however, remains underdeveloped and they do not challenge sufficiently the lack of consistent progress in standards. Too much weight is placed by elected members, officers and schools on the impact of deprivation and what they describe as a local culture of low aspiration. Elected members and officers are working to overcome the constraints of insularity and parochialism through attending courses, working collaboratively with other LEAs and observing examples of good practice on the mainland.

10. The inspection and advisory service is effective in supporting measures to raise standards in particular schools, phases and subjects. However, it has yet to bring about sustained and consistent improvement in overall performance. It has concentrated most of its resources on rectifying weaknesses in particular schools. This has left little to spare for addressing the difficulties which can arise when key stages, and their associated curricula, are split between phases. Primary, middle and high schools have not achieved the sustained sharing of responsibility for standards in key stages that is essential if the three-tier organisation is to be successful. The recent refocusing of the LEA's services to support cross-phase clusters, or families, of schools has the potential to improve curriculum coherence and accelerate the rate of progress across each key stage.

11. The council does not serve vulnerable groups of children well. Insufficient progress has been made in promoting social inclusion. There has been some progress, however. The council has put appropriate emphasis on collaborative working between council departments and with other agencies, such as health. The capacity for improved partnership working is good.

There are particular strengths in:

- the LEA's strategy for school improvement, including the Education Development
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Plan;

- the extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities;
- the extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools;
- the extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need;
- support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communication technology (ICT);
- the effectiveness of its services to support school management with respect to:
 - financial services
 - human resources
 - property services
 - services for ICT in school administration
 - grounds maintenance;
- the effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement;
- the expertise of staff to support school improvement;
- the effectiveness of the LEA in providing school places;
- the effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning;
- the effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools: and
- support for early years.

There are weaknesses in:

- the quality of leadership provided by elected members;
- the overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion;
- the effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism;
- the extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection;
- the effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of special educational needs (SEN);
- the extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place;
- the extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance; and
- the extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to looked after children.

12. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory overall, but has been uneven. Recommendations from the previous inspection report have been addressed. There are substantial improvements in corporate planning, the strategy for supporting children with special educational needs and some elements of support for school improvement. However, there has been insufficient progress in raising standards and in aspects of social inclusion. Judged satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, this remains a satisfactory LEA overall. The new director of education (in post since November 2002) and a reorganised senior management team are aware of the extent of the improvement, and increased rate of progress, required to move from being a competent authority to being a good or excellent one. The LEA's capacity to ensure that the necessary actions are taken to increase the rate of progress, and to address the recommendations within this report, is satisfactory.

13. A commitment to continuous improvement is now evident in the council's approach to Best Value processes and performance management at all levels. Some important initiatives, for example the refocusing of school improvement services on a cluster model and the collaborative model of 14-19 educational provision, are at an early stage of implementation and consequently it is too early to judge their impact.

14. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment for education, published in December 2002, gave the education service two stars for current performance (on a scale of one to three). The assessment also gave the education service two stars for its capacity to make further improvement. The findings of the inspection team, based on up-to-date evidence in the field, support this.

Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement

Context

15. The Isle of Wight is a small unitary authority with a system of primary, middle and high schools. A significant number of schools in the primary and middle phases are small. Since the previous inspection, the overall population has risen by about 4% to 130,000, of which the school population is 19,400, a 2% increase.

16. The Isle of Wight is the only island in the south east region. Expensive ferry crossings serve to increase geographical isolation and have a negative impact on socio-economic development. The island has pockets of disadvantage. Of the council's 48 wards, three are in the 10% most disadvantaged in the country. The percentage of wards in the lowest third nationally has increased significantly between 1991 and 2000 from 40% to 70%. Unemployment is 4.3% compared with a regional level of 1.8%.¹ Low wages, driven by reliance on seasonal industries such as tourism, predominate, with average pay levels 22% below the national average.

17. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (22.8% of primary age and 17.5% of secondary age in 2001/02) is above that of similar authorities² but broadly in line with the national figures for primary and secondary schools.

18. At Key Stages 1 and 2, while the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs has fallen significantly since the last inspection to 3.2 %, this is still above the national average (2.6%) and that for similar authorities (2.7%). However, the percentage of children with a statement at Key Stages 3 and 4 (4.7%) is broadly in line with the national figure. The percentage of statemented pupils who are educated in special schools (28.1%) has reduced since the last inspection and, although higher than in similar authorities (22.3%), is now broadly in line with the national rate (29.6%). Fewer than 1% of pupils are from minority ethnic communities, compared to 3% in similar authorities.

19. In 2002, 11 of the island's 67 mainstream schools had a pupil mobility level greater than 15% over a three-year period; this is a reduction from 16 schools at the time of the previous inspection.

20. The Isle of Wight has 46 primary schools educating pupils aged 4-9; four have nursery classes. Of the 46 primary schools, 44 have a private or voluntary pre-school on site. The LEA offers a free place to every 4-year-old whose parents require a place. In 2002/03 there was provision of free places for 55% of 3-year-olds compared to 79% in unitary authorities generally.

¹ The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 places the Local Authority at 87 out of 354 on the rank of average ward results with 1= most deprived.

² The Isle of Wight's similar authorities are Calderdale, Darlington, East Riding of Yorkshire, Herefordshire, The Medway Towns, North Lincolnshire, Shropshire, Torbay, Warrington, and the City of York

21. Pupils aged 9-13 are admitted by 16 middle schools and five high schools take pupils 13-19. The authority maintains two special schools, three specialist centres for children with SEN and two pupil referral units for excluded pupils. The LEA's support services have recently been reorganised to support clusters, or families of schools.

Performance

22. Overall, the performance of schools is unsatisfactory. The key features of schools' performance in 2002, the most recent year for which validated comparisons are available, and changes between 1998 and 2002 are outlined below.

23. Ofsted school inspections show that pupils' attainment on entry to Isle of Wight primary schools at age five was broadly in line with national averages. At the end of Key Stage 1, standards were broadly in line with similar authorities in reading, writing and mathematics and above the national averages in writing and mathematics. Results in reading declined between 2001 and 2002. At the end of Key Stage 2, standards in English and mathematics were below those for similar authorities but broadly in line with the national average. In science, results were above the national and similar authorities' averages.

24. The end of Key Stage 3 results in English were well below the national and similar authorities' averages. In mathematics and science, they were broadly in line with the national average but below those in similar authorities. In General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations, the percentages of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades and those gaining at least one A*-G grade were below the national average and that for similar authorities. Advanced and Advanced Subsidiary (A and AS) level performance remained broadly in line with national averages.

25. Validated comparisons in trends are available for the period 1998 to 2002. The rate of improvement in attainment at Key Stage 1 was above the national trend in reading, and broadly in line in writing and mathematics. It was above or well above the trend in similar authorities. Rates of improvement in attainment at Key Stage 2 were broadly in line with the national trend and above or well above that of similar authorities.

26. At Key Stages 3 and 4, rates of improvement in attainment were well below the national trends and those of similar authorities. Increases in the percentages of pupils achieving five or more A*-C or at least one A*-G grades at GCSE were well below national levels and those of similar authorities. This is a worsening position compared with the rate of improvement between 1996 and 1999.

27. Progress between each key stage was below the average national rate of progress.

28. Attendance rates overall are broadly in line with the national figure. The percentage of sessions missed by pupils because of unauthorised absence is below the national figure for primary and secondary schools. The exclusion rate for 2000/01 and 2001/02 was well below that of similar authorities and the national rate.

29. The results of school inspections present a mixed picture as they did at the time of the last inspection. The percentage of primary schools judged to be good or very good is above the national average and broadly in line with similar authorities. A higher proportion

has improved from satisfactory to good than nationally. However, the proportion of middle schools judged good or very good overall (46.2 %) is much lower than nationally (75.5 %). The percentage of high schools graded good or very good is also below the national average and that for similar authorities. In secondary schools, the quality of education and climate has declined between the first and second cycle of inspections, although management and efficiency have improved. Three schools hold Beacon status.

30. One primary school, previously identified as having serious weaknesses, was deemed to require special measures in September 2002. Another primary school was found to have serious weaknesses in October 2002. A further two schools (one primary and one middle school) have been identified by the LEA as a cause for concern.

31. Provisional data for 2003 indicate, at Key Stage 1, a marginal improvement in reading, a slight decline in mathematics and a significant drop in writing. At Key Stage 2 there has been a drop in all three core subjects, with that in English the most serious and significant. At Key Stage 3, results show a significant improvement in English, and smaller improvements in mathematics and science. There has been a marginal improvement at Key Stage 4 in the percentages of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades, and those gaining at least one A*-G grade at GCSE.

Council structure

32. Since April 2000 the council has been operating an executive model of governance. This was slightly revised in June 2001 in line with changes in legislation. The full council consists of 48 members of whom 28 belong to the Island First Group (Liberal Democrat and Independent Alliance), with 13 Conservatives, three Labour and four Independents/other. The council executive consists of the leader of the council and nine other members, each of whom has a portfolio for a range of services to supervise policy development and financial resourcing. Within the executive, one member holds a portfolio for education, community development and lifelong learning.

33. There are six select committees which cover all the service responsibilities of the executive. These committees give advice on policy development, scrutinise executive decisions and monitor the activities and performance of individual services. A select committee has as its focus education, community development and lifelong learning. It comprises 12 members who include eight councillors, representatives from two dioceses and two parent governors with voting rights on education matters.

34. In November 2002, the council reorganised its service delivery structure into five executive directorates, of which education and community development is one. The executive directors' group meets every fortnight under the leadership of the chief executive, and provides strategic leadership to the corporate organisation. Within the education and community development directorate the senior leadership management team comprises the director (the council's chief education officer) and four senior officers. They are supported by 14 service managers responsible for the operational functions that fall within their remit.

Funding

35. The council has made education a major priority, with a commitment to spend at or just above the education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) or Formula Spending Share (FSS). Education expenditure was 100.03% of SSA/FSS in 2002-03 and is budgeted to be 101.34 % in 2003-04. The SSA/FSS per pupil is well above the average for similar authorities and close to the national average. Capital expenditure in education has increased significantly, standing at £11.2 million in 2003-04, double what it was in 1998-99.

36. At just over 87 %, the Isle of Wight's delegation of its local schools budget was in line with similar authorities and the national average in 2002-03. The gross delegated funding per primary school pupil³ was above all comparator averages in 2002-03. This is due to relatively high funding in Years 5 and 6, the first two years of middle schools. For secondary pupils, gross delegated funding is just above that of comparable authorities but well below other unitary authorities and the England average. This reflects relatively low funding in Years 7 and 8, the last two years of middle schools.

³ The national system calculates primary pupils as all pupils up to Year 6, even though in this LEA those in Year 5 and 6 are in fact in middle schools. Similarly the secondary pupils calculation includes Year 7 and 8 pupils

	LEA £ per pupil	Similar authorities £ per pupil	Unitary authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Primary individual schools budget (ISB)	£2,297	£2,076	£2,153	£2,223
Secondary ISB	£2,767	£2,758	£2,852	£2,929

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002/03.

37. At £272 per pupil in 2002-03, the authority's Standards Fund per pupil was above the average for similar authorities (£258) but well below the unitary average (£311) and the national average (£333).

38. The LEA has been successful in obtaining a small range of external funding from sources that include the New Opportunities Fund, Single Regeneration Budget and the European Social Fund.

39. Spending on strategic management in 2002-03 was significantly below all comparators, while spending on SEN was significantly above all comparators.

Table 2	LEA £ per pupil	Similar authorities £ per pupil	Unitary authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Strategic management	62	92	93	101
School improvement	27	29	26	30
Access	105	144	124	131
SEN	230	132	151	160
Total	424	397	394	422

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002/03.

This continues to be the case against national comparators in 2003-04. Spending on school improvement has more than doubled in 2003-04, reaching £68 per pupil compared with the national average of £33. Most of this increase, however, is money devolved to clusters of schools.

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

40. The Education Development Plan was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. The LEA has acted on the recommendations in the previous report to address the weaknesses. The EDP 2002-2007 is the major vehicle for the LEA's strategy for school improvement, and is now good.

41. The five priority areas, which reflect national priorities, are:

- early years and the foundation key stage;
- pupils' achievement at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4;
- 14-19 curriculum coherence;
- school self-evaluation and improvement; and
- special educational needs reorganisation.

42. The plan is properly cross-referenced to other strategic council plans. Schools and governing bodies were consulted fully and all phases are represented in the audit and monitoring activities. The EDP and performance monitoring working group reports to the scrutiny committee for education, community and lifelong learning.

43. Explicit actions, based on a detailed audit, are set out within each priority. These actions are costed and have clear success criteria and time frames for action. However, there is not always a sufficient emphasis on pupils' attainment as outcomes, particularly within associated operational plans. Schools are aware of the priorities and some have begun to enter into partnership arrangements with the LEA to deliver EDP activities and programmes.

44. The LEA has recently refocused its services on clusters of schools. It has recognised the need, and taken action to address more effectively the problem of inconsistency and under-performance across the school system. Early work is in hand to agree cluster-based targets. Schools are in the process of making bids for additional finance to address EDP issues relating specifically to their clusters. This initiative is intended specifically to address the low rate of progress across each key stage. At this stage of implementation it is too early to assess the effect of this.

45. Progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement is satisfactory, having been highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. The actions set out in the EDP and annual action statement are implemented as planned and to budget. Education Development Plan priorities are clearly reflected in the school improvement programme of the majority of schools. Qualitative and quantitative success criteria have been set and suitable performance management measures ensure that they are used to check progress.

46. Progress on taking action, for example the reorganisation of the island's two special schools, has been good. However, progress on improving pupils' attainment has been less successful. Provisional results this year indicate a significant decline in standards at Key Stage 2. This was unpredicted and reverses the improvement since the last inspection. However, at Key Stage 3, following several years in which the rate of improvement was well below the trend of similar authorities and the national rate, there has been some progress this year. At GCSE the increase of less than 1% in those gaining five or more A*-C grades will do little to close the gap with levels nationally. The LEA has not succeeded in preventing some officers, school staff and elected members from attributing unsatisfactory performance to the perceived culture of low aspirations.

Recommendation

In order to accelerate progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement:

- set clear measures of attainment for the new clusters, and report progress against these performance indicators to elected members on a regular basis.

The allocation of resources to priorities

47. At the time of the last inspection, the council's ability to target resources to priorities was satisfactory. It is now good. Education is a key priority of the council which funds it accordingly, even in difficult financial times. The decision to raise council tax by over 14% in 2003-04 enabled a standstill budget for schools to be achieved.

48. The council's strategic planning process for 2004/05 is significantly more rigorous than it used to be. It is undertaking a fundamental review of provision, including service pressures, requirements to fulfil statutory duties and the possible contraction of services to accommodate developments. The forward plan for the following three years mirrors this approach. Spending within the education budget reflects priorities, for example the increased

spending on school improvement is a result of the new clustering arrangements. Consultation on priorities with the public and with education stakeholders is good.

49. Budget-making is accurate and control is good. There has been recent support from the corporate centre for grant bidding and the LEA has also recently identified similar specific resources to support schools. Few schools are in deficit or have high balances. The last fundamental review of the funding formula took place some five years ago. The Schools Forum is rightly preparing to examine the effectiveness of the distribution mechanism as part of its work this autumn.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

50. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's strategies to promote continuous improvement were unsatisfactory. They are now satisfactory.

51. The LEA knows its strengths and weaknesses. Plans to address the unsatisfactory rate of progress across key stages are in place and action initiated. The Best Value Performance Plan is sound. The performance management framework is much improved, with a clear relationship between corporate, directorate and service performance management plans now identified. The latter, however, are variable in quality and little monitoring of consistency by senior managers currently takes place. The quality of performance indicators has improved significantly; their accuracy is now satisfactory. Monitoring by elected members has been inconsistent. A new, more thorough, quarterly monitoring regime is in its infancy. Similarly, the council has very recently implemented a revised performance appraisal system. It is too early to judge the impact of these initiatives.

52. The identification of areas for Best Value review has previously been weak. This has now improved and rightly focuses on areas for development, such as SEN. The use of appropriate and rigorous external challenge has increased. Best Value improvement plans, however, as with much of the authority's service planning, are insufficiently focused on outcomes for service users, with too much emphasis being placed on the achievement of processes.

53. There are early signs of useful cross-directorate working being developed to support improvement. Examples of this include the creation of groups which focus on shared learning in areas such as risk management, performance management and business management. The island strategy group, that includes other partner agencies, for example health and social services, has recently reformed and sensibly reviewed its terms of reference in order to take forward the children's services agenda in the coming months.

Recommendation

In order to improve the quality of planning:

- ensure that all plans incorporate success criteria which identify clear outcomes for service users.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

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

54. The inspection and advisory service deploys its resources according to a careful analysis of where needs are greatest. It is largely successful in improving quality and standards in the particular schools and areas selected for support. However, it has not addressed sufficiently well the wider problem of inconsistency and under-performance across the school system as a whole. The splitting of Key Stage 2 between primary and middle schools, and of Key Stage 3 between middle and high schools, has the potential to lead to disrupted progression in the curriculum unless the LEA has a strategy for promoting continuity in learning. In the past, the LEA strategy for promoting continuity has not been effective. Furthermore, the small size of many of the island's middle schools compromises their ability to provide appropriately for the whole age and ability range. However, the school improvement services have been refocused to work through new school clusters, or families of schools, in order to reinforce the way they address issues of curriculum progression. The work of other LEA support services, for example on attendance, also reflects cluster arrangements. These initiatives have significant potential to remedy the situation. The service is actively promoting mutual support among schools through new cluster arrangements and is launching a programme of courses for middle managers.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

55. The leading role in school improvement is taken by the inspection and advisory service. Its structure is well suited to a small authority. There are six inspectors, augmented effectively by a team of consultants, some employed within the service and some bought in as the need arises. The secondments of leading teachers and shared appointments make very good use of the expertise available in schools. Steps are taken to guard against the effects of isolation. Four of the inspectors have been appointed fairly recently from the mainland and there are many links with mainland educational institutions. The service is energetically led and managed. It has a strong sense of purpose and functions as a close-knit team, co-operating closely with other services. There is a sound system of performance management.

56. The team is well deployed and largely succeeds in implementing its plans. However, it is at full stretch in implementing the national agenda.

57. The services responsible for data and for information and communication technology make a strong contribution to school improvement, both in administration and the curriculum. The behaviour support and educational welfare services are managed well, but their deployment is not systematically targeted according to needs. The services to support school management are effective.

Monitoring, challenge, and intervention

58. The LEA's procedures for monitoring, challenging and intervening in schools were satisfactory at the time of the last inspection and are now good. Following consultation with headteachers, these have been carefully refined to reflect local needs and to secure continuous

improvement. The criteria for determining each school's entitlement to support and intervention are detailed and transparent, and allow the LEA to respond sensitively in proportion to needs. The respective roles of schools and the LEA's officers are well defined. The schools are well aware of how the LEA categorises them and fully understand the procedures.

59. Schools value the LEA's challenge. Intervention has led to improved standards in the schools receiving it. However, the focus on individual schools is not capable of overcoming the wider issues arising from the division between schools in the responsibilities for key stages. A parallel system of monitoring, challenge, intervention and support, operating upon clusters of schools, is being developed to address this issue. It is imaginative and has good potential to secure improvement.

The focusing of the LEA's support on areas of greatest need

60. The LEA's capacity to identify areas of need, and to focus its resources appropriately, has improved from highly satisfactory to good since the last inspection. Performance data continue to be used effectively to identify under-performing schools and good use is made of the additional data that have become available, to determine more precisely areas of underachievement. Intervention teams, which draw upon the wide range of expertise found among the inspectors, consultants and leading teachers, enhance the ability to target resources and respond rapidly.

61. Schools have a good understanding of their responsibility to purchase support beyond the core entitlement provided by the LEA. Compared with the situation at the time of the last inspection, successful schools now more readily make their own decisions on buying extra support from the LEA. Under the newly strengthened cluster arrangements they are beginning to do so in collaboration with others in their cluster, and this enables them to tackle common issues.

62. The LEA is active in drawing in expertise from elsewhere and making useful links with educational bodies on the mainland. The majority of schools tend to confine their training choices to what is available on the island or arranged by the LEA. There is scope for the LEA to publicise opportunities further, and to encourage schools to look farther afield.

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

63. The LEA's approach to monitoring and challenging schools was highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It is now no more than satisfactory overall since, despite more rigorous mechanisms for monitoring and challenge, the improvement in schools' performance and pupils' achievement has not been sufficient or consistent.

64. Link inspectors know schools well and their monitoring of schools is thorough. The data collected are extensive and used well to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses. There are good facilities for transferring data electronically. The setting of targets is rational and challenging. School self-review has been improved. Link inspectors give good advice. They are efficient in co-ordinating the contributions of the various services that schools may require. Areas of weakness common to a number of schools, such as spelling and writing, are

tackled with vigour through well-targeted projects. The recommendations of the last report have been met. Reports to headteachers and governors are now more rigorous and consistent, and performance data are analysed well and presented clearly.

65. The system of school-by-school monitoring is rigorous, yet improvement in standards has been erratic. The heart of the problem is in Key Stages 2 and 3. The splitting of key stages under the three-tier school organisation means that programmes of study can be disrupted part-way through. There is sometimes wasteful repetition and agreements between schools on curriculum content are allowed to break down. Patterns of homework are inconsistent and often lack progression. All three phases are affected to some extent but the middle schools, in particular, bear the brunt of having to deal with two split key stages. Most are scarcely large enough, and some much too small, to organise internally so as to provide both good quality cross-curricular approaches and adequate specialist subject teaching. The compromises required have to be implemented with exceptional skill if pupils' progress is not to be jeopardised. Middle managers in the middle schools, usually without the support of a subject department, face particularly difficult challenges if they are to maintain standards.

66. The LEA and schools have a good, shared understanding of the problems and all concerned are fully committed to the new and strengthened cluster arrangements instituted by the LEA this year. A new round of middle manager training is just beginning. It is too soon to judge the success of these measures. Additional funding has been made available to support cluster initiatives this year. The bids received from clusters to date indicate that there is a danger that they will address the same symptoms of under-performance as before, rather than the underlying causes.

Recommendations

In order to support schools in raising standards and sustaining improvement:

- ensure that development work in clusters includes sufficient focus on joint policies for the curriculum and homework across all three tiers; and
- agree with schools clear expectations of what pupils should achieve by the end of Years 4 and 8 in standards, study skills and work.

67. Social disadvantage and low parental expectations are frequently cited reasons for under-performance on the Isle of Wight. There is no question that pockets of disadvantage exist and the LEA is right to promote projects, such as family learning, to address this. However, the generally satisfactory performance at Key Stage 1, and rapid improvement this year at Key Stage 3, show that these are not factors that should be allowed to depress expectations overall.

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

68. Support for under-performing schools is highly satisfactory, an improvement on the satisfactory position at the time of the last inspection. The support for schools that were found in their Ofsted inspections to have serious weaknesses or to require special measures is highly effective. Since the last inspection, one school has been found to have serious weaknesses

and one requires special measures. In the former, improvements have been rapid as a result of a comprehensive support programme. In the second, progress is slower.

69. Monitoring visits by Her Majesty's Inspectors over the period illustrate that schools in these categories receive prompt staffing enhancement, comprehensive advice, good support with self-review and action planning, relevant governor training, and regular review at a senior level. Other schools, which the LEA itself has identified as being of concern, have been equally well supported and with a high degree of success. Two features of the support stand out. First there is the capacity that the LEA has developed to draft in senior staff or experienced governors at very short notice to support management. Secondly, there is the good use of intervention teams to improve teaching and learning.

Support for literacy and numeracy

70. The implementation of the national strategies was found to be good at the time of the last inspection. However, as the LEA acknowledges, there are persistent weaknesses in pupils' performance that have still not been overcome. The inspection undertook only limited field work but it was sufficient to conclude that the effectiveness of the support is now no more than satisfactory.

71. The strategies continue to be managed and co-ordinated well and the numeracy and literacy consultants work very closely together. The last three years have seen a move towards closer targeting of support to address specific weaknesses in particular schools and this has generally been successful for the schools concerned. Headteachers praise the work of consultants and the intervention teams, especially in helping to improve teaching and learning. There are tangible, sometimes substantial, improvements in standards in some schools as a result of targeted projects based on the LEA's very detailed analysis of performance data.

72. More general matters that apply to the majority of schools are given insufficient attention by the LEA. For instance, the LEA has identified the gap between reading and writing performance, beginning in Key Stage 1, and shortcomings in spelling and writing that adversely affect standards across the curriculum right through to Key Stage 4. It draws the reasonable conclusion that the strategies are being applied too narrowly by schools. The LEA's targeted approach is not, by itself, sufficient.

Recommendations

In order to raise standards in the application of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum:

- maintain the existing work targeted at the areas of most severe weakness while broadening the approaches to tackle weaknesses that are found across the majority of schools, particularly in the application of writing skills; and
- ensure that all schools, not just those with poor performance, are supported in analysing weaknesses through the systematic scrutiny of pupils' work.

Support for information and communication technology

73. The LEA's support for information and communication technology is good. It has built consistently upon the foundation that had already been laid at the time of the last inspection when support was highly satisfactory. The LEA aspires to facilitate the work of schools so that all pupils should have independent skills in a variety of key ICT applications by the end of Year 8. It has made good progress towards this. Standards at Key Stage 3 are abreast of the national average and ahead of the other core subjects in the LEA. The number of pupils obtaining recognised qualifications at Key Stage 4 is significantly higher than average.

74. Schools of all types, including special schools, have more computers per pupil than the average for England. All middle and high schools, and a third of primary schools, have broadband connectivity and the remainder are to gain from it by 2005. Most schools have suitably equipped ICT suites and a substantial proportion of classroom computers are networked. The National Grid for Learning programme has been implemented determinedly and with imagination and, along with the broadband programme, has been well integrated with the corporate ICT strategy. As a result, small schools have sometimes been able to obtain high level installations by offering community and adult education use, thus drawing upon additional funding sources with LEA support.

75. Priority has also been given to training teachers and support assistants. The New Opportunities Fund training programme has been unusually successful as a result of careful preparation that ensured the match of courses to teachers' needs. A higher proportion of teachers have now been trained than is the case nationally and advanced courses have been provided for some in the latest multi-media technology.

76. The ICT strand in the Key Stage 3 Strategy has been well received and has helped to promote the use of ICT across the curriculum. Consultants in the other strands, and those working in Key Stage 2, share in cross-curricular developments, although there has been less direct influence recently in the primary schools. There is an active headteachers' steering group. Teachers are closely involved in curriculum development projects, including the development of the LEA's website as a curriculum source and means of disseminating materials and good practice.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

77. This is a new area for inspection. Support for the Key Stage 3 strategy is satisfactory and, if recent improvements can be sustained, has good potential for the future. Early progress was slow because of difficulties in filling some of the posts and because extra care was needed in implementing the strategy in middle schools. The LEA has been resourceful in recruiting extra support from the mainland and using the strengths within some of its schools. A Beacon school is leading in the foundation subject strand and a consultant for behaviour and attendance has also been seconded from a school. Wisely, consultants often work across both key stages in the middle schools.

78. Schools have found departmental audits to be challenging but constructive. The new work just starting in the clusters promises to improve continuity and the sharing of

responsibility for the key stage. This is particularly relevant where the foundation subject strand is concerned. Some high schools have audited all departments and are now disseminating new approaches to teaching and learning widely, even into Key Stage 4.

79. Consultants are proving valuable. Schools appreciate their advice and very practical support in demonstrating methods and helping individual teachers. Their guidance with planning and the moderation of pupils' work has improved insights into the National Curriculum programmes of study. Transition between Years 6 and 7 is eased by the fact that pupils remain in the same school. The LEA contributes to the provision of useful data on transition from Year 8 to Year 9, by supporting the use of voluntary National Curriculum tests and other standardised tests.

80. Following three years in which the gap in Key Stage 3 standards between the LEA and those nationally has grown wider, this year's provisional results have risen sharply, with proportionately more improvement in those high schools targeted for extra support by consultants. However, standards are still significantly below national norms and there is much to be done. In addressing the worrying fall in Key Stage 2 standards, it will be important not to let slip the gains made at Key Stage 3.

Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers

81. Work in this area continues to be satisfactory and was not the subject of fieldwork in this inspection. The last inspection found that the LEA maintained careful records of the attainments, first languages, attendance and other relevant data regarding minority ethnic pupils. Although numbers are too small for clear patterns to emerge, data are analysed and pupils' progress is monitored individually rather than at group level.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

82. Provision for gifted and talented pupils was not inspected at the time of the last inspection. The LEA's support in this area is satisfactory. A policy has been produced by a working group of teachers and headteachers that includes excellent guidance on identifying gifted and talented pupils. The LEA assists in the identification by naming, for each school, gifted pupils who, according to its data, have high potential. Their subsequent progress is then monitored.

83. There is a great variety of extension opportunities available to pupils beyond the curriculum. Some of these are funded wholly or partly by the LEA, some are provided by individual schools for the benefit of all, and others are provided by independent organisations. They include sporting and musical activities, mathematics master classes, able writers projects, dance and the arts, creative thinking, ICT and technology functions, and early GCSEs in statistics and religious education, aimed at Year 8. Funding for summer schools has been well used to support some of these activities. A newsletter disseminates information about them and there are plans to publicise them via the LEA's website.

84. The majority of schools have appointed co-ordinators for gifted and talented pupils and some have formulated registers of pupils in the various categories. There is variation in the extent to which schools provide extension work internally and differentiate the

mainstream curriculum to meet the needs of these pupils. The majority of the newly-constituted clusters have submitted bids for further work along these lines. A recently appointed advanced skills teacher is conducting an audit of the quality of provision within schools in order to provide the basis for further development at school level.

Support for governors

85. Support for governors was highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection and the documentary evidence indicates that this continues to be the case. No fieldwork was carried out. There are suitable mechanisms for communicating with governors and a range of training opportunities are provided. The LEA has responded effectively to the recommendation that officers' reports to governors be made clearer. It has conducted marketing exercises to recruit governors where vacancies are hard to fill and is quick to reinforce governing bodies to support schools causing concern.

Support for school management

86. The last inspection found support for school leadership and management to be good and the LEA considers this still to be so. The documentary evidence largely supports that view but the evidence of a limited amount of fieldwork indicates a more mixed picture. Overall, the LEA's support is currently satisfactory. The strengths noted previously in supporting senior managers are still present. Headteachers, deputy headteachers and other senior members of staff are strongly encouraged to engage in national training schemes. There are very good induction procedures for newly appointed headteachers. The school self-evaluation procedures have been revised and improved and senior managers have been well trained in their use. The advice and challenge provided by link inspectors are generally praised by headteachers.

87. However, the issue of support for middle managers, raised in the last report, has become of greater significance than at the time of the last inspection. A series of courses is about to begin but there has been a lull in the LEA's activity in this respect during the intervening period. This is a significant weakness since neither the headteachers nor the LEA can, alone, bring consistent standards and improvement. Solving the underlying problems of continuity and expectations, referred to elsewhere in this report, requires the effective involvement of middle managers.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for middle managers:

- ensure that training equips them to play an effective part in dealing with issues of methodology, progression and continuity.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

88. Although individual services were inspected, the overall effectiveness of services to support school management was not judged at the time of the last inspection. It is now satisfactory but some areas for development remain. A recommendation was made in the last

inspection report that the LEA should establish procedures for reviewing the performance and cost-effectiveness of services, in collaboration with schools, in order to ensure continuing good value for money. Performance has been monitored through an LEA satisfaction survey, informal mechanisms and the Audit Commission's annual survey of schools that demonstrate a highly positive evaluation of the services provided. However, there has been too little rigorous and systematic benchmarking of costs. The Schools Forum is now taking on the task of monitoring and evaluating some of the management services.

89. Service quality is highly satisfactory or better, indeed often good, in all service areas. There is a very high level of purchase of services by schools, and they are, in general, very satisfied customers. Services can be purchased independently of each other. Provision is monitored effectively and complaints followed up efficiently. Most contracts have an appropriately short notice period. Service details are clear and ordering processes easy.

90. However, very few service level agreements have options within them. Charges for individual services are identical to the delegated sums. In some cases, performance standards are insufficiently focused on the quality of outcomes. There is no formal system for monitoring complaints. The LEA does not provide any information on entitlement to core services from centrally retained funds. There is insufficient training and support for headteachers and governing bodies in Best Value or procurement. The LEA and schools are aware of the constraints involved in developing an effective market within the island context. Nevertheless, insufficient proactive support is offered to schools who might wish to consider purchasing elsewhere. Many schools, particularly small schools, remain over-reliant on the LEA.

Recommendations

In order to develop schools as effective purchasers:

- identify a range of options within service level agreements that can be separately purchased, and directly relate charges to cost of provision;
- provide regular performance information to schools, measured against costs and targets;
- provide training for headteachers and governing bodies in procurement; and
- identify ways of growing the market to provide real choice to schools.

91. At the time of the last inspection, **financial services** were very good. No fieldwork was undertaken during this inspection. These services remain very good. Schools are very satisfied with the support that they receive. Both schools' and the LEA's budgets are well managed overall.

92. At the time of the last inspection, **human resources** were good. They remain so. No fieldwork was undertaken during this inspection. Schools remain highly satisfied with all aspects of human resources support including casework and contract issuing.

93. **Property services** were good at the time of the last inspection and remain so. No fieldwork was undertaken during this inspection. Schools continue to be very satisfied with both buildings maintenance and the management of capital projects.

94. **Information and communication technology strategy, infrastructure and support for administration** were satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. They are now good. The LEA's strategy is sound. There is a good relationship to incorporate ICT objectives and appropriate links with curriculum ICT. The helpdesk is effective, prioritising need and, where necessary, supplementing support with school visits. Response times are not currently monitored but schools are, for the most part, very satisfied. Electronic data exchange is efficient and data requests are appropriately minimised. The common transfer form has been handled particularly well. The roll out to schools of broadband meets Department for Education and Skills (DfES) targets and is well managed. Initiatives requested by schools, such as the use of software to support assessment, have been appropriately developed and supported. Common platforms and standards are in use across the authority. Training is available as necessary, generally on an individual basis, but there is no annual planned programme. Staffing flexibility is being appropriately developed to meet pressure points but capacity is still very stretched on occasions.

95. The council's website is informative, attractive and interactive. The education-specific website contains useful information but is not yet interactive. It does not have a secure element where confidential information can be viewed by stakeholders but this is being developed.

96. **Cleaning and caretaking** were not judged during the last inspection and have not been inspected on this occasion. Funds for this service have been fully delegated to schools. No central contract is provided and the LEA retains no responsibility for monitoring.

97. **Grounds maintenance** was not judged at the time of the last inspection. It is now good. The central contract is monitored well by the LEA's contract management unit. Faults are rectified promptly and emergency work dealt with speedily. Contractors respond well to a joint monitoring approach. Schools are very satisfied overall. Suitable support is also given to those schools which purchase outside the contract. Grounds are appropriately seen by officers as part of the school's curriculum resources. They have been successful in obtaining grants to support individual projects, such as that replacing a disused swimming pool with a coastal environment at a primary school.

98. At the time of the last inspection, **catering** was not inspected. It is now satisfactory. The contract management unit undertakes sound and regular monitoring of the central contract. Kitchen repairs and maintenance are given sufficient priority. Generally, schools are satisfied with the service but satisfaction is declining slightly. The contractor deals with complaints appropriately. Special diets are catered for and nutritional standards maintained. However, the take-up of free school meals is insufficient; the use of free school meal cards makes pupils using them too readily identifiable.

99. Benchmarking for catering services shows satisfactory cost comparison with other providers but the contract has not been market tested. Insufficient support has been available to date for those schools considering making alternative arrangements.

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

100. The LEA's measures to maintain the supply and quality of teachers are satisfactory overall. Those concerned specifically with recruitment are good. There are no more vacancies in the island's schools than nationally. Proportionately more newly qualified teachers and entrants to the graduate training programme are appointed. The LEA assists with informative publicity material. The programme of induction, support and training for newly qualified teachers is well regarded, with helpful written guidance. The Graduate Teacher Programme is run in collaboration with one of the high schools that has training status. An appointment has recently been made to oversee all arrangements for new entrants to the profession. There is a small financial inducement for those who continue teaching on the island beyond the induction year and the percentage that do so is above the national average.

101. The LEA regularly surveys all vacancies and knows the profile of the workforce well. Typically, once established, teachers tend to remain in post or in teaching on the island for a long time. The LEA is vigilant for opportunities for senior teachers to take up responsibilities that benefit the island as a whole and maintain their interest. Recent appointments suggest that the LEA is successful in encouraging applications from the mainland to headships and senior positions in the LEA.

102. A good range of relevant training is offered centrally for the continuing professional development of teachers but the statistics indicate that the proportion of teachers attending courses is low in middle and high schools, and very low in primary schools. This is a matter of concern, especially given the need to refresh long-serving teachers and the persistently disappointing pupil performance. Some schools, with the LEA's encouragement, pay expenses for evening attendances that fall outside the statutory working hours. The LEA helps by maintaining a list of vetted supply teachers to whom it offers update training and conferences.

103. The proportion of teacher absences for sickness is well above the national rate. The LEA issues data to each school on its own absence rates but has not made schools aware that it is an island-wide issue.

Recommendation**In order to further support school staff development:**

- monitor and analyse data related to take-up of training courses and teacher absences, and support schools in responding to patterns emerging internally and across the island.

104. The LEA is taking part in the government's Raising Standards and Reducing Workload initiative, for which it is receiving a grant of £83,000. There have already been well-attended introductory seminars for headteachers and one school has been identified as an 'early adopter'. The LEA's own staff are about to attend the national training.

Section 3: Special educational needs

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision

105. Provision for children with special educational needs has improved since the last inspection. The LEA has implemented most of the recommendations of the previous report. It has also conducted a review of provision that has resulted in the establishment of three resource centres and in the reorganisation of special schools, part of whose remit is to provide outreach, support and training. Its SEN strategy has been revised and closely aligned to the government priorities for inclusion, which are clearly reflected in the increasing focus on inter-agency work, particularly in the area of school improvement. There is increasing emphasis on monitoring and improving provision but this does not yet focus sufficiently on the actual or intended impact on pupils' attainment and progress. The extent to which the LEA fulfils its statutory obligations has also improved since the last inspection but remains unsatisfactory overall. There are delays in the completion of statements; delays in their amendment following annual review; and a lack of specificity in statement objectives.

The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

106. At the time of the last inspection, the authority's strategy for SEN was unsatisfactory. Most recommendations have been implemented successfully. The strategy is now highly satisfactory, which shows very good progress.

107. The LEA's policy clearly reflects the government's priorities. It presents a coherent approach to ensuring that children and young people with special needs are identified early, educated within mainstream schools where appropriate, and receive support within their own communities. It is supported by a detailed action plan that is derived from a cross-cutting Best Value review and relates closely to the EDP, the behaviour support plan and the early years development plan. The action plan gives a precise indication of priorities, timescales and responsibilities for implementation and monitoring but places insufficient emphasis on the expected impact on pupils' performance.

108. Through the Best Value review and allied reviews of contributory services, the LEA has established a clear picture of the resources needed to implement its strategy; its financial planning is well-based and coherent. This is particularly evident in its approach to the reorganisation of special schools into specific age-phases, and in its revisions to the formula for financial delegation. The introduction of a matrix of needs ensures that decisions on resource distribution are transparent.

109. In reviewing provision and drawing up its policy, the LEA has consulted and communicated with a wide range of stakeholders. This has ensured a good level of understanding of the broad principles of the strategy but there is still some uncertainty among headteachers, parents and schools about its implications in practice.

Statutory obligations

110. At the time of the last inspection the LEA was poor at meeting its statutory obligations. Although improvements have been made, this area remains unsatisfactory.

111. The LEA has clear procedures for identifying pupils with SEN and, through the early years SEN service and the multi-agency assessment team, is able to do this at earlier and earlier stages in children's lives. The proportion of statements, not including those that require involvement of other bodies, completed within the statutory 18-week period, has improved from 80% to 96% over the last year. However, almost half of the statements that require another agency's involvement are not completed within the deadline. These delays are the result of late reports from partner agencies, such as the primary care trust and the social services department. The LEA has not established a sufficiently effective system for following these up and some parents report that they are having to pursue agencies themselves in order to speed up the assessment of their children.

Recommendation

In order to improve the effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet statutory obligations:

- work more closely with other agencies to bring about a radical improvement in the proportion of SEN statements completed within the required timescale.

112. The authority provides appropriate information to parents at each stage of the statutory assessment process, including their own and their children's rights and how to lodge complaints. There is a well-regarded parent partnership system. This is being strengthened through the appointment of independent parental supporters and information is now being shared more widely.

113. Existing statements lack detail and are insufficiently related to the analysis of the child's needs. Like the annual reviews, they do not give enough attention to children's academic development and take little account of the responses of the children and young people themselves. The LEA relies too heavily on schools to set objectives. There have been major delays, of up to a year, in issuing amendments to statements following annual reviews. The LEA has belatedly recognised this and has recently appointed an officer who is in the process of clearing a very large backlog of amendments.

Recommendation

In order to improve the effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet statutory obligations:

- ensure that the objectives of SEN statements are more closely focused on outcomes, are completed within the required time limit, and are amended promptly following annual reviews.

114. The LEA is working hard to promote the inclusion of children with a range of special educational needs by increasing provision within mainstream schools and within the local community. This is in keeping with government policy. However, a minority of parents are extremely critical of the approach taken by officers to achieving this aim. This has led to prolonged disputes with these parents and to a number of tribunals, some of which have found against the LEA. The scrutiny committee has recently set up a working party to examine practice in this area. While some parents are highly critical of the LEA's approach,

others interviewed were highly complimentary about the support provided by officers, especially in resolving misunderstandings or disputes with schools over the funding of provision for their children.

Recommendation

In order to increase the effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet statutory obligations:

- improve dialogue with parents of children with complex needs at all stages of the statutory assessment process.

School improvement

115. Support for school improvement was previously unsatisfactory. It is now satisfactory. The LEA rightly places special needs in the broader context of inclusion. The reorganisation of special schools, together with the establishment of resource centres, and the move towards the provision of training for mainstream schools by staff of special schools, is creating a more integrated approach to support for school improvement. Criteria for statutory assessment accord with the national Code of Practice and the recently produced matrix, based on cognitive as well as deprivation indices, ensures that resources are increasingly better matched to schools' needs. However, there are still some schools that are reluctant to accept the increased responsibility that this places on them to provide for a range of special educational needs.

116. Through moderated school self-assessment, schools are being held accountable for the provision that they make for pupils' special educational needs. Link inspectors also give useful assistance to schools in challenging whether pupils at lower levels of need are receiving appropriate support. However, rigorous analysis of pupils' progress against specific targets is at an early stage of development. Targets set for pupils with statements tend to lack detail and there is variability in the quality of individual education plans.

117. Special educational needs co-ordinators are provided with good support and relevant training. Through cluster meetings, they are able to share good practice and relate their work to that of mainstream teachers.

118. Pupils with a range of special educational needs receive effective support. Headteachers and parents speak highly of support services and also of the work of education psychologists. A major strength of the LEA is the support provided for pupils with SEN in the early years. There is good multi-agency assessment of these very young children and the LEA is building a database on pupils with special needs from the age of six months onwards. Parents of pre-school children are given good support from experienced staff who also ensure that the transition to school is smooth and well managed.

Value for money

119. At the time of the last inspection, value for money in SEN was unsatisfactory. The LEA acted on the recommendations of the last report and this area is now satisfactory.

120. A cross-cutting Best Value review, conducted in 2001/02, was strong on consultation, satisfactory in the use made of comparisons with other authorities but more limited in terms of its challenge and competition elements. Nevertheless this formed the basis of a satisfactory improvement plan which includes clear goals, actions, responsibilities, timescales and costings but lacks details of the expected impact of developments on pupils' performance. This limits its usefulness as a means of assessing value for money. However, recent reviews of provision for young people with dyspraxia, autism and hearing disorders show improvements in the formulation of performance indicators to support such evaluation.

121. The LEA is a high spender on SEN and, in 2000-03, was the ninth highest among unitary authorities. Some of this is accounted for by the authority's geographical isolation which, according to an independent consultants' report, accounted for £0.5 million additional costs in 2002, compared with mainland authorities. Significant funds are delegated to schools. Since the last inspection, the LEA has reduced the number of statements issued, reduced the number of off-island placements and appropriately recycled money to support greater inclusion. The LEA has sensibly reviewed and refined its formula for the distribution of special needs funding and has delegated the funding for high incidence special needs.

122. The central budget for SEN is well controlled and monitored. The authority also monitors schools' special needs budgets as part of a wider monitoring process. This is done on a cyclical basis. However, the cycle is too long and, as a result, a third of schools have not had any monitoring to date. There are regular reports to elected members that detail the results of the system for monitoring resources delegated to schools. While this is useful, such reports are limited in that they do not demonstrate any impact of such funds on pupils' performance.

Recommendation

In order to improve SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money:

- identify quantifiable performance targets, use these to review the effectiveness of investment and to identify specific areas for improvement, and report the outcomes of such monitoring to elected members.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

123. At the time of the last inspection the LEA's effectiveness in promoting social inclusion was satisfactory. The strongest areas at that time, provision of school places and schools admissions, remain so. The weakest area, provision for pupils who have no school place, has improved but is still not satisfactory. Insufficient progress has been made in taking measures to combat racism and in providing support to improve attendance at schools. Overall, the LEA's effectiveness in promoting social inclusion, particularly with reference to vulnerable groups of children, is now unsatisfactory.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

124. The council has a sound social inclusion strategy that has been developed in close collaboration with a wide range of relevant agencies and service providers. It presents a coherent outline of the issues to be addressed and a co-ordinated programme for achieving its nine key aims, which include promoting lifelong learning. The programme is explicitly related to other key corporate plans. The action plan for lifelong learning has clearly defined intended outcomes that focus appropriately on groups at greatest risk.

125. The council's aims are appropriately reflected in several aspects of the LEA's planning, especially in relation to admissions, school places and the cross-cutting review of SEN provision. The authority's move towards greater social inclusion is also reflected in its increasing provision for pupils with English as an additional language, its school access strategy, and its provision for children in their early years and for pupils aged 14-19.

126. Cohesion between services is still underdeveloped in several areas. Insufficiently close working between education and social services, for example, has resulted in an unacceptable delay in the production of personal education plans for looked after children and to inefficiencies in the support provided for these pupils. There is also insufficient sharing of information on pupils at risk of exclusion. Similarly, a lack of cohesion between the work of education and the health service is leading to delays within the statutory assessment process for children with SEN.

127. Data on vulnerable children are being collected but not always systematically, and information on their performance is not related sufficiently closely to targets. Therefore, the authority is not able to make a reliable assessment of the impact and effectiveness of its strategy.

The supply of school places

128. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's provision of school places was good. It remains so. No fieldwork was undertaken in this area. Although there is a large number of small schools, only five schools have more than 25 % surplus places.

Asset management

129. Asset management planning was not judged at the time of the last inspection. It is now good. The process is fair and transparent. Individual schools' data are available on the council's education website. Condition, suitability and sufficiency data are all well managed in a timely fashion. The condition backlog is relatively small; building stock is generally of good quality and well maintained. Schools' and the LEA's funds are maximized in partnership. Schools understand where they are in the order of priorities. There has been no formal programme of training for schools but headteachers are well informed and involved in the process. Sensible use of partnering is planned for 2004 onwards to increase the value for money of major projects. The authority is also about to pilot, on behalf of the DfES, an analysis of the relationship between building improvements and attainment. This will usefully enable the LEA to relate the asset management process more closely to pupil outcomes.

Admissions

130. Arrangements for admissions to schools were very good at the time of the last inspection. They remain so. No fieldwork was undertaken during this inspection. Schools remain very satisfied with the process and the percentage of parents achieving a first place preference is high. The last report recommended the LEA to keep the need for an admissions forum under review. It has done so and a forum has been set up, in line with legislative requirements.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

131. When inspected in October 2000, this function was unsatisfactory. While some progress has been made, this has been insufficient and provision remains unsatisfactory. The LEA's capacity to improve this provision is, however, satisfactory.

132. The recommendations of the last inspection related to the quality and quantity of the LEA's educational provision for pupils who were not in school, and the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of support for these pupils. Since that time two pupil referral units have been registered.

133. The LEA now has a satisfactory strategy to provide education for pupils out of school because of exclusion or for medical reasons. The practical application of aspects of this strategy, however, is not sufficiently consistent. Two of the 12 pupils permanently excluded during 2002/03 did not receive the 25 hours provision statutorily required. While the LEA has satisfactory referral systems for individual pupils who have been permanently excluded, summary data describing the LEA's overall performance in these respects are not systematically compiled and reviewed by senior officers and elected members.

Recommendation**In order to improve the attainment of children educated otherwise than at school:**

- ensure that provision for 25 hours a week is made for all permanently excluded pupils, and those with fixed-term exclusions exceeding 15 days, within 15

school days, and that progress on this is regularly reported to members.

134. The LEA is successful in securing the reintegration of excluded pupils into mainstream schools. This is an explicit target in both pupil referral units and it was achieved with 10 of the 12 permanently excluded pupils in 2002/03. The LEA has developed with schools a protocol for the re-admission of excluded pupils and, while some schools have reservations about the way in which this works, overall it is effective.

135. During 2002/03, 153 young people were educated at home by their parents. At around 1% of the school population this figure is high and an increase on the position in 2000. The LEA attempts to monitor this provision, and officers are diligent in gaining access to these children. However, pupils' files revealed a significant number of omissions in, and inconsistencies with, the LEA's database. These difficulties hinder effective monitoring. Trends and issues are not systematically reported to senior officers and councillors. There is little evidence of judgements being made on the appropriateness of such provision and the LEA has inadequate guidelines for making such judgements. Overall, the LEA's monitoring of home-educated children is unsatisfactory.

Recommendation

In order to improve the monitoring of children educated at home:

- report to senior officers and councillors annually on the numbers involved, the suitability of education provided and the reasons for children being educated at home by their parents.

136. Around 15 children are receiving home tuition from the LEA for medical reasons. Typically, this is for 10 hours per week but there is differentiation according to the amount of tuition a young person can manage. Tuition is made available for pupils whose stay in hospital exceeds a few days. Pregnant schoolgirls are encouraged to remain in school for as long as is sensible. However, inadequate provision is made for schoolgirl mothers to facilitate their continued attendance at school.

137. There are effective procedures in place to ensure that pupils do not become lost from the education system.

Attendance

138. The LEA's support for improving school attendance was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Since then performance in this area has declined. Current support and progress overall since the last inspection are unsatisfactory. However, changes made since January 2003 demonstrate that the LEA's capacity for further improvement is highly satisfactory.

139. In September 2001, the education welfare service was devolved to all schools. At the time there was substantial school support for this move, which was launched as part of a wider government pilot where a small number of LEAs devolved the service to secondary schools. While this was still supported by some schools, a number of difficulties emerged and a decision was taken to bring the service back under central control from January 2003.

The difficulties related, mainly, to the ability of the devolved service to focus on its key role of enhancing attendance and challenging schools, parents and pupils where appropriate. During the period of devolution, the LEA's performance in monitoring and challenging low attendance declined. A number of procedures have been put in place since the January decision. Many of these are still at an early stage of implementation and have yet to make an impact.

Recommendation

In order to raise pupil attendance:

- enhance monitoring and reporting systems so that schools, senior officers and elected members have a clear picture of attendance patterns and can identify priorities for improvement.

140. The LEA's plans for improving attendance are hindered by having two different sets of targets for the 2003/04 academic year. It is unclear how the differing targets within the EDP and Best Value Performance Plan have been derived or how either is driving action.

Recommendation

In order to raise pupil attendance:

- ensure that there are clear LEA targets for improving attendance and that resources are targeted on identified needs and priorities to achieve the targets.

141. Levels of attendance have been relatively constant over the last few years and are not significantly different from those in similar authorities. Unauthorised absence is relatively low but some schools acknowledge that they may be too willing to authorise absences. Officers report juvenile employment and holidays taken in term time as contributing to poor pupil attainment. They have, as yet, produced no detailed analysis by year group to demonstrate the effect of either. Schools view low attendance as a key issue for themselves and the LEA. The LEA, with the police, conducted two truancy sweeps in 2002/03 resulting in 18 children being escorted back to school. The LEA has made use of its statutory powers and taken action through the courts where appropriate.

142. An education welfare officer is attached to each of the five school clusters. However, this is, in part, a residual consequence of the devolution pilot and the LEA has not demonstrated that this resource is sufficiently targeted towards identified need.

Behaviour support

143. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's support for behaviour was satisfactory overall and good in primary schools. This function remains satisfactory. The capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

144. The LEA last updated its behaviour support plan in 2001. The action set out is not sufficiently specific and the plan pays too little attention to raising attainment or reducing

fixed-term exclusions. However, as reported in the last inspection, implementation in practice is better than implied in the behaviour support plan.

145. Rates of permanent exclusion are relatively low. The number has been broadly constant for several years at around a dozen each year. In 2002/03 there were no permanent exclusions from its maintained high schools, but permanent exclusions, particularly from Year 8, in the middle schools have increased.

146. Fixed-term exclusions have risen, more than doubling between 1999/00 and 2002/03. The largest single reason is verbal abuse of staff. In 2002/03 the 807 fixed-term exclusions involved 462 pupils, each on average excluded for six days. The LEA has analysed data on both fixed-term and permanent exclusions and sent the results to all schools. Officers are starting to use these data to challenge schools, where appropriate, over high levels of exclusion. The LEA has introduced a managed transfer protocol whereby the high schools have agreed to move a pupil at risk of exclusion between schools and this has been used effectively.

147. The LEA has secured a number of initiatives in middle schools to address the rise in exclusions. Schools have been given sound advice on managing behaviour and there are useful documents on drugs, bullying, attendance, behaviour and discipline. Guidelines on physical restraint have also been issued. The LEA has made available a range of training opportunities, for example on assertive discipline, and these have been valued by schools.

148. Behaviour support is provided to primary schools and middle schools through different but appropriate services. While able to access the educational psychology service, high schools make their own arrangements through delegated resources which, in general, they use to maintain behaviour support units. They report that this is effective.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

149. At the time of the last inspection, this aspect of the LEA's work was satisfactory. Since then it has declined and is now unsatisfactory.

150. The education and community development directorate is appropriately represented by a senior officer on the area child protection committee and has collaborated with a number of agencies on relevant programmes, such as a local domestic violence project. The area child protection committee has produced a useful child protection manual that has been circulated to all schools and to education officers and has produced a detailed inter-agency development plan to implement recommendations arising from a recent serious cases inquiry. Progress on this, however, is not reported on a regular, formal basis to elected members.

151. The LEA has provided training on child protection for its own, centrally retained staff who work in schools. All schools have a designated person responsible for child protection and the LEA maintains a list of these. Training for these nominated staff, however, has been too limited, with none being provided by the LEA between 2001 and 2003. Of the designated persons identified, the LEA's records indicate that only a third have received training within the last year and, for almost a half, there is no record of any training. The LEA does not hold lists of training for nominated governors for child protection. It has

not provided training for governors and there is no monitoring of the training that they might have received from other agencies.

152. The LEA has a recently updated health and safety policy and an associated health and safety action plan. Earlier this year, the Health and Safety Executive issued an improvement notice, requiring the council to develop a strategy for the identification of and provision for health and safety training for managers and other staff with health and safety responsibilities. The Health and Safety Executive has indicated that valuable progress has been made since the issuing of the improvement notice but further work is still required to identify specific health and safety training and on the prioritising of delivery and timescales.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for health, safety and child protection ensure that:

- all designated persons and nominated governors receive regular training on child protection and that records of such training are kept up to date;
- health and safety training accords fully with the requirements and recommendations of the Health and Safety Executive; and
- regular reports are provided to councillors on progress in relation to these areas of their responsibilities.

Looked after children

153. At the time of the last inspection, support in this area was satisfactory. Despite the developments since then, particularly the good work being done by the looked after children education service, the LEA does not fulfil all its requirements in this area. Therefore, this aspect of its work is unsatisfactory.

154. The council's corporate parenting policy places appropriate emphasis on promoting the welfare, life chances and achievements of young people in care. Members of the children and young person's committee receive formal reports on progress of relevant support programmes and case studies on children and young people in public care. They also meet directly with them to gather their views and to explore the issues that they face. The council is currently organising a high profile gala occasion to celebrate the academic success of young people in care. Although the Quality Protects report makes explicit reference to low morale among foster carers and to an extra payment being made to them in recognition of their work, the foster carers interviewed expressed the view that members had a limited understanding of the issues that they faced in promoting the educational success of the children and young people in their care.

155. The authority has a clear commitment to supporting the academic development of looked after children. With joint funding from social services and education, it has established a dedicated support team. This well-led team organises a variety of homework clubs and study support groups for pupils preparing for GCSE examinations and additional catch-up programmes for pupils excluded from schools. It also runs a drop-in support centre, with Internet access, which is proving increasingly popular with young people, and has

recently begun to provide young people with computers for use at home. A strength of the team's approach is the emphasis that it places on involving young people in determining the provision made for them. The support team has also run a number of training events for teachers, carers and officers. Both foster carers and young people rightly hold the good work of the support service in high regard.

156. The LEA collects and analyses data on the number of changed placements and on exclusions and attendance, and uses target-setting information to provide additional study support. However, the collection of attendance data is not systematic and delays in the transfer of information on exclusions prevent prompt provision of necessary support. The looked after children support service also reports a tendency for some schools to resort more readily to the use of long-term fixed exclusions in the case of looked after children than for the rest of the school population. Foster carers interviewed were highly critical of what they felt was a lack of support for looked after children excluded from school. They also believed there was a lack of clarity over the function of personal education plans and the responsibilities for their implementation.

157. A major weakness of provision is the low proportion of looked after children with personal education plans. At the time of the inspection, no more than 20% had such plans, despite the requirement that all should have one.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for looked after children, ensure that:

- every looked after child is provided with a personal education plan and provide training for relevant staff in their implementation; and
- elected members:
 - are better informed about the attainment, attendance and exclusion rates of looked after children;
 - are more consistent in fulfilling their duties as corporate parents; and
 - have a better understanding of the issues faced by looked after children and their carers.

Measures to combat racism

158. Provision in this area is poor. The council has been very slow to respond effectively to the recommendations of the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. It did not meet the deadline of May 2002 for producing a race equality strategy and did not audit its provision against the criteria established by the Commission for Racial Equality.

159. Support for combating racism was given a low rating in the school survey. The LEA was slow in providing guidance and training to schools on producing their own race equality policies.

160. After criticisms within the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the local authority, the council has adopted a new race equality scheme and published an action plan

for its implementation. In response to this, the education and community development directorate has produced a set of clear, well-written guidelines for schools. Consultations on these are being conducted with teachers, headteachers, governors and representatives of local minority ethnic communities. Included within the documentation is guidance on how to identify and report on racist incidents. At present, the LEA does not have a reliable system for monitoring racist incidents in schools, and reports to elected members do not include the required risk assessment on race equality.

161. Members of local minority ethnic communities are rightly critical of the low priority that has been given to combating racism. However, they are cautiously optimistic that recent developments led by the chief education officer will lead to improvements.

Recommendations

In order to improve measures to combat racism, ensure that:

- there are efficient systems in place for:
 - monitoring the effectiveness of schools' race equality policies;
 - the collection and analysis of reports on racist incidents;
 - ensuring that all staff and governors receive relevant, up-to-date training on their duties in relation to race equality; and
- elected members receive regular, detailed reports on the effectiveness of the implementation of the council's anti-racist policy.

Section 5: Corporate issues

Introduction to corporate issues

162. At the time of the previous inspection the council's strategic leadership, management and planning in its role as the local education authority were unsatisfactory. Corporate strategic planning for education was under-developed. The proposed timescale for undertaking community consultation to produce a corporate plan was judged to be too slow. The lack of clear political leadership, coupled with a resolutely local focus by many members, had restricted progress. The council was recommended to accelerate the rate of progress on the production of corporate plans, improve the coherence of planning by the education and community development directorate, and establish firmer links with the Best Value processes.

163. Three years on, the recommendations of the previous inspection have been met. Highly satisfactory progress has been made in addressing the need to improve corporate planning and the strategic leadership role has improved. Elected members and the restructured senior management team of the education and community development directorate have worked hard to develop a strategy for education that is based on the corporate vision of the council. Education is one of six corporate priorities and there is good investment in education.

Corporate planning

164. Corporate planning, which was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection, has improved and is now highly satisfactory. The corporate plan is set within the framework of the strategic community plan 2002 to 2012 that was subject to extensive community consultation. Both reflect the council's Best Value Performance Plan. This is used with increasing effectiveness as a tool by which the council assesses its performance. Raising education standards and promoting lifelong learning form one of six corporate objectives.

165. The corporate plan sets out key national and local priorities for education. An action statement details priorities and targets that are set annually. Individual service plans are now produced within the corporate planning framework. They are properly cross-referenced and demonstrate coherence and continuity, although some inconsistencies in quality remain.

166. The key strategic document for school improvement is the EDP. It effectively links other key strategic plans. Each plan sets out the indicators against which progress will be measured. Plans are affordable and achievable and are now clearly aligned with the medium-term financial strategy. There have been improvements in the specificity of performance indicators and a necessary shift in emphasis from qualitative to quantitative outcome measures. Officers recognise the need, within some operational plans and delivery, for clearer emphasis on outcomes for pupils.

167. The implementation of corporate plans was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It is now satisfactory. The strategic directors, senior managers and elected

members have met together for joint training and liaison, demonstrating their determination to ensure that the work of different directorates is complementary and that officers learn from each other. Further training is planned. Individual directors take responsibility for cross-cutting themes. A quarterly corporate monitoring cycle has been introduced very recently. The LEA reports on performance against Best Value indicators and identifies the need for any remedial action. Monitoring against a wider range of indicators, for example on issues of social inclusion, is not yet embedded. Good financial management complements accurate council budget setting.

Decision-making

168. At the time of the last inspection, the speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making were unsatisfactory. Decision-making is now highly satisfactory. Budget-setting processes are sound. Budgets are consistently met to within a small percentage variance. The council has recently adopted good practices in making three-year projections of financial needs and resources, and in providing detailed reports to the executive that identify efficiency savings, service reductions and developments, as well as pressure points. Decisions, such as the reorganisation of special schools, are based on good consultation with stakeholders. Some difficult decisions have been taken, for example in setting a high council tax increase to support priorities and in reversing the delegation of the education welfare service. Priorities appropriately inform budget setting. The impact and effectiveness of these new decision-making processes, however, are not yet evident. The LEA retains limited funds centrally, reflecting its intention to delegate as much as possible to schools.

The leadership provided by elected members and officers

169. The leadership provided by elected members was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection and remains so. The local authority was recommended to engage elected members fully in policy and scrutiny. Members have backed their prioritisation of education even in difficult times. There is a cross-party consensus on the great majority of issues. The executive member with responsibility for education demonstrates a knowledge of, and wide interest in educational issues. However, elected members, including those with specific responsibility for scrutiny of education issues, have not used the data available to challenge sufficiently the poor educational performance and rate of progress between each key stage. Nor have they championed, with sufficient vigour, issues of race equality, child protection or provision for vulnerable groups such as looked after children.

170. Many are members of governing bodies and take an active role in the governance of individual schools. At an LEA level, however, the monitoring of the education department is insufficiently rigorous and, crucially, places too little emphasis on the value provided for the money spent on education. Members provide insufficient challenge to the culture of low expectations and aspirations they perceive on the island.

Recommendations

In order to improve the quality of their leadership, ensure that :

- elected members are more thorough in challenging educational under-

performance and low aspirations; and

- elected members hold the department and schools more rigorously to account for their performance and the value for money they provide.

171. The capacity for improvement, however, is good. Members have undertaken training, have taken advice from outside the island and are working hard to ensure that they understand the issues clearly and are broadening their perspective on the role they need to develop to provide more effective challenge on standards. The relationships between officers and members are good. Formal and informal communication between them is good and procedures for delegation to officers are clear. Elected members in the scrutiny select committee have recently taken the lead on a review of the statutory assessment process for children with SEN in response to the concerns of a small group of parents. In so doing they have demonstrated the capacity to ask the necessary questions to get under the surface of complex issues.

172. Leadership provided by senior officers is highly satisfactory. It was good at the time of the last inspection. The director was appointed to the substantive post in November 2002. The senior management team has since been broadened to include officers responsible for key operational areas. This group shares a strong sense of purpose. The leadership of senior officers is well regarded by headteachers. Senior officers display initiative and, on issues of school improvement, lead developments in consultation with schools. However, while they understand the urgency of improving standards and work well together as a team, their self-evaluation prior to this inspection overstated their performance. They sometimes provide too little challenge to suggestions that low parental aspiration and pockets of deprivation on the island are reasons for the lack of improvement in standards.

173. The LEA's strategy for school improvement is good and relationships with schools are very good. Consultation and communication with schools are clear and transparent. Headteacher conferences and phase meetings are well used for consultation and headteachers are properly represented in specialist groups to develop initiatives and strategies, for example the National Grid for Learning and the special schools working group. Officers have supported school self-evaluation and developed it effectively. They have been successful in encouraging schools to behave autonomously in this context but not always in encouraging them to maintain and strive for high expectations. Where the LEA has focused intensive support to schools, standards have improved. These are not always sustained once the LEA is no longer involved.

174. Officers are aware of the need to promote social inclusion. Until recently, though, in this area of their work, they have been responding and catching up rather than leading. The development of race equality guidance and incident recording forms, for example, was unacceptably overdue. Nonetheless, they have been prepared to take some difficult decisions. Because of unsatisfactory performance on attendance issues, they have taken back delegation of the education welfare service, a move not welcomed by all headteachers. They have shown their ability to be innovative in initiating a cluster-based approach for school improvement and support services. Plans and strategies do not yet, however, consistently show the outcomes necessary to secure further improvements.

175. The quality of advice given to elected members is satisfactory. It was highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Advice to elected members on policy and implications provides informed alternatives. Members receive advice in sufficient time to be able to make key decisions. While they are kept up to date with their responsibilities, advice on the need to take more decisive action, for example in some areas of social inclusion, lacks urgency.

176. The authority is rich in data and elected members are aware that information is available if they request it. However, reports to them provide too little analysis of trends and comparisons with statistically similar authorities and the national average. This reduces the potential effectiveness of elected members in their challenge and scrutiny roles.

177. Policy options and their implications are reasonably well thought through, but elected members are not always sufficiently informed about their intended impact. For example, members have supported a collaborative model of 14-19 education that involves the high schools, the local college of further education and vocational training providers. They do not have details of the improvements in pupils' attainment and quality of teaching that this model is intended to deliver.

Recommendations

In order to improve the quality of advice to elected members, officers should:

- ensure that reports provide a summary of the detailed analysis and trends in performance across the range of services that is produced by and available to officers; and
- provide details of what improvements are intended to secure in terms of pupils' attainment and quality of teaching.

Partnership

178. At the time of the last inspection, this aspect of the LEA's work was satisfactory. It is now highly satisfactory.

179. The council has a clear commitment to working in partnership with a range of public and private agencies to deliver services. This is reflected consistently in the corporate plan, the community plan and the directorate's services plan. The aim has been to give coherence to partnership work by identifying a limited number of key players with whom the council can work to develop shared priorities and deliver clearly defined outcomes. While this has been largely successful, officers recognise that there is further work to be done to clarify and rationalise the lines of communication and accountability.

180. Within education, three partnerships have been particularly successful. The work of the Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership and the tertiary strategy group are described below. In addition, for over four years, the LEA has worked on a development project with Anguilla to extend the cultural horizons of Isle of Wight teachers and students and to enhance the project management and school improvement capacity of officers. This has included successful exchange visits by teachers, officers and students from middle, high and special schools.

181. Locally, the LEA has collaborated with the police on crime prevention initiatives and on tackling absence from school through organising truancy sweeps. There has also been appropriate work with representatives of the dioceses and other religious groups through the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education. However, until very recently, partnership with local minority ethnic communities has been limited. The authority recognises this and is now planning to identify representatives from a cross-section of communities in order to ensure closer consultation and collaboration with them in the planning, delivery and monitoring of services.

182. The inter-agency work on the early identification of children with SEN has been particularly successful in bringing together expertise from education, social services and the health service. Social services and health are increasingly organising their services to reflect school clusters. This will provide more coherent services for children and their parents. Within the council, there is increasing emphasis on closer partnership between individual departments.

Support for early years

183. The last inspection report commented on the positive contribution that the LEA was making to raising the standards achieved in early years settings. This support has continued to develop and is now very good.

184. The authority has a strategy for early years that is clearly defined in the EDP. This links coherently to the goals of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership with which the authority works very closely. The success of this partnership is reflected in the support that the LEA has given to the development of capital projects, including a recently-established early excellence centre, a Sure Start local project and seven neighbourhood nurseries.

185. The recent vigorous programme of training on the foundation stage profile for reception teachers, support staff and governors is now being extended to pre-school staff, in order to strengthen further the links between pre-school, early years and Key Stage 1.

186. The LEA has good monitoring systems. There is on-going monitoring by development workers, the foundation stage adviser and the SEN team. Notes of visits are collated and analysed. There is an effective system for identifying where support is needed and where it has been provided and managers conduct a termly review of the impact on improvement. The LEA is currently seeking external accreditation for its early years quality assurance scheme. This has been developed in close collaboration with social care, health and welfare services. Ofsted inspections have found all settings to be at least satisfactory. Reports on developments are presented regularly to the children and young persons' committee and to the select committee.

187. The establishment of the early years and special needs team has been a major and successful development since the last inspection. Through multi-agency assessment, young children's needs are identified at a very early age and support programmes are developed for children and parents, with effective transition arrangements at the time when the children reach school age. In addition, parents are offered training on a wider range of educational issues. Five parents, for example, have been trained as evaluators of services.

188. The LEA has four maintained nursery classes. The bulk of pre-school education is provided in voluntary and private pre-school settings. The LEA provides good support to these and has given additional support to settings in isolated communities, which are in danger of closing, in order to maximise opportunities for children. The authority has revised its criteria several times in order to increase take-up of places and, from September 2003, has moved to a policy of offering universal free places, ahead of government targets.

Support for 14-19 education

189. The LEA has worked closely with a range of partners to improve provision at 14-19. An independent consultative report was produced in January 2002 that presented a range of options. Support has been provided by a tertiary strategy group, set up to advise on possible models of organisation and delivery. The preferred option, described in the independent report, was rejected in favour of a collaborative model which, it was felt, would be more acceptable politically and less disruptive to the existing pattern of school organisation. The key elements in the collaborative model now being implemented are: a 20% shared timetable across institutions; the concentration of full-time GCSE, AS and A-level courses in schools; the extension of vocational opportunities in schools as well as the college; closer collaboration between the college and work-based training providers; and increased viability of minority courses offered, especially at A-level.

190. The model is intended to widen the range of courses available, to increase the numbers opting for vocational courses and to improve course completion rates. Through links with a mainland university, it is also intended to increase the percentage entering higher education. A high level of agreement has been reached on the mechanics of implementation and the new model of provision has been in operation since September 2003. It is too early to judge its impact. Performance indicators to measure the impact on standards and the quality of teaching and learning have not yet been defined. Until this happens it will not be possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the new model.

191. Despite the high level of collaboration leading to the recent changes, there is considerable confusion among and between partners, elected members and officers about their likely outcomes or intended time-span.

Appendix 1: Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations.

The following recommendations should be acted upon as a matter of urgency:

In order to improve the quality of their leadership, ensure that:

- elected members are more thorough in challenging educational under-performance and low aspirations; and
- elected members hold the department and schools more rigorously to account for their performance and the value for money they provide.

In order to improve the quality of planning:

- ensure that all plans incorporate success criteria that identify clear outcomes for service users.

In order to improve support for health, safety and child protection, ensure that:

- all designated persons and nominated governors receive regular training on child protection and that records of such training are kept up to date;
- health and safety training accords fully with the requirements and recommendations of the Health and Safety Executive; and
- regular reports are provided to councillors on progress in relation to these areas of their responsibilities.

In order to improve the effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet statutory obligations in regard to children with special educational needs:

- ensure that the objectives of SEN statements are more closely focused on outcomes, are completed within the required time limit, and are amended promptly following annual reviews;
- work more closely with other agencies to bring about a radical improvement in the proportion of SEN statements completed within the required timescale; and
- improve dialogue with parents of children with complex needs at all stages of the statutory assessment process.

In order to improve measures to combat racism, ensure that:

- there are efficient systems in place for:
 - monitoring the effectiveness of schools' race equality policies;
 - the collection and analysis of reports on racist incidents;
 - ensuring that all staff and governors receive relevant, up-to-date training on their
-

duties in relation to race equality; and

- elected members receive regular, detailed reports on the effectiveness of the implementation of the council's anti-racist policy.

In order to improve support for looked after children, ensure that:

- every looked after child is provided with a personal education plan and provide training for relevant staff in their implementation; and
- elected members:
 - are better informed about the attainment, attendance and exclusion rates of looked after children;
 - are more consistent in fulfilling their duties as corporate parents; and
 - have a better understanding of the issues faced by looked after children and their carers.

In order to improve the attainment and monitoring of children educated otherwise than at school

- ensure that provision for 25 hours a week is made for all permanently excluded pupils, and those with fixed-term exclusions exceeding 15 days, within 15 school days, and that progress on this is regularly reported to members; and
- report to senior officers and councillors annually on the numbers involved, the suitability of education provided and the reasons for children being educated at home by their parents.

However, the following recommendations are also fundamental in that they affect the LEA's overall capacity for improvement:

In order to improve the quality of advice to elected members, officers should:

- ensure that reports provide a summary of the detailed analysis and trends in performance across the range of services that is produced by and available to officers; and
- provide details of what improvements are intended to secure in terms of pupils' attainment and quality of teaching.

In order to accelerate progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement:

- set clear measures of attainment for the new clusters, and report progress against these performance indicators to elected members on a regular basis.

In order to support schools in raising standards and sustaining improvement:

- ensure that development work in clusters includes sufficient focus on joint policies for the curriculum and homework across all three tiers; and
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- agree with schools clear expectations of what pupils should achieve by the end of Years 4 and 8 in standards, study skills and work.

In order to raise standards in the application of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum:

- maintain the existing work targeted at the areas of most severe weakness while broadening the approaches to tackle weaknesses that are found across the majority of schools, particularly in the application of writing skills; and
- ensure that all schools, not just those with poor performance, are supported in analysing weaknesses through the systematic scrutiny of pupils' work.

In order to improve support for middle managers:

- ensure that training equips them to play an effective part in dealing with the issues of methodology, progression and continuity.

In order to further support school staff development:

- monitor and analyse data related to take-up of training courses and teacher absences, and support schools in responding to patterns emerging internally and across the island.

We also make the following recommendations:

In order to develop schools as effective purchasers:

- identify a range of options within service level agreements that can be separately purchased, and directly relate charges to cost of provision;
- provide regular performance information to schools, measured against costs and targets;
- provide training for headteachers and governing bodies in procurement; and
- identify ways of growing the market to provide real choice to schools.

In order to raise pupil attendance:

- ensure that there are clear LEA targets for improving attendance and that resources are targeted on identified needs and priorities to achieve the targets; and
- enhance monitoring and reporting systems so that schools, senior officers and elected members have a clear picture of attendance patterns and can identify priorities for improvement.

In order to improve SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money:

- identify quantifiable performance targets, use these to review the effectiveness of investment and to identify specific areas for improvement, and report the outcomes of such monitoring to elected members.

Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	Not Inspected
SECTION 1 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	5	
2	The performance of schools	5	
3	Funding, including the co-ordination of external funding	4	X
4	The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	2	
5	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	4	
6	The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities	2	
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	4	
SECTION 2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT			
8	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools	2	
9	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	2	
10	the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	4	
11	The effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	3	
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	4	
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	4	
14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	2	
No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	4	

16	Support to schools in raising standards of ethnic minority and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grants	4	X
17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	4	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value	4	
19	Support to school governors	3	X
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	4	
20a	Financial services	1	X
20b	Human resources	2	X
20c	Property services	2	X
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	2	
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	0	
20f	Grounds maintenance	2	
20g	Catering	4	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	4	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement	2	
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	3	
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	4	
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	4	
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	2	X
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	3	X
28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	3	X
SECTION 3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	3	

30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	5	
31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	4	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money	4	
SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	5	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	X
No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	2	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	1	X
37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place	5	
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	5	
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	4	
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	5	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	5	
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	6	
SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	3	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	4	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	3	
46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	5	

47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	3	
48	The quality of advice given to elected members	4	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	3	
OVERALL JUDGEMENTS			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	4	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	4	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	4	

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 1 to 7 point scale:

- Grade 1 – Very good
- Grade 2 – Good
- Grade 3 – Highly satisfactory
- Grade 4 – Satisfactory
- Grade 5 – Unsatisfactory
- Grade 6 – Poor, significant weaknesses
- Grade 7 – Very poor, fails to provide effective support to schools

Notes