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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation, and on discussions with LEA Members, staff in the Education and Cultural Services Directorate and in other Council departments, representatives of the LEA's partners and a representative group of headteachers of schools not selected for visits. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 220 schools. The response rate was 85 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 12 primary and one nursery school, seven secondary and two special schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Local Government Reorganisation in 1998, with the removal of the districts of Blackpool and Blackburn-with-Darwen, has led to considerable changes to Lancashire LEA. However, it is still one of the largest and most socially and economically diverse shire Counties in England.

5. That diversity is reflected in its schools, and in their relative performance. Overall, however, its pupils and schools are performing at least as well as schools nationally, and their performance continues to improve in line with, or slightly faster, than the rate nationally and in similar LEAs.

6. The LEA acknowledges, however, that for some years it took its eye off the ball in terms of effectively monitoring the performance of its schools. At the time, a disproportionately high number of its schools emerged as a cause for concern. It has taken steps to redress that situation. Changes in policy, organisation and leadership within the education service, and the development of its strategy for school improvement, have all combined to bring about improvements in its support to schools.

7. The LEA's strengths outweigh its weaknesses. Schools in general acknowledge this and are supportive of the LEA. It is successfully carrying out the majority of its functions in supporting school improvement, raising standards and securing suitable and effective education. Nevertheless, not all schools need current levels of monitoring. In so far as the related work of the advisory service is not sufficiently differentiated, it does not make best use of resources. The LEA's performance in fulfilling some functions relating to special educational needs (SEN) and improving the standards of information and communications technology (ICT) in its schools is unsatisfactory. Too few inroads have been made into these substantial and - in the case of SEN - long standing problems.

8. The following functions are carried out well:-

- support for school planning and target setting, and review and monitoring of progress against targets;
- supporting leadership, management and governance of schools;
- identifying and securing improvements in schools causing concern;
- support for literacy and numeracy;
- support to improve the quality of teaching and the continuing professional development of teachers;
- support for continuing education and lifelong learning;
- provision of financial, personnel and property services to schools.

9. The following functions are performed adequately:-

- corporate and strategic planning;
- planning and supply of school places;
- promoting social inclusion, and securing the safety and welfare of children;

- support for behaviour and attendance;
- ICT for administration.

10. The following functions are not exercised adequately:-

- systematic evaluation of value for money provided by services;
- support for ICT in the curriculum;
- support for some key aspects of special educational needs.

11. There is effective leadership of the education service by elected Members and officers. Decision-making is now based on more rigorous identification of priorities, rather than on custom and practice. The LEA has a sound strategy in place for school improvement. Services are generally well managed.

12. Most of what the LEA does it does well. It has accurately identified where further development and improvements are required. Even with SEN and ICT it has plans, and in some cases, strategies already in place to make the improvements needed. It is not, therefore a question of vision. It is the pace and, in the case of SEN, the rigour of change that is the issue.

13. The LEA has the strategic management capability to deliver its school improvement agenda, and the necessary awareness of its changing role to take effective action on the recommendations made. However, the current pace of developments still leaves the LEA open to the accusation that it is continuing to be too protective of its schools and services, and is not pursuing its modernising agenda and partnership role vigorously enough. Moreover, schools are too often unaware of the true costs of the services provided to them and are not in a position to assess value for money.

14. The LEA needs to take steps to ensure that all parties, including schools, are provided with the information needed to make effective decisions on the quality and effectiveness of provision. It also needs to increase the pace at which it moves to providing increasingly autonomous schools with greater responsibility for identifying the support they need, and the best provider to meet their needs, using delegated funding. In general, the LEA has the confidence of its schools and can in turn be confident that in the many areas where it provides good quality services, it would continue to be schools' first choice provider.

SECTION ONE: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

15. The LEA's strategy for school improvement is sound. It has identified the right priorities; accurately reflecting the strengths and weaknesses in its performance and the key areas where improved provision and support are needed. It has communicated its priorities for school improvement clearly but, until recently, it has not articulated its strategy for delivering those priorities clearly enough to the major partners in this endeavour - the schools.

16. For the most part its strategy is being effectively implemented. There is evidence of measurable success in a number of priority areas. Nevertheless, there are problems with the implementation of its priorities regarding support for improving ICT and SEN. Rigorous and more urgent action is needed to bring about rapid improvements in these two areas.

17. The LEA is putting its money where its priorities lie. Overall the LEA spends above SSA on education but, despite being in the forefront of earlier delegation of funding and services to schools, it currently delegates less than the majority of LEAs. Its strategic plans do not yet fully reflect its overarching objective of providing schools with maximum flexibility and responsibility for choosing and purchasing the support they need to help them improve.

18. The remainder of this section outlines the LEA's context, the performance of its schools, the organisation of the Council and the key features of the Council's funding for education: as a backdrop to evaluating the key document in the LEA's strategy for school improvement, its Education Development Plan (EDP).

Context

19. Lancashire LEA serves one of the largest shire Counties in England, with a total population of 1.15 million. Social and economic circumstances across the County vary markedly. The County has a comparatively large and diverse economic base, and unemployment is generally lower than the national average. This masks some severe local problems and, overall, average earnings in Lancashire are nine per cent below the national average. Half the County's wards are more deprived than the national average and over half the population live in these wards.

20. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is very close to the national average, but above that for similar LEAs. The proportion of ethnic minority pupils in both phases (7.3 per cent primary and 7.6 per cent secondary) is below the national average but around twice that in similar LEAs. The proportion of pupils of Pakistani ethnic origin is well above average, and this group performs significantly less well than others. The percentage of pupils with statements of SEN (3.9 per cent primary and 5.2 per cent secondary) is above the national average and that for similar LEAs. The proportion of primary pupils with statements rose at twice the national average rate between 1994-1998.

21. Lancashire currently has 176,000 pupils, being educated in 30 nursery

schools, 31 special schools, 11 pupil referral units (PRUs), 502 primary schools, and 89 secondary schools. 17 secondary schools provide education post-16. A high proportion, (52%), of the primary and secondary schools are denominational in nature. An Education Action Zone (EAZ) is being established in Preston, led by secondary schools, the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), the local business community and the LEA.

22. Key features of schools and overall pupil performance are:

- overall, pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is broadly average;
- attainment at Key Stage 1 and the rate of improvement are broadly in line with the national average;
- attainment at Key Stages 2 and 3 is above the national average: the rate of improvement matches that nationally in Key Stage 2 and is greater than the national average in Key Stage 3;
- GCSE results are slightly above the national average, and have kept pace with national improvements;
- A-level point scores for students taking two or more A-levels are above the national average and continuing to improve;
- levels of attendance and levels of permanent exclusions are broadly in line with national figures for primary and secondary schools;

Based on OFSTED inspection data:

- a similar proportion (70%) of Lancashire primary schools are good or very good to that found nationally (72%), but lower than found in similar LEAs (76%). A higher proportion of secondary schools (78%) are good or very good;
- OFSTED judged 4 per cent of primary schools to need substantial improvement, in line with national figures. No secondary schools were judged to need substantial improvement. Eight schools are currently in special measures and 33 schools have been declared by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses.

Funding

23. Over the last three years Lancashire has spent above SSA on education, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1:

Financial Year	SSA (£M)	Budget (£M)	Variance (%)
1997/98*	512.0	540.5	+5.6%
1998/99	444.8	468.1	+5.2%
1999/00	468.5	487.2	+4.0%

*these figures include Blackpool and Blackburn-with-Darwen

24. Significant features of Lancashire's education funding include:

- spending on under 5s has traditionally been well above SSA: currently +7.4%;
- although budgets were cut this year, Lancashire has spent increasingly higher amounts than SSA on continuing education: currently +53.8%;
- the budget for statutory age provision has grown above inflation, but marginally less than the growth in the SSA. Current expenditure is 2.3% above SSA;
- the Local Schools' Budget (LSB) includes some central holdbacks which are higher than the shire County average. Funding for SEN in mainstream schools is 40 per cent higher than average, primarily due to the cost of statements (see Section 4). Specific grants, mainly the Standards Fund, are about 25 per cent higher. Although in line with the national average, its plans for school improvement are about 20 per cent higher than the shire average. Whilst the overall costs of Strategic Management and Access are average there are elements of these which are comparatively expensive, for example, existing early retirement costs, and education otherwise than at school;
- as a result, Lancashire delegates a lower proportion of its LSB to schools than the average shire: 78 per cent as opposed to 81 per cent. It will need to increase delegation to meet the government's requirement for 2000/2001;
- table 2 shows that the delegated funding per pupil is less in primary schools than the shire average and significantly less in both sectors when compared to national averages. This position is likely to get marginally worse next year as schools in most other LEAs receive additional delegation for those services which Lancashire has already delegated;
- the LEA is successful in attracting grants such as the Standards Fund and New Deal, but amounts from other sources such as Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), European funds and the Lottery are modest. The school survey suggested schools would appreciate more support from the LEA in gaining access to this source of funding.

Table 2:

	Primary	Secondary	Special
Lancashire	£1563	£2308	£9618
County Average	£1609 (-2.85%)	£2314 (-0.25%)	£9601 (+0.18%)
England Average	£1691 (-7.57%)	£2449 (-5.75%)	£9596 (+0.23%)

Council Structure

25. Lancashire County Council consists of 78 Members (46 Labour, 23 Conservative, 7 Liberal Democrat and 2 Independent Labour). Some progress has been made towards a modernised structure. The number of subcommittees and working groups has been reduced substantially, but the Education and Cultural Services Committee (ECSC), one of six strategic committees of the Council, still has a large Membership.

26. A Quality Protects panel, drawn from ECSC and the Social Services Committee, addresses issues of common interest concerning children in need. The Council has recently established three Area Consultative Committees for Members of the public to meet and question local elected Members. These new structures are seen as first steps towards responding to *Modernising Local Government*. The Council expects to move to a Cabinet and scrutiny committee to promote speedier

decision-making. However, the Council has decided to await legislation before moving further. As a result, the changes so far have had little noticeable effect on the speed and efficiency of the decision making process.

The Education Development Plan (EDP)

27. The main vehicle for the LEA's strategy for school improvement is, of course, the EDP. Lancashire's EDP was approved by the Secretary of State for three years from April 1999, subject to annual review. Elements of the Education and Cultural Services (ECS) Directorate's existing strategic priorities, such as lifelong learning, social inclusion and a strategic review of SEN, have been incorporated into the EDP. However, the Directorate has yet to align its overall strategic framework and objectives fully with the EDP.

28. The EDP priorities for school improvement are:-

- to ensure rapid improvement in schools in difficulty and prevent serious weaknesses in schools;
- to improve school leadership and management;
- to improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- to raise standards by improving the use of ICT as a tool to support learning in all subjects;
- to improve the provision for and attainment of pupils with SEN;
- to develop strategies and processes for promoting inclusion and behaviour support.

29. These priorities, the subsequent allocation of resources, and strategies for action, are based on a very thorough audit of performance. They adequately reflect national priorities and local needs, particularly in the detail of implementation. For the most part the EDP is being implemented effectively, although the LEA has yet to satisfactorily tackle two of its six priority areas.

30. The EDP sets realistic and, for the most part, sufficiently challenging targets for its schools. The principal exception is in the target for higher levels of GCSE to be achieved by 2002 which was set below the minimum expected by the DfEE. The EDP defines the actions the LEA is taking with those schools where targets fell short of expectations. The performance of schools in 1999 slightly exceeded the LEA's targets, suggesting that the LEA underestimated the potential for improvement by some schools and the appropriate levels of challenge in these early targets. However, the process of target setting continues to improve and has, in itself, contributed to raising expectations of achievement.

31. The consultation on the LEA's priorities was effective. Schools are committed to the principles of the EDP and its implementation. All schools visited were aware of the LEA's priorities and approved of them; all headteachers of mainstream schools considered them relevant to their schools. However, few schools were familiar with the detail of the EDP, and it does not help schools to tap directly into the LEA's strategies for delivering its priorities. A recently published eight page digest, though welcome, has arrived very late.

32. The LEA acknowledges that the EDP was produced primarily as a service planning document for itself. It has been generally successful in this respect and has improved detailed strategic planning and the coordination of work across teams and Divisions - for example on social inclusion. Nevertheless, its format does not make it easy to track specific actions through to outcomes; there is no easily accessible matrix of activities relating to priorities. Not all success criteria are sufficiently clear and measurable; and timescales are not always clear. In the two areas where this is most prevalent, (ICT and SEN), implementation and progress have been least satisfactory.

33. The LEA has thorough procedures for monitoring and evaluating the overall implementation of the EDP. Services have already begun to reconstruct action plans in order to monitor actions and outcomes more effectively. The LEA has begun to evaluate the implementation of the EDP and to consider what form any updating might take. However, at present, it has no mechanism for judging overall value for money or the impact of specific priorities.

34. The EDP does not model any staged reduction of central support as the LEA's strategy takes effect, particularly for those schools that prove themselves able to operate more independently, nor any staged delegation of services and transfer of funds to schools in line with its overall objective. The LEA's key strategic document of school improvement does not, therefore, plan to reduce schools' dependency on its support.

Allocation of resources to priorities

35. Overall, Lancashire's spending reflects its priorities for school improvement and the development of lifelong learning, including Early Years. One of the LEA's main priorities in recent years has been to protect school budgets by making cuts to non-school budgets. It has taken appropriate steps to strengthen its resources to deliver its school improvement strategy, particularly to meet the greater needs of primary schools. However, whilst the LEA has satisfactory mechanisms for allocating resources, it has lost momentum in its delegation of funds.

36. The new County Finance Strategy (CFS) of setting all directorates notional cash budgets fixed for three financial years gives the potential for a sharper approach to targeting and planning. Officers and elected Members are currently grappling with how best to exploit this initiative.

37. Where schools have used delegated budgets to purchase LEA services, they generally feel satisfied that they get good value. However, schools lack sufficient benchmarked information about the real cost of non-traded services, such as admissions and legal advice, to be able to make value for money judgements. Some services seek schools' views on their performance but this is not yet co-ordinated at LEA level. The LEA acknowledges that the further development of service review and assessment of value for money of services is needed. However, at present some services are neither accountable, nor subject to the rigour of having to prove their cost effectiveness and relative worth.

Recommendations:

In order to improve strategic planning for school improvement:-

- all LSB elements should be tested for areas where funding, responsibility and accountability could be delegated or devolved to schools (paragraph 24);
- plans for the phased delegation of services should be finalised and shared with schools (paragraphs 17, 34).

- planned revisions of the EDP should:-
 - identify more clearly the relationship between the EDP and other key plans and strategic objectives (paragraph 27);
 - identify more clearly the activities to deliver priorities, the overall pattern of provision, and how schools can gain access to this provision (paragraphs 31, 32);
 - identify and incorporate mechanisms for assessing and reporting on VFM for each costed element of the EDP (paragraph 33).

SECTION TWO: LEA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

38. In general the LEA has a sound strategy for supporting improvement and raising standards in its schools. In all but one of the schools visited, the LEA was providing sufficiently effective support to meet the school's needs and to help the school improve standards. In just under half the secondary schools and in four primary schools visited, the LEA had provided good support. The schools themselves endorsed this view.

39. The LEA's support has contributed to measurable success in raising standards of literacy and numeracy in its schools. It has helped sharpen the analysis of performance data and, by encouraging schools to set appropriately challenging targets, has helped them to become more self-evaluative and more effectively managed, and helped schools in difficulties to improve. However, its contribution to school improvement in ICT (paragraphs 77-79), and SEN (Section 4) has, to differing degrees, been impaired by weaknesses in overall planning and management of change.

40. On the whole, the LEA is achieving the synergies needed to ensure that services complement each other, for example in supporting schools causing concern (paragraph 65), and in support for its most vulnerable children (paragraphs 99-122). It has moved from focusing on the remediation of problems to ensuring that, where necessary, support is more timely and effective. This is principally the result of improvements in the organisation and management of advisory services and the development of a clearer framework for monitoring and supporting schools, the Schools Service Guarantee (SSG).

Monitoring, Challenge, Support, Intervention

41. The LEA has a clear view of its role in monitoring, supporting, challenging and, where necessary, intervening in its schools. In all but one of the secondary schools, and in half of the primary schools visited, the LEA was providing an appropriate level of monitoring and had achieved the right balance between support and challenge. In five of the seven secondary schools and two-thirds of the primary schools this was helping to empower the school to manage its own development. Two schools remained too dependent on the LEA.

42. Nevertheless, the LEA still has a considerable job to do to explain clearly to schools the changing roles, relationships and responsibilities between LEAs and schools, and how it sees those roles being fulfilled. The EDP is not yet effectively contributing to this overall debate and, in this respect, the role of link advisers is also unclear.

43. Whilst a number of activities require cross-Divisional and some cross-Directorate liaison, the Advisory Division is responsible for delivering most activities in the EDP. The LEA has used the opportunity presented by new appointments, local government reorganisation, and the analysis of needs in developing the EDP, to re-evaluate and restructure the work of its Advisory service. This has resulted, for

example, in some essential redeployment of advisory support from the secondary to the primary phase and the creation of a specialist SEN advisory team.

44. The service is large, consisting of 104 advisers, advisory teachers and consultants. The cost of this scale of service is reflected in higher than average spending on the school improvement strategy, though almost half the service (46 fte posts) is funded from marketed services bought by schools. All advisory staff provide some specialist input into these very extensive marketed services for in-school support or in-service courses. The resulting professional development programme provided by the LEA is very comprehensive and, for the most part, highly valued by schools. Around half of the advisory service also provide specific support for school improvement through the SSG and attachment as a link adviser to a school or PRU, or as part of the small specialist team supporting schools causing concern.

45. The day-to-day work and, for the most part, the overall planning of this extremely complex Division is effectively managed at all levels. Its work is comprehensively monitored and recorded. The Division acknowledges, however, that it still needs to improve its capacity to plan and prioritise future resource needs. The LEA continues to provide monitoring and support to all its schools. All primary, special and 40 per cent of secondary schools receive a minimum entitlement of three days regular monitoring visits per year, the remaining secondary schools receive the equivalent of two days. Its own analysis of performance, however, identifies that this blanket provision in all phases may not be necessary nor, given the LEA's overall objectives and resources, is it desirable. It has yet to define the criteria for judging whether a school needs the minimum levels of support provided, or for any staged reduction of its levels of support as schools become increasingly self-supporting. Along with the majority of the LEA services, it has not yet developed robust criteria for evaluating the impact of its work and judging the value for money of its services.

46. The SSG itself provides a clear framework for the monitoring and support that schools receive from the LEA. It reflects the LEA's analysis of needs. Incremental levels of support and, where appropriate, intervention are clearly identified and linked to the LEA's overall categorisation of schools causing concern. The SSG seeks to ensure that the implementation of priorities in the EDP, particularly school self-evaluation, management, target setting and improving teaching and learning, are consistently monitored by the LEA and the school, and supported as necessary. Schools generally reported greater consistency and improved quality of support since the introduction of the SSG, but almost half the schools visited were not clear on their SSG entitlement and the criteria for additional support.

47. The role of the link adviser is pivotal to the success of the LEA's strategy. The staff development programme for advisory staff, linked to annual appraisal and performance review, the use of experienced headteachers as consultants, and networking of specialist expertise, has generally been effective in redressing any imbalances in the expertise of advisory staff and ensuring that schools receive the support they need. In only one school visited had the limited phase expertise of the link adviser adversely affected the support for the school.

48. Other schools visited commented positively on the work and expertise of their link adviser. Support provided was sufficiently well targeted and managed by the link adviser in all but one school. The structure and organisation of the SSG helped to ensure that in the limited time they had in schools, link advisers covered a number of aspects and maximised support to the school. Schools and teachers had generally received helpful, evaluative oral feedback from link advisers and advisory staff.

49. However, annual records and records of visits are less effective. They do not provide a consistent or clear enough record of schools' self-evaluation, targets for development, expected actions by both parties and intended outcomes, or the progress made by the school.

Collection and Analysis of Data

50. Overall, the LEA's procedures for the collection and analysis of performance data and target setting provide very good support for schools. The LEA has a detailed and increasingly effective strategy to support target setting. For secondary schools, this is based on a value added approach developed in partnership with London University, and on clearly thought out guidance to schools on how to use the data to set realistic targets.

51. The information supporting target setting in primary schools, based on the Durham University Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) project, is less complete than that for secondary schools, but is improving as more schools join the project. Target setting takes account of QCA benchmarking information, PANDA data, KS1 assessment and any other standardised data, and teachers' predictions of performance.

52. The LEA is undertaking groundbreaking work with special schools on developing an approach to performance targets, using working groups of officers and headteachers. An assessment instrument is being trialled and QCA is to use Lancashire's work in national developments.

53. All the secondary schools visited during the inspection commented on the very good quality of the data provided by the LEA, and on the training and support. The target setting process was conducted professionally, and based on clear information and guidance. These views were shared by one of the two special schools and 9 of the 13 primary schools. Those who were less enthusiastic had, in the main, developed their own approaches and felt less need of the LEA input. Only one school had a poor experience of target setting, caused by misunderstandings between the school and its link adviser.

Support for Literacy

54. Improving standards of literacy and numeracy features strongly within EDP priorities. The LEA's strategies for both literacy and numeracy are clear and their

implementation is well managed.

55. Lancashire's support for literacy is effective. The LEA has set a target of 81 percent of pupils reaching Level 4 or above by the year 2002 (compared with the national target of 80 per cent). In 1999, 72 per cent achieved this level, a significant improvement which exceeded the LEA target and puts Lancashire on track to achieve the year 2000 target of 77 per cent

56. The literacy team of consultants and advisory teachers is well managed, and there is effective coordination between various teams within the Advisory Division. Advisory teachers divide their time between literacy support and more general support for the teaching of English. Schools value their expertise both in INSET provision and in-school consultancy.

57. For the most part, schools reported that training for the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) was satisfactory. Literacy consultants have since played an effective role in supporting individual schools in their implementation of the NLS, for example by providing demonstration lessons, assisting with literacy audits and evaluating school literacy action plans. Problems of discontinuity in support for some schools as a result of difficulty in recruiting some consultants have now been resolved by appointing a number of serving primary heads and deputies as associate consultants on a part-time basis.

58. Primary schools are assigned high, medium or low levels of contact with the literacy team. These categories guarantee appropriate levels of monitoring and advisory visits and additional resources. The implementation of the literacy strategy is also monitored as part of the SSG. Some schools which received intensive support last year understandably feel the loss of it this year, but the criteria for intensive support have been applied consistently.

59. Schools surveyed judged support for literacy as satisfactory to good, and above average for other LEAs surveyed. Inspection evidence confirms this picture. All primary schools visited by the inspection team had received at least satisfactory support, a quarter had received good support. A further six specialist monitoring visits by HMI also found at least satisfactory support, with good support in half the schools. Support has been particularly effective in schools with serious weaknesses or in special measures, including assisting co-ordinators on to national courses. Two schools reported benefits from the LEA's small school cluster group, bringing together teachers of mixed age teaching groups to share experience and practical ideas.

60. Support for literacy in secondary schools last year was principally through four literacy pilot projects, which focused on literacy in Year 7, raising boys' achievement, continuity and progression from Key Stage 2 and 3 (KS2/3) and literacy across the curriculum. Literacy summer schools were held in eleven schools. Schools had encountered some difficulties in delivering the KS2/3 project due to pressures on the primary schools but, overall, the projects had a beneficial impact and were well supported by high quality training and advice.

Support for Numeracy

61. LEA support for numeracy and the implementation the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) has been well received in schools. Visits to schools as part of this inspection and monitoring visits for the NNS found that training and other support were making a very effective contribution to improvement.

62. The LEA has been involved in the National Numeracy Project for the last three years, and this has helped participating schools to become familiar with many aspects of the NNS. This has contributed to good progress towards the Key Stage 2 target of 79 per cent of pupils reaching Level 4 and above by the year 2002. Seventy two per cent of pupils achieved this standard in the 1999 tests, almost meeting the LEA's Year 2000 target of 73 per cent. Standards were rising in eight of the primary schools visited.

63. Schools surveyed judged LEA support for the teaching of numeracy to be good overall. This was confirmed by school visits: support was good in five secondary schools and in 10 of the 12 primary schools. All the LEA's Leading Mathematics Teachers (LMTs) were trained and observed by Members of the LEA numeracy team before being deployed to provide demonstration lessons for other teachers. The quality teaching seen reflected the positive impact of NNS training and support, with highly effective use made of oral and mental routines and reinforcement techniques.

64. Secondary schools praised well organised courses, support for Heads of Department and Summer Schools, although three schools commented on limited follow up to track the impact of training. Primary schools valued support for mental and oral maths, advice on suitable NNS resources and support from NNS consultants. The LEA has also made a positive contribution to raising standards through its provision of intensive support to schools, additional support for schools causing concern, cluster-based training for small schools, and a willingness to tailor support to match schools' particular needs. In two schools (one primary and one special) the LEA could have been more pro-active in helping to identify ineffective numeracy co-ordinators and provide earlier support.

Support for Schools Causing Concern

65. Supporting and challenging schools causing concern is, rightly, a priority in the EDP. One secondary, one special and six primary schools are currently in special measures. A further 33 schools, (two secondary, one special and 30 primary schools – 22 of them since September 1997) have been identified as having serious weaknesses. The LEA has also identified a further group of schools requiring special support. Including those in special measures and with serious weaknesses, a total of 127 schools are currently receiving support for educational, financial or personnel difficulties. In the past, LEA systems for identifying schools in difficulties and providing support have not been efficient and were too slow, leading to a

disproportionately high number of schools in special measures. The LEA has recognised these weaknesses and has acted to redress them.

66. The strategy had a faltering start, when over-enthusiastic monitoring and intervention in schools already identified by OFSTED added to schools' problems. There has since been improvement in the quality of the LEA's support. This is linked to improvements in school monitoring and support in general, particularly the development and implementation of the SSG; and more effective management of cross-team support through the Directorate Special Support Group (DSSG).

67. Ten schools have been removed from special measures in the last year and the percentage of schools in special measures is now well below the national average. Only one school receiving special support has subsequently been identified as having serious weaknesses. The LEA now has a clear and coherent strategy for supporting schools causing concern which reflects DfEE requirements and the principles of the Code of Practice for LEA/School relations. Criteria for categories of schools causing concern, and for incrementally increasing intervention and support are clear and appropriate. The LEA has set itself clear and rigorous targets for further improvement in the EDP.

68. Overall, schools judged the LEA provided good support for schools causing concern well above the average for other LEAs surveyed. This positive picture is confirmed by the inspection. The inspection visited or met 13 schools which had been, or were still, on the LEA's list of schools causing serious concern. In all but one case, the support and advice received, particularly from the Inspection and Special Support team (ISST) and from Personnel and Finance services, had been effective, well coordinated and instrumental in the school's progress.

69. This level of support for schools is costly. The ISST service in particular is already fully stretched and the LEA's initial calculations significantly underestimated the prospective costs, particularly in adviser time. The support provided is carefully monitored but at present the LEA has no reliable means of predicting the likely costs of supporting individual schools or collective costs of the service as a whole. It is not yet using its available data efficiently to identify what support will be needed for the most frequently occurring problems, or to benchmark and evaluate the value for money of support provided.

70. School files do not always contain a clear trail of evidence to substantiate the LEA's judgements on causes for concern. Contracts and action plans seen were sufficiently clear and specific in the actions to be taken by the school, the support to be provided by the LEA, and the criteria for success. However, exit strategies and the criteria for concern were not always sufficiently open and transparent nor fully shared with schools.

Support for School Management

71. Overall, the LEA provides good support for school management. As already discussed in paragraph 46, it is providing most schools with effective and often good support for the schools' own self-review procedures, principally through the work of

link advisers and the SSG.

72. Link advisers were providing good support to the school's own self-evaluation and monitoring procedures in half the schools visited. Many of these procedures had been developed from earlier LEA input, particularly for schools in difficulties. Link advisers were often combining the monitoring of schools' own evaluation procedures with practical support to improve the quality of teaching, jointly observing lessons with senior managers or coordinators. One school visited had not received the level of practical support needed to develop its own self-review effectively enough and was overly dependent on the LEA to monitor its progress.

73. The LEA also provides substantial and generally highly effective support for headteachers, including appraisal. Schools surveyed rated the LEA's support for senior management as above average; secondary schools rating it the highest of any LEA surveyed. Headteachers in just over half the schools visited had received support through the LEA's extensive professional development programme, much of it linked to national accreditation. Headlamp courses, the mentor system for new headteachers, and allocation of experienced "associate" headteachers as mentors to support schools causing concern, have been particularly effective.

74. Its support for middle managers is less comprehensive. It provides some specific courses for aspiring and existing middle managers. However, the extensive in-service support provided for coordinators and managers of subjects had not always provided sufficient emphasis on the key aspects of planning, monitoring and review to support developments in schools.

75. The LEA has recently produced further guidance on self-evaluation for its schools. This contains comprehensive and helpful evaluation criteria but too little guidance on how they might be used, or how this fits within a comprehensive strategy for review, target setting and strategic planning. Schools receive generally good quality management information and guidance on its use from Advisory, Finance, and Personnel services, including good quality performance data. This is increasingly helping schools to monitor their progress more effectively.

76. The LEA's strategy for supporting improvements in school management includes support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and improving the recruitment and training of governors. Support for NQTs is good and the LEA has produced excellent documentation for NQTs and their mentors, including advice on using the career entry profile. Support for governors is also good. Schools causing concern were particularly appreciative of the training and support for governors provided by Personnel and Finance services as part of DSSG arrangements.

Support for Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

77. The EDP rightly identifies the need to raise standards by improving the use of ICT as a tool to support learning in all subjects. Teaching and standards in ICT in primary schools are generally below those in comparable LEAs. The number of computers per pupil is below the national average, particularly in primary schools.

The objectives, targets and desired outcomes in the EDP are appropriate, though most do not have firm timescales.

78. Lancashire has had major difficulties in its support of ICT across the curriculum and with the development and implementation of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). The LEA accepts that it has failed to deliver effective support, or to communicate effectively with schools over the technical and internal difficulties it has experienced with NGfL. A report by District Audit concluded that a lack of suitably qualified and available personnel within the Directorate has led to many problems, compounded by responsibilities for ICT being split between several units. The LEA has not yet appointed the recommended officer to co-ordinate ICT matters because funding has still to be identified. Its record in addressing these weaknesses so far, and the associated value for money, are poor.

79. Schools surveyed rate support for ICT as less than satisfactory and below average for all the LEAs surveyed. Inspection visits confirmed these views. Schools were highly critical of the LEA's failure to support the introduction of NGfL effectively. Only two of the 22 schools visited have noticed some improvement in the support and advice provided by the LEA. It is surprising that only two of the schools visited have turned to outside providers for the advice and support they need.

Support for Lifelong Learning

80. Promoting inclusion and lifelong learning is a priority within the EDP and for the ECS Directorate. The LEA's approach to Lifelong Learning and associated multi-agency working are beginning to have a beneficial impact on school improvement. A Lifelong Learning Development Plan has been produced and the Lifelong Learning Division plays a central role in effective partnerships with the TECs, Further Education colleges, District Councils, local SRB projects, Social Services, the Health Authorities and Police. At the other end of the lifelong learning continuum, early years and childcare provision is overseen by the increasingly effective Early Years Partnership.

81. The EDP promotes work with parents of pre-school children and training opportunities for parents relating to the education of their children through, for example, the Parent Education and Parents as Educators schemes. These have resulted in several hundred parents and other adults receiving guidance, advice and training in schools, colleges, Burnley FC and young offender institutions. Family literacy courses involving partnership between the Adult College, the library service and schools have been effective in preventing early failure of children and improving the skills of parents. Open learning centres, including libraries, are being developed to assist pupils with limited resources at home. There is a very effective partnership with the Basic Skills Agency, for which the LEA accredits the Primary School Quality Mark.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the general quality of support for school improvement:-

- criteria should be developed to identify schools that are able to operate more independently, and to devise alternative methods of monitoring the performance of these schools (paragraph 45);
- visit proformas and annual reports to schools should provide clearer evaluation of schools' performance and progress, and the effectiveness of support provided (paragraph 49).

In order to improve further support for schools causing concern:-

- a systematic approach should be developed to identifying common factors of effective support, predicting service costs, and evaluating value for money (paragraph 69);
- all causes of concern, exit strategies and plans for phased withdrawal of support should be identified and shared openly with schools (paragraph 70).

In order to improve support for ICT:-

- an officer should be appointed to coordinate future support (paragraph 78);
- clear, accurate and up-to-date information on the present position regarding NGfL, and plans to improve the situation, should be presented urgently to schools (paragraph 78).

SECTION THREE: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

82. There is effective leadership of the education service by elected Members and officers and, with the exception of SEN, the strategic management of the LEA is sound. A good working relationship exists between officers and elected Members, stemming from a tradition of non-partisan politics. Members and officers are clear about their respective roles. In the main, Members receive appropriately detailed advice and information to enable them to make informed decisions. However, not all reports to committees or working groups are well enough argued or offer clear enough advice.

83. Local government reorganisation in 1998, with the removal of the districts of Blackpool and Blackburn-with-Darwen, created a period of significant change. In the last 18 months the County Council has removed £200 million from its budget and 1000 jobs. The current Directorate structure, including the new Education and Cultural Services Directorate, was created as part of those reforms.

84. In this same period the Council has introduced the beginnings of a rolling programme of reviews using the Best Value model as the framework for developing, monitoring and evaluating quality; a comprehensive three year financial strategy and ICT strategy; cross-directorate working; and a review of local democratic arrangements. As already outlined in paragraphs 25-26, it has made some initial decisions on modernisation of its structure. The expected outcomes and improvements to Council and Directorate services have not been made clear to all those involved in these processes.

85. The Corporate Plan, a brief four-page statement, summarises the Council's priorities stemming from the draft strategic plans of the new Directorates and work undertaken by cross-Directorate groups. It makes references to education, including the EDP and the intention to work in partnership with schools, parents and governors to improve standards. However, in visits to 22 schools, it was apparent that the Council has failed to communicate its overall plans or strategic objectives effectively to schools.

86. The Council has identified the need for cross-cutting initiatives to ensure more effective 'joined up' strategic planning and provision of services. This is actively being pursued by the Chairs of the ECS and Social Services Committees in order to improve liaison between these two key services; an aspect of the LEA which was criticised by schools surveyed. A start has been made on clarifying roles and expectations between agencies by mapping all the inter-agency activities taking place.

87. Progress at higher management levels has been far more limited. The development of improved strategies for multi-agency working identified in the EDP is currently behind target and this dimension of strategic planning in general is behind

schedule. The most recent strategy documents produced by ECS and Social Services, the EDP and 'Quality Protects', indicate that there is still a long way to go on integrating the work of the Directorates. More effective liaison is, however, a growing reality on the ground, with specific initiatives involving education, Police, the Health Authorities, TECs, colleges and District Councils. Schools visited have noticed improvements.

88. Since his appointment in 1996, the Director of Education has had a significant impact on the organisation and overall efficiency of the LEA, and its relationships with schools. He has begun to introduce a more rigorous evaluative culture; more specific identification of priorities; and a focus, acknowledged by both Members and officers, on making policy and resource decisions based upon these priorities rather than custom and practice. There is more to be done and the Director recognises this, not least in rigorous evaluation of services and performance review. He accepts the Fair Funding agenda and is committed to the principle of maximum delegation of resources and autonomy to schools. Some officers have yet to fully recognise the further shift in culture and pace of change this requires.

89. The ECS Directorate has made satisfactory progress in addressing a number of its initial strategic priorities, the exception being the SEN review. Further reorganisation is envisaged to align its work more closely to delivering its key objectives of supporting and improving school performance, pupil participation and lifelong learning set out in the EDP.

90. For the most part, budget monitoring is a strength of the LEA. Good mechanisms exist to provide all budget holders in both the ECS Directorate and schools with regular updates of actual spend against budget plans. However, budgetary control of SEN expenditure is poor, (Section 4). The inspection has also revealed some errors of apportionment in the statutory reporting of financial information to the DfEE, indicating the need for more robust checking procedures.

91. Assessing value for money within Lancashire's education system is not well established. The LEA is only just developing a framework for performance management which would allow these judgements of its own services to be made. In addition, the County Council does not have a policy of demanding clear service level agreements for all services provided between Directorates. This does not promote rigorous value for money discussions within the organisation.

Management Services

92. For the most part management services perform well and make a significant contribution to school improvement. The LEA delegated relevant parts of these service budgets in 1994/95, earlier than most. As a consequence they have become customer focused; schools are highly satisfied and trust these services. Those aspects which are not delegated also perform well, have modest costs, and are highly valued by schools.

93. **Personnel services** meet all statutory duties and provide schools with a

good quality service, including documentary guidance on a wide range of personnel issues. The great majority of schools buy into the service at one of two levels and there are opportunities for them to influence the way the service is provided. The co-ordination between Personnel and the Advisory Division to ensure an integrated approach to school improvement is a particular strength. The involvement of senior personnel and finance officers on the DSSG management group is a feature of the LEA's effective support to these schools.

94. **Financial services** generally perform statutory functions well. Schools are provided with good data and advice on a range of financial matters. Timely warnings are issued if deficits are likely, so that remedial action can be taken. Balances are reducing and the LEA has provided schools with useful guidelines. Deficits are being acted upon and the LEA has responded positively when the need has arisen for delegation to be removed from schools. Traded services such as Payroll and Audit that are part of the County Treasurer's department are also effective and highly praised by schools.

95. Financial planning information provided to schools is very good. Schools are provided with projected budgets based on a range of situations. However, the LEA is not yet combining its strong forecasting methodology and the new County Finance Strategy to encourage better longer term financial planning by schools.

96. Most **property services** are traded. The range of services offered covers design, planned maintenance, survey and advice. Schools are offered easily understood service agreements and this year 94 per cent of primary and special schools joined a pooled system to utilise the extra delegated repair and maintenance funding. Schools are generally highly satisfied with this service.

97. There are good links between the Buildings and Development team in the ECS Directorate and the Property Services team of the County Council. This has resulted in the production of an excellent Asset Management Plan (AMP). Lancashire is at the forefront nationally and officers have been working closely with the DfEE. The AMP will provide a very good planning base at both County and school level. Recently produced condition surveys will provide a useful five year, costed, maintenance plan on a classroom by classroom basis for each school.

98. **Administrative ICT support** is provided by the Westfield Centre, operating on a £1M budget almost totally generated by income from schools in Lancashire and Blackburn-with-Darwen. The service's business plan and budget management processes are sound. Schools are provided with several clearly set out service level agreements and there is a comprehensive range of training courses on offer. The take up of courses is high and the quality of the service was commented on positively in the school survey and the majority of the school visits. However, the precise role of the Westfield Centre in the LEA's ICT strategy, and the future balance of funding between trading and service level agreements, is unclear.

Recommendations:

In order to improve strategic management and planning:-

- inter-directorate planning and cross-cutting initiatives, particularly between Education and Social Services, should be pursued more vigorously (paragraph 87).

In order to further improve service review, evaluation of value for money and preparation for Best Value scrutiny:-

- a co-ordinated approach should be developed to providing schools with benchmarked information, and involving them in the planning, delivery and value for money review of traded and non-traded services (paragraphs 37, 91);
- the real costs of services should be set out for schools, and systems put in place to ensure that all sections of the LEA seek and act upon the views of customers (paragraphs 37, 91);
- service level agreements with clear and transparent pricing should be required for all services provided by other departments of the County Council (paragraph 91).

In order to further improve strategic financial management by schools:-

- an agreed methodology for promoting long-term budget planning should be developed in conjunction with schools (paragraph 95).

SECTION FOUR: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

99. Improving provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and raising their attainment is an appropriate EDP priority. Strategies in the EDP are broadly matched to need, but their likely effectiveness is weakened by vague success criteria and targets. Support for SEN pupils is well funded, but has been hampered by poor strategic planning. In general the LEA is meeting its statutory responsibilities. The exception is that not all statements of special educational needs are produced within recommended time limits. Some aspects of SEN support are very good, but the overall quality varies and the LEA has not yet begun to resolve some of the key problems it has been wrestling with for many years.

100. At strategic level, LEA planning has significant weaknesses. Its overall strategy identifies the problems. But outcomes, and how it intends to achieve those outcomes, are not defined clearly or sharply enough. The LEA has only recently begun to tackle critical issues of the quality and management of services and overall provision. As a result, the LEA's support for pupils with special needs in mainstream schools does not contribute consistently to school improvement and overall provides poor value for money. The LEA has rightly identified the need to challenge a dependency culture, including high statement levels, and inconsistencies of provision, but has made only slow progress.

101. The LEA appropriately intends to work towards the provision of inclusive education for SEN pupils. With an unduly large proportion of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties educated outside the authority, and a high level of demand from mainstream schools for external support for pupils with SEN, the LEA has some ground to make up. It has only recently begun to address shortcomings in special school provision. The LEA's action plan to develop inclusion lacks clarity in how, precisely, it intends to achieve the required changes in both mainstream and special schools. The future provision of special schools and the timescales for change are not clear enough to help existing institutions prepare for their new roles. Of the schools visited, only six were positive about LEA moves to encourage inclusion.

102. The LEA has taken action to address the issue of a large number of separately managed SEN support teams serving mainstream schools. The creation of Co-ordinated Services for Learning Support (CSLS), has drawn most teams together into a single service, resulting in fewer staff working in each school. The initiative has brought some short term challenges, but has placed the LEA in a much stronger position to further develop and rationalise its provision. The development has been well managed and is enabling the LEA at last to monitor the services it provides. The CSLS had already brought some benefits to nine of the schools visited. Improved liaison between educational psychologists and learning support service staff across the LEA has also begun to moderate the levels of support offered via statements. Nevertheless, the strengths in LEA SEN support outweighed the weaknesses in only one secondary and three primary schools visited.

103. A significant long-standing problem remains. Too many schools have been content to rely too heavily on the LEA and its statementing procedures as the means of addressing the SEN problems in their school. In the past the LEA has tacitly condoned this. The consequences have been twofold: that Lancashire has an above-average number of pupils with statements and, in the current year, a projected £2.5m overspend on SEN. The level of resource needed to support the high number of statements is also primarily responsible for the low level of funding available to schools (see paragraph 24).

104. A recent policy document stresses the need to control and reduce the number of statements. A Members' committee has recently discussed this issue and the further delegation of funds to schools. However, papers have not provided sufficient information on financial implication for Members to make sufficiently informed decisions. The average cost of a Statement in primary schools is almost £7000 and for non-delegated statements in secondary schools almost £9000. Discussions with schools on possible changes to funding mechanisms have not been accompanied by illustrative models. How resources freed by reductions in statements might be used to target earlier intervention has not been made explicit. Until these factors are openly debated the situation is unlikely to improve dramatically.

105. Although support for SEN is generously funded overall, budget control is poor. A large amount of money is delegated to schools for SEN pupils without statements. The formula for distributing these funds is sound, but the LEA has failed to work consistently with schools to monitor whether these funds are used effectively.

Recommendations:

In order to improve provision for pupils with special educational needs:-

- the SEN strategy should be urgently reviewed, in order to clarify intended outcomes for overall provision, levels of funding and more efficient and effective use of resources, and to specify related actions and timescales (paragraph 100);
- the future provision of special schools should be quickly agreed and plans put in place to help existing institutions prepare for their new roles (paragraph 101);
- rapid agreement should be reached on the respective roles and responsibilities of schools and the LEA, and the most effective means of utilising the SEN funds available (paragraphs 104, 105).

SECTION FIVE: ACCESS

106. The LEA carries out its statutory duties over the wide range of functions in this area. Functions are generally performed satisfactorily; a number are performed well. Overall, the associated services provide satisfactory value for money.

Planning and Supply of School Places

107. The LEA has an integrated and well coordinated approach to the planning and supply of school places which successfully addresses a number of policy objectives. The underlying strategy in the School Organisation Plan has recently been endorsed by the School Organisation Committee.

108. Overall, the level of surplus places is low but there are significant pockets of over-capacity. The situation in primary schools is projected to get worse in the coming years. Building upon suggestions by the District Auditor the LEA now has an achievable plan to remove around 5000 surplus places, including closure, reorganisation, and the rationalisation of nursery provision. Two small primary schools are currently proposed for closure. The Nursery review, recently launched by elected Members, addresses problems of high unit costs, surplus capacity and uneven provision across the County. The infant class size plan is working well. Since January 1998, the number of KS1 pupils in classes over 30 has been cut from over 40 per cent to around 10 per cent.

109. The challenge in the secondary sector is to provide enough places by 2003. Plans are in place to address this including a possible PFI project and a potential major rebuild, and review of admissions; initial Basic Needs bids have been successful. Plans for the supply of appropriate special school places are not as well developed.

110. There is a significant number of small schools in Lancashire and the LEA has, appropriately, a Small Schools Initiative to provide necessary support. This is having a positive impact on collaborative working between schools and in developing and sharing support for curriculum and teaching. There is, however, no policy on reviewing their viability. As yet the project has not addressed one of its key initial objectives of exploring innovative ways of reducing high unit costs.

Admissions to Schools

111. The overall provision of information to parents on admissions is good. Booklets are generally consistent with the requirements of the code of practice, the only shortcoming being the lack of information on the reasons for parents not being successful in their preferred choice of school. Ninety-three per cent of parents are successful in gaining a place at their preferred secondary school, and 90% at their preferred primary school. At present the LEA adequately administers admissions and appeals and the cost of the service is modest. The level of appeals is high but the LEA is implementing a range of strategies based on advice from the District Auditor to address this. Performance should improve further as this well structured

development plan is implemented.

Promoting Social Inclusion

112. One of the LEA's priorities in its EDP is to promote **social inclusion**, including behaviour support. The LEA has satisfactory arrangements for supporting schools in dealing with behaviour, exclusions and attendance, and for providing support for looked after children and pupils of minority ethnic heritage.

113. The Pupil Referral Service has made considerable efforts over the past two years to provide an integrated service to support schools in dealing with **behaviour and exclusions**. It has attempted to provide a better continuum of support for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), balancing the need for earlier intervention by the LEA or school before a pupil's problems become too severe, with provision of SEN statements for those whose problems are greatest. This policy is beginning to have an effect, although it is still too early for its impact to be visible in all schools.

114. The Behaviour Support Plan is sound. Its seven key objectives are generally well defined and are individually addressed in each phase. However, priorities are not yet clearly enough identified within the plan, and targets and success criteria are not always firm or closely enough linked to clear deadlines. The authority plans to make these revisions early in year 2000.

115. Expenditure on PRUs is high (almost twice the national average) but the County's 11 Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are effectively used to support pupils with EBD, mainly pupils from mainstream schools at Stages 3 or 5 of the Code of Practice. Provision is typically part time with an emphasis on working with mainstream schools on curriculum and integration, although a small number of pupils attend full time. There is good support for schools dealing with exclusions, and actions by the LEA and school following exclusion are sufficiently well coordinated. The LEA is on target for achieving the reduction in permanent exclusions identified in the EDP. Communications between school, LEA and parents are improving.

116. Expenditure on the **education of children otherwise than at school** (almost three times the national average) is also high. However the support provided is effective. The level of tuition provided for pupils out of school, at ten hours a week minimum, is higher than in many other authorities. The LEA is on target to achieve its aim of ensuring that all pupils excluded for more than 15 days will receive full time appropriate educational provision. A recent survey of schools by the LEA indicated very high satisfaction rates for both the LEA's response and support provided and the length of time pupils were out of school. Schools are, therefore, satisfied with the value for money but neither they nor the LEA yet have the means to judge whether its provision represents good value in relation to high costs.

117. In general, the Education Welfare Service (EWS) provides good support to schools on **attendance** and related matters, and is held in high regard by the majority of schools. Attendance at Lancashire schools has improved steadily for a

number of years. Unauthorised absence is below national averages. An extended work experience programme, working in partnership with TECs, is provided to meet the needs of Year 11 pupils needing an alternative curriculum. Where support was less successful in the schools visited, this was the result of changes in EWS personnel or heavy workloads. Though generally successful, the EWS is very expensive when compared to statistical neighbours and the national average. The LEA and schools are not in a position to judge the value for money it provides.

118. There are significant local differences in attendance across the County. The Behaviour Support Plan does not adequately reflect or tackle these differences. Increasingly, the service is using prosecution and attendance orders, in accordance with statutory regulations, to discharge its duties. A revised document on registration and attendance was sent to schools in September 1999. The systems now in place generally work effectively. Nevertheless, practice in schools still varies and the LEA is not always rigorous enough in ensuring that guidance related to taking pupils off the school roll is followed effectively. There is a significant time lapse in keeping the database up to date. Working arrangements with Social Services to track pupils that the EWS fails to trace are not yet sufficiently rigorous.

119. Schools judged the support for Lancashire's **looked-after children** as satisfactory or better. Inspection evidence confirms this. Liaison between education and social services is improving. The LEA has put in place appropriate measures to monitor the attainment and progress of looked-after children and has asked schools to set targets for improving their attainments in order to contribute to the LEA's own challenging target.

120. Schools surveyed rated the LEA's support for meeting the needs of **ethnic minority pupils**, including Traveller children, as satisfactory to good. Delegation of former Section 11 funding has been completed and most staff have been redeployed to schools. This has been broadly welcomed, providing enhanced resources and improved flexibility for schools in meeting needs of these pupils.

121. The LEA has produced a satisfactory Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant plan, but targets, success criteria and priorities are not yet sharp enough. The EDP takes account of minority ethnic issues but its focus is entirely on pupils with English as an additional language, with no emphasis on the needs of other groups. School visits, however, found that support for these pupils is satisfactory. The LEA is now monitoring carefully the performance of minority ethnic groups and the collection and analysis of achievement data provides a useful basis for target setting. The LEA is now setting appropriately challenging targets for itself and its schools and is now providing sufficient support and guidance to schools to help them pursue these targets, particularly with its lowest achieving group of pupils of Pakistan ethnic origin. Social inclusion is supported by guidance on racial harassment in schools and careful monitoring of racist incidents.

122. The LEA meets its responsibilities for safeguarding the **health and welfare** of pupils. The County has a good record of property maintenance. This has resulted in a sustained investment in building stock over the years and serious health and safety issues are generally dealt with effectively. The LEA's Health and Safety

procedures are good and are rated as above average by schools surveyed. **Child protection** procedures are rated above average by schools and there is good take up by schools of the training provided.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the planning of school places:-

- a policy should be developed to review the viability of small schools (paragraph 110).

In order to improve support for attendance:-

- procedures for tracing pupils removed from attendance registers, including sharing information with Social Services, should be strengthened and the database updated more frequently (paragraph 118);
- the costs of support for attendance, and for PRU provision, should be explored carefully and wherever possible ways of making those services more cost effective identified (paragraphs 116, 117);
- planned revisions of the Behaviour Support Plan should identify clearly the local differences across the County and, where appropriate, differentiated strategies to address local needs (paragraph 118).

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve strategic planning for school improvement:-

- all LSB elements should be tested for areas where funding, responsibility and accountability could be delegated or devolved to schools (paragraph 24);
- plans for the phased delegation of services should be finalised and shared with schools (paragraphs 17, 34).
- planned revisions of the EDP should:-
 - identify more clearly the relationship between the EDP and other key plans and strategic objectives (paragraph 27);
 - identify more clearly the activities to deliver priorities, the overall pattern of provision, and how schools can access this provision (paragraphs 31, 32);
 - identify and incorporate mechanisms for assessing and reporting on VFM for each costed element of the EDP (paragraph 33).

In order to improve the general quality of support for school improvement:-

- criteria should be developed to identify schools that are able to operate more independently, and to devise alternative methods of monitoring the performance of these schools (paragraph 45);
- visit proformas and annual reports to schools should provide clearer evaluation of schools' performance and progress, and the effectiveness of support provided (paragraph 49).

In order to improve further support for schools causing concern:-

- a systematic approach should be developed to identifying common factors of effective support, predicting service costs, and evaluating value for money (paragraph 69);
- all causes of concern, exit strategies and phased withdrawal of support should be identified and shared openly with schools (paragraph 70);

In order to improve support for ICT:-

- an officer should be appointed to coordinate future support (paragraph 78);
- clear, accurate and up-to-date information on the present position regarding NGfL, and plans to retrieve the situation, should be presented urgently to schools (paragraph 78).

In order to improve strategic management and planning:-

- inter-directorate planning and cross-cutting initiatives, particularly between Education and Social Services, should be pursued more vigorously (paragraph 87).

In order to further improve service review, evaluation of value for money and preparation for Best Value scrutiny:-

- a co-ordinated approach should be developed to providing schools with benchmarked information, and involving them in the planning, delivery and value for money review of traded and non-traded services (paragraphs 37, 91);
- the real costs of services should be set out for schools, and systems put in place to ensure that all sections of the LEA seek and act upon the views of customers (paragraphs 37, 91);
- service level agreements with clear and transparent pricing should be required for all services provided by other departments of the County Council (paragraph 91).

In order to further improve strategic financial management by schools:-

- an agreed methodology for promoting long-term budget planning should be developed in conjunction with schools (paragraph 95).

In order to improve provision for pupils with special educational needs:-

- the SEN strategy should be urgently reviewed, in order to clarify intended outcomes for overall provision, levels of funding and more efficient and effective use of resources, and to specify related actions and timescales (paragraph 100);
- the future provision of special schools should be quickly agreed and plans put in place to help existing institutions prepare for their new roles (paragraph 101);
- rapid agreement should be reached on the respective roles and responsibilities of schools and the LEA, and the most effective means of utilising the SEN funds available (paragraphs 104, 105).

In order to improve the planning of school places:-

- a policy should be developed to review the viability of small schools (paragraph 110).

In order to improve support for attendance:-

- procedures for tracing pupils removed from attendance registers, including sharing information with Social Services, should be strengthened and the database updated more frequently (paragraph 118);
- the costs of support for attendance, and for PRU provision, should be explored carefully and wherever possible ways of making those services more cost effective identified (paragraphs 116, 117);
- planned revisions of the Behaviour Support Plan should identify clearly the local differences across the County and, where appropriate, differentiated strategies to address local needs (paragraph 118).

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