

APPENDIX A



Inspection Report

ISLE OF WIGHT

Local Education Authority

SUMMARY

**Date of Inspection : September 2003
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INTRODUCTION

1. The Isle of Wight Local Education Authority (LEA) was inspected in September 2003. The inspection was carried out by OfSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement.

COMMENTARY

2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.
10. 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

Performance

11. 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.
12. 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.

Funding

13. 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.
14. 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.

The Education Development Plan

15. 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.

16. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's strategies to promote continuous improvement were unsatisfactory. They are now satisfactory.
17. 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.
18. 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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 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

19. 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.

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.

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 issues of methodology, progression and continuity.

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 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.

SECTION 3

Special Educational Needs

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

20. 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.

21. 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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.

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.

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.

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 the effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

22. 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

23. 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.
24. 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.
25. 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.
26. 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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 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

27. 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.
28. 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

29. 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.
30. 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.
31. 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.

Decision-making

32. 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.

Partnership

33. At the time of the last inspection, this aspect of the LEA's work was satisfactory. It is now highly satisfactory.
34. 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.

35. Within education, three partnerships have been particularly successful. The work of the Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership and the tertiary strategy group. Additionally, 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.

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.

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.