

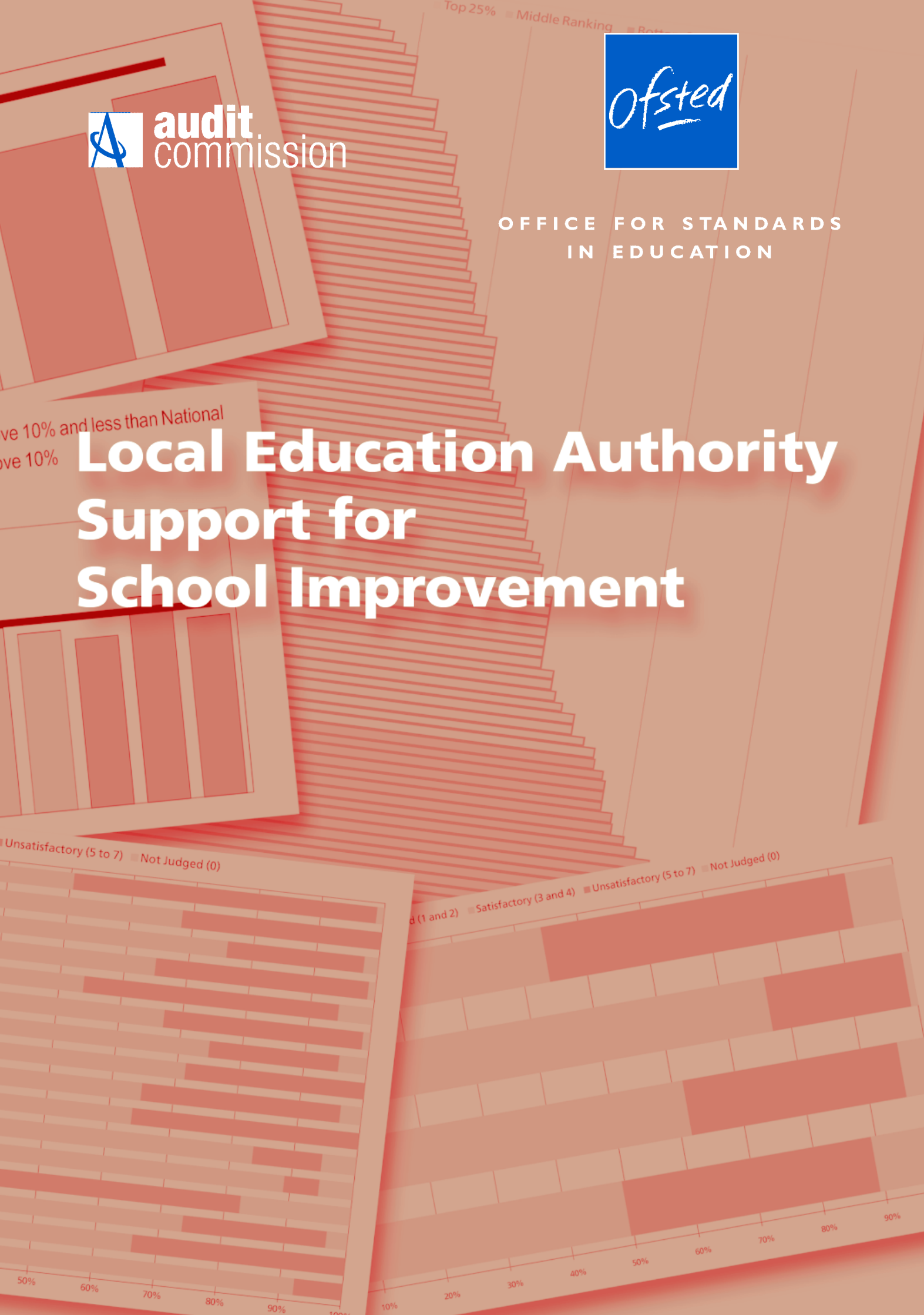


audit
commission



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

Local Education Authority Support for School Improvement





OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

Local Education Authority Support for School Improvement

London

The Stationery Office

© Crown Copyright 2001

All rights reserved.

Copyright in the typographical arrangement and design is vested in The Stationery Office Limited.
Applications for reproduction should be made in writing in the first instance to the Copyright Unit,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ.

First published 2001

ISBN 0 11 350113 7

Contents

	Introduction	1
1	Commentary	3
2	The policy context	7
3	The performance of LEAs	11
4	School improvement	17
5	Support for access to education	31
6	Support for provision for Special Educational Needs (SEN)	41
7	LEA management and management services	45
8	Conclusions and recommendations	51
Appendix	Measuring the LEA effect	55

Introduction

1. This report is based on the evidence of 91 inspections and ten return inspections of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) conducted by OFSTED and the Audit Commission between 1996 and the summer of 2000. The first eight inspections were pilots, carried out with the agreement of the LEAs concerned. The remainder were conducted by virtue of the Chief Inspector's powers under the 1997 Education Act. The statutory programme began in January 1998. This report looks forward to a further major publication following the completion of the cycle of LEA inspections in the Autumn of 2001.
2. The report therefore draws on evidence from the majority of English LEAs. It represents by far the largest body of data ever collected on LEA performance. It does not, however, at this stage seek to draw definitive conclusions; it is intended to stimulate debate on the role of LEAs, while pointing to areas in which their performance can be improved. It draws on examples of best practice. It seeks to pose questions, rather than offer final judgements. There are two reasons for caution. First, the inspections were conducted over a four-year period, during which the role of LEAs was changing rapidly, largely in response to action by central government. It would be surprising indeed if the LEAs inspected at the start of the process had not changed significantly by the end of it. Some of the evidence is, therefore, to that extent historical. Secondly, Ministers requested, and the Chief Inspector agreed, that inspections should initially concentrate on LEAs whose schools were performing below average. It was not assumed, nor did it prove to be the case, that such LEAs were themselves necessarily performing badly, but it is fair to say that the bias of inspection coverage to date has been towards those LEAs with the most difficult job to do.
3. An earlier, shorter, version of this report, based only on the first 40 inspections, was presented as a discussion paper to LEAs at two national conferences, which virtually all LEAs attended, in June and July 2000. The LEAs welcomed the chance to discuss the document, but expressed many detailed reservations. The paper was intended to provoke debate, and it did so. Some 25 LEAs or other organisations subsequently wrote to OFSTED, setting out their response, sometimes in great detail. A few such responses were unduly defensive; the majority, like the conferences, engaged in an open-minded way with the issues. They revealed considerable uncertainty about the future role of LEAs, some evidence of low morale and an overwhelming desire for stability. Most respondents, naturally enough, thought that the sample of 40 LEAs was not a sufficient basis on which to draw conclusions. The majority also took issue with at least some of the conclusions and recommendations. A minority welcomed the broad thrust of the paper. Almost all felt that the paper gave insufficient attention to good practice.
4. This report differs somewhat in emphasis from the earlier paper. The developing evidence has not borne out a few of the earlier, tentative, conclusions. On a number of issues it is now possible to say a great deal more than was the case a year ago. It is also possible to set out the inspection evidence more fully, because it has now reached a volume at which it can be recorded and retrieved electronically. The main judgements made by inspectors are now recorded numerically on a database, and the tables set out in this report are drawn from that source. All LEAs inspected to date have been informed of the gradings allocated to them, and the criteria for allocation of grades have been shared with the authorities.

5. The election of the Labour Government in 1997 and the subsequent enactment of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA) followed a lengthy period of change in the whole of local government which bore particularly heavily on LEAs. During the 1980s and early 1990s, repeated moves to delegate both funding and management responsibility to schools implied a diminution in the LEA role, and particular policies, most notably the introduction of grant-maintained status for schools, appeared, not least to the LEAs themselves, to call into question the very *raison d'être* of local education authorities. A strongly interventionist thrust on the part of central government reduced still further the direct powers of LEAs, for example over the curriculum, and elements of their authority, such as further education, were simply removed. A climate of recurrent financial austerity added to a general sense of increasing astringency, while the requirement across local government for compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) brought into question the function of local authorities as providers of services.
6. The task of LEAs was reducing in scope and significance, but not in difficulty or complexity. Their key job, the provision of school places, had to be undertaken in the context of more open enrolment and the availability of grant-maintained status, though neither innovation fully explains or excuses the complete impasse at which many authorities quickly arrived. At the same time, a proliferation of central initiatives, mostly directed to the improvement of schools, and a multiplication of funding sources, rendered an already complex task more so and, in some LEAs, engendered a degree of turmoil, as authorities repeatedly reorganised to meet ever-changing demands. Furthermore, the structure of local government itself underwent considerable change following, first, the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), by the Education Reform Act (1988), and subsequently the work of the Local Government Commission early in the 1990s. Over a decade, the number of LEAs has grown from about 100 to 150. The formation of new unitary authorities entailed, whatever the benefits, significant initial disruption both for the new authorities themselves and for the parent authorities. Moreover, so far as education is concerned, the change has resulted in a pattern of LEAs of widely varying size and statutory function, some of which made a difficult and uncertain start. The increase in the number of Local Authorities (LAs) has not, to state the obvious, made the recruitment of sufficient qualified staff easier. More generally, the reform of local government has left fundamental questions about the optimum size and structure of authorities, including education authorities, as far from resolution as ever, and, though it is far too early to make any judgement of the effects of the two recent Local Government Acts, the evidence of inspections tends to confirm that the quality of local political leadership remains unduly variable and sometimes inadequate.
7. When the inspection cycle began it was soon obvious that LEAs, considered collectively, were not in perfect health. Most were seeking a shift in their role and were, more explicitly than in the past, attempting to establish support for raising standards in schools as their central, though no means their entire, purpose. Many welcomed the focus of the Labour Government on "standards, not structures", with the assurance that there was a continued role for LEAs. As that role has been more fully elaborated, in the Excellence in Schools White Paper, then in the SSFA and subsequently in the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations, in the Role of the LEA in School Education policy paper and in Fair Funding, so its limitations have become more apparent.
8. The government has made it clear that it intends to continue with the main thrust of the policies of its predecessor, in that schools are to retain the main responsibility for their own improvement. They are not to be returned to the control of LEAs, but it is intended that they shall work in partnership with them and that LEAs shall exercise their functions so as to support schools' efforts to raise standards. The LEA's role involves setting strategic objectives and negotiating targets, allocating resources to priorities,

and providing monitoring, challenge, support and, where necessary, intervention. The rationale for this policy is that LEAs are well placed to support schools, since they possess extensive local knowledge, are locally accountable and have much experience in managing services that support schools. They are also in a good position to ensure that the educational provision in an area contributes to the Council's overall efforts to promote the well-being of children and families.

9. Over the four years of inspection there have been signs of improvement in LEAs' performance. That improvement, however, is from a low base and is by no means consistent across LEAs. Overall, most LEAs perform the majority of their functions satisfactorily, but there remains a great deal of unsatisfactory practice, and the public perception of all LEAs – indeed, of local government as a whole – has been repeatedly damaged by the poor work of a large minority, the performance of whose functions is so inadequate that it has precipitated intervention by central government.
10. There is no consistent pattern to that poor performance. The worst performing LEAs tend to serve disadvantaged communities, but so do some of the most impressive. No shire authority has yet required intervention, but the performance of a few has nevertheless left a great deal to be desired. Some of the worst performing authorities are very small; a few are very large. Their weaknesses are not confined to their support for school improvement, which covers a difficult and relatively new set of functions, but spread across some of the most basic functions of an LEA, particularly in relation to support for access to education and for Special Educational Needs (SEN). The latter is perhaps the weakest aspect of LEA work, perhaps not altogether surprisingly. LEAs are struggling to achieve strategic coherence and budgetary control against a statutory framework that accords uncontested priority to individual needs – uniquely within the whole of public provision.
11. In spite of the improvement referred to above, and confirmed with increasing frequency as LEAs are reinspected, performance management is still judged to be inadequate in too many LEAs, not least in relation to the critical link adviser role. Service plans are often ill-defined, specifications unclear and performance measures absent.
12. Best Value will submit service management to the disciplines of competition and challenge. Currently, these are present only in the best-performing LEAs. Above all, there is still, though diminishingly, a reluctance or inability to target support where it is most needed and to admit that, to achieve results, LEA resources need to be directed rigorously in inverse proportion to success. LEA plans repeatedly refer to “an entitlement” to support that covers all schools: an insistence that leaves them in the position of a physician intent on treating all patients, irrespective of whether or not they are sick.
13. What is true of most is not, however, true of all. Some LEAs, particularly among those recently inspected, are impressive organisations, and this report draws extensively on the good practice inspected in those LEAs. The best LEAs have a **clear definition of monitoring, challenge, intervention and support**; they use their resources providently, **targeting them to greatest need**; they make effective use of management information to direct their resources, so that they are not wasted on universal provision. They make **a clear distinction between the carrying out of their statutory functions and more general support**, which schools purchase. Through **effective performance management**, they are able to engender a consistent quality of service. They **consult well** and ensure that **decision-making is timely, open and transparent**, with the result that it has validity even when it is in some respects not popular. They take Best Value seriously **and are open to competition and challenge**. They have no automatic predilection, either for public sector or private sector provision, only a preference in favour of what works. They rigorously ask themselves:
 - “Do we need to do this?”
 - “Can someone else do it better?”
 - “Can it be done more cheaply?”
 They are well-led, professionally and politically. They understand well the implications of **multi-agency working** and are able to manage them at the operational, as well as the strategic level. Finally, they are genuinely committed and have viable strategies to **enhance schools' own capacity to sustain continuous improvement**.
14. The gulf between these LEAs and the worst performers is, however, too wide to be acceptable in public bodies. The least effective authorities do not promote school improvement. Often, they inhibit it,

- through a combination of poor political leadership and inept management, leading to waste of resources and to disillusionment in the schools. There are many reasons for poor LEA performance, but the factor that outweighs all others is poor political leadership at the local level – just as consistent and rational decision-making by members is invariably a feature of the best authorities. At its worst, poor political leadership can engender a culture of expedient decision-making and inept working practices that makes it difficult even for the most competent professional officers to function effectively. A climate of hopelessness is created that only fundamental change can dispel.
15. The government is attempting to accelerate that fundamental change in the worst LEAs through intervention, which may include use of the private sector. Until the reinspection of Hackney in November 2000, no LEA in which intervention has taken place had been reinspected. It is, however, worth noting that there have already been several instances of remarkably rapid improvement from a very low base where intervention has not been involved. The contributory factors to that improvement have been effective political leadership and professional management of high quality, combined with determination to address recommendations of the original critical inspection report.
 16. The key question for policy is whether the “LEA effect” exists. Much of current policy is predicated on the view that LEAs can assist schools to raise standards through the well-targeted provision of challenge and support. The evidence of inspection so far suggests that any such effect is relatively marginal overall, but significant, in particular aspects of schools’ and LEAs’ work, when the support provided by the LEAs is of good or very good quality. The challenge for the government and for the authorities must be to raise the performance of all to the level of the best. Nothing less will do.
 17. A still more disturbing implication of the inspections so far is that the “LEA effect” is much less influential on standards than socio-economic disadvantage. The correlation between the level of disadvantage in an authority and the performance of its schools remains, despite differential funding and many local and national initiatives, very close. This obviously casts some doubt on the current efficacy of LEAs as instruments for promoting social inclusion. Indeed, LEAs’ support for the most vulnerable children is among the most variable aspects of their work. Such support is often inherently difficult, requiring complex liaison between agencies. A large minority of LEAs have substantial remedial work to do before they can contribute confidently to that liaison.
 18. It would be wrong, though, to consider the performance of LEAs in isolation. If they are to be effective, they must surely function within a system in which all other elements are also effective. Too often, reports spoke of a “dependency culture”. It seems unlikely that that can exist solely because the LEA wishes it to; others must at least tolerate it. Headteachers, and more particularly governors, often seemed to inspectors to have an unrealistic and unhealthy view of what the modern LEA could offer, and a correspondingly reduced notion of their own role. Whether governors in particular are always able to exercise their very considerable powers adequately is an issue these inspections do not resolve, but which they pertinently raise.
 19. One consequence of government’s desire to improve the performance of LEAs has been a multiplication of detailed planning requirements. The inspection evidence does not suggest that this has so far had the desired effect, partly because of the complexity of the requirements, but partly also because of the sheer novelty of systematic planning in some authorities. All LEAs were required to submit an Education Development Plan (EDP) for approval by the Secretary of State. They were given considerable support by the Standards and Effectiveness Unit in formulating the plans. The plans were inspected by OFSTED, in some cases before approval, and in some, following approval, in the course of implementation. The reports contain many detailed criticisms. At their worst, the plans are little more than a menu of activities with little evidence of strategic intent. They do nothing to underpin progress and elicit little commitment from the schools; nor do they focus the standards agenda sufficiently on locally identified needs. More generally, the proliferation of plans has placed significant demands on LEAs which not all have found conducive to effective action. The bureaucratic burden, on schools and LEAs, has grown and though steps are being taken to reduce it, they had not taken effect during the period of these inspections.
 20. Strategic thinking is not a widespread strength, and the increasing complexity of the local scene lays a heavy onus on LEAs to achieve coherence from many strands of policy and many funding streams and

to liaise closely with many partners. Some succeed in doing so, and increasingly they are taking seriously the need to coordinate action with other departments of the Council and other public and private bodies. For others, the complexity of the job is clearly too much. The most consistent success in LEA work has been in areas such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, where the prescription is clear and the necessary actions feasible over a defined timescale.

21. This report does not, then, support the extreme view that all LEAs are failing, but neither does it support the very large claims that are sometimes made for them. Overall, the variability in the quality of LEA support for schools and the apparent slightness of the evidence for its effectiveness in raising standards are disappointing findings, although they remain at this stage tentative. The success or otherwise of LEAs is, however, most likely to be judged by their effectiveness in raising expectations and overcoming the effects of socio-economic disadvantage. The evidence as it currently stands does not suggest a positive overall conclusion.

22. LEAs have, increasingly over recent years, been grappling with a rapidly changing policy context, as government seeks improvement both in the performance of the authorities, and in their support for schools as part of an increase in the effectiveness and responsiveness of local government as a whole. These two policy objectives are not intrinsically incompatible with each other, but in combination they impose certain strains. For example, over issues of social inclusion, the government is seeking a more integrated approach across the whole of government, on the grounds that separate professionalisms pursuing different objectives within different departments will only accidentally, if at all, meet the full range of needs as experienced by the citizen. In order to coordinate its work on behalf of children with other interested agencies, such as social services or health, LEAs need to look outwards and give time, which may be considerable, to liaison and joint working. In relation to schools particularly, however, they simultaneously face a large and growing set of demands.
23. Among those demands are the requirements laid on of the Council to devise, consult over and publish a wide range of plans, and to contribute to others. For education specifically the following are required:
- the Education Development Plan (EDP);
 - the Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan;
 - the Behaviour Support Plan (BSP);
 - the Asset Management Plan;
 - the School Organisation Plan (SOP);
 - the Class-size Plan;
 - Local Admissions Arrangements;
 - The Ethnic Minority Achievement Plan;
 - Headship Training Plans; and
 - ICT (information and communication technology) Development Plan.
24. Taken together, these requirements represent a considerable burden, particularly on small LEAs, and on schools, which must regularly be consulted even where they are not actually involved in groups working towards the formulation or implementation of plans. The formulation of plans has in many LEAs left little time for contribution to the corporate working of the Council.
25. During the last year of inspection, Councils were themselves beginning to anticipate, or implement, the requirements of the Local Government Acts 1999 and 2000. The latter received the Royal Assent only in July 2000, so that consideration of its effects falls largely outside the scope of this report. It seeks to promote greater efficiency and transparency in local government by separation of the executive from the scrutiny function. It requires local authorities to move towards one of three forms of executive:
- a directly elected mayor who appoints two or more councillors to an executive;
 - a Council leader, elected by the full Council, who appoints two or more councillors to an executive; and
 - a directly elected mayor, with an officer of the authority, appointed by the Council as a Council manager.
26. These arrangements were clearly signalled in the 1998 White Paper, and a number of authorities inspected during the last year were already reviewing their arrangements. Inspectors made judgements, where appropriate, on any discernible effects from the point of view of education on the

quality of leadership given by elected members and on the speed, efficiency and openness of decision-making.

27. Predictably at this stage, the structures themselves appeared to make less difference than the capacity of the members to understand and operate them. In Councils where there is a strong tradition of accountability and assuring value for money, the new structures worked well; so did the more traditional structures where a similar culture obtained. Mostly, though, the changed arrangements appear to be well-considered (as in Lewisham) and are having a beneficial effect (as in the City of York, Barnsley and Doncaster). In a very few cases, such as Bradford, restructuring had at the time of inspection achieved little more than reinforce the Council's propensity for taking its eye off the ball. Elsewhere, for example in Hartlepool, enhanced arrangements for scrutiny are increasing accountability and helping to ensure better informed decision-making.
28. A number of detailed issues have arisen. For example, schools and other stakeholders complain of being marginalised by new scrutiny arrangements, and the involvement of diocesan and parental representatives in decision-making is an issue that remains to be resolved. Decisions which would previously have been discussed, with written reports, at education committee meetings may now be taken in meetings between the director of education and the lead member for education. The extent to which this becomes public varies, since there is at present little consistency in what is recorded. The role of scrutiny panels and the extent of public access also vary considerably between Councils.
29. At the same time as they were undergoing, or preparing for, changes in structure, local authorities were also required to seek continuous improvement through changed management processes. Best Value requires Councils to submit all their services to rigorous review over a five-year period. Those reviews should be conducted according to the "four Cs"; that is, they should examine the extent to which authorities:
 - **consult** local taxpayers, service users, partners and the wider business community in the setting of new performance targets;
 - **compare** their performance with that of others across a range of relevant indicators, taking into account the views both of service users and potential users;
 - **challenge** why, how and by whom a service is provided; and
 - use fair and open **competition**, wherever practicable, as a means of securing efficient and effective service.
30. These are not, of course, new or arcane criteria. They are features of well-run organisations, and certainly are present in the best-run LEAs. For example, the majority of LEAs consult schools over:
 - major proposals for change, such as the reorganisation of schools;
 - the implementation of national policies;
 - the allocation of resources; and
 - the evaluation of the LEA's success in carrying out its functions.
31. Consultation works best where:
 - sufficient time is allowed for it;
 - the LEA asks schools and other stakeholders what support they want (not merely what they think about a ready-made policy);
 - it is clear what is a matter of principle and what is up for discussion;
 - written consultation documents are supplemented by meetings; and
 - the main responses to consultation are summarised and, where the LEA does not accept the arguments adduced, it sets out its rationale for not doing so.
32. Effective consultation is a main function of a well-organised LEA, although this too imposes its own tensions. It was common for headteachers to comment that they felt over-consulted, and for governors to complain of the volume of documentation to be read, yet these were not matters wholly within the control of the LEA. Consultation involves more than seeking consensus. In the best LEAs, it leads

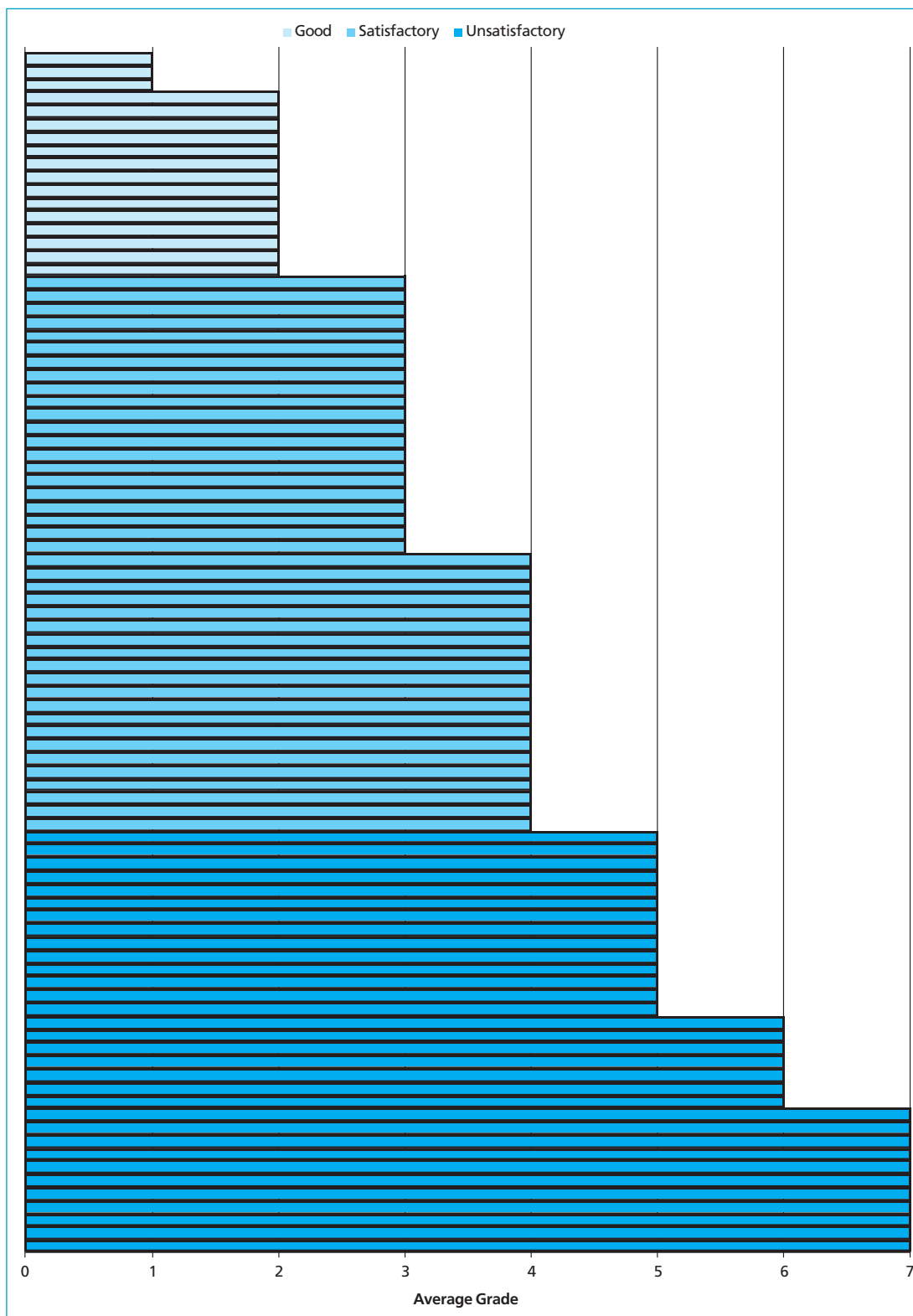
- seamlessly into more detailed work on implementation through networks of groups of headteachers, governors and others. Such a strategy shares with schools the onus for work, not solely on their own improvement, but on the progress of issues of common interest. However, it can also impose a considerable burden on schools. The overall message of the reports was that consultation was an essential feature of a well-run LEA, but that its amount should be limited.
- 33.** Well run LEAs also compare both their costs and their performance against those of all other LEAs and of comparable LEAs, using bench-marking data. They ask themselves seriously questions such as:
- Are our services “best in class”?
 - Which of our functions are relatively expensive?
 - In which areas are we relatively cost-effective?
 - How does the performance of our schools compare with those of similar LEAs and all LEAs?
 - Are we adrift/outstanding against any of the standard performance indicators? If so, why?
- 34.** It is part of the role of elected members to ask these questions and to ensure that rigorous self-criticism permeates the professional management, so that the LEA can assure itself that it is securing the best possible service, as cost-effectively as possible, for schools, parents and pupils. To ask these questions with full rigour assumes neutrality on the issue of whether the LEA provides the service itself or secures its provision from elsewhere.
- 35.** On this issue, LEAs do not start with a clean sheet. They are large employers, and they have obligations to their employees. Some, like Bury and Brent, have nevertheless asked themselves what, as a minimum, they need to do. Nevertheless, it is comparatively rare to find LEAs embracing challenge and competition by asking themselves:
- “Do we need to do this?”
 “Does it need to be done at all?”
 “Could someone else do it better or as well and more cheaply?”
- 36.** The largest single change bearing directly on LEAs during the period, however, was the enactment of the SSFA, which laid on LEAs a new duty to carry out all their functions with a view to promoting high standards in schools. A responsibility for standards was (arguably) implicit in previous legislation, but this was the first explicit statement that LEAs had a duty not merely to make provision, but to secure improvement in the standards attained. As such, it represented a significant shift in focus, albeit one towards which the majority of LEAs had in any event been moving.
- 37.** LEAs are required to set out how they propose to discharge this duty in an EDP which is presented to the Secretary of State for approval. The EDP defines the LEA’s and schools’ targets for raising attainment, and outlines the school improvement programme, showing how the priorities identified are related to empirical evidence of local need. The selection of priorities was, however, by no means a free choice. LEAs were required to have regard for the national priorities – naturally enough, since the EDP was centrally funded. In a sense, therefore, the function of the EDP was to translate the national standards agenda into the most locally relevant shape by giving particular emphases as the audit of local performance dictated. The involvement of elected members in the precise formulation of the EDP was not usually decisive.
- 38.** The period covered by the inspections was dominated by the formulation, approval and implementation of the EDP. The inspection reports themselves naturally reflect the different stages LEAs had reached at the time of inspection. Comment on the quality of EDPs is found later in this report. For now, it is enough to say that the first EDP cycle was, for many LEAs, an uncomfortable experience, from which it is important that lessons be learnt. Some of that lack of comfort arises from the EDP itself. It is:
- a document setting out compliance with policy requirements;
 - a working plan; and
 - a bid for funding.
- It is often least effective as the second of these, both because the focus of officials judging the plans was on the first, and because some LEAs set out not to define a strategy, but to seek funding for

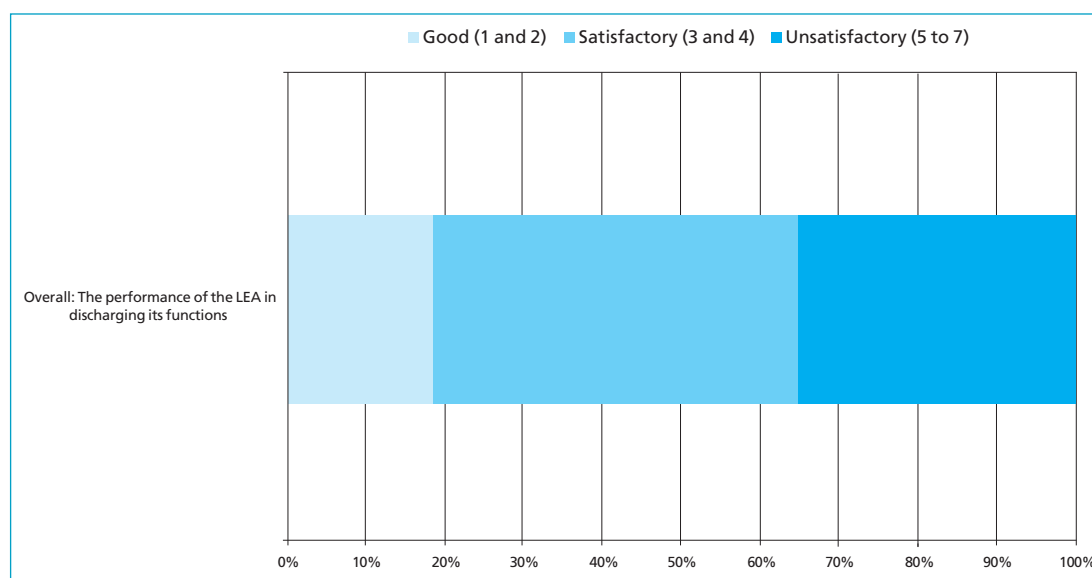
continuing arrangements. Moreover, the targeting of support initially envisaged in an EDP sometimes needed to be amended in the light of later initiatives, such as Excellence in Cities (EiC), or the launch of an Education Action Zone (EAZ).

- 39.** Consultation over, and implementation of, the EDP gave rise to considerable debate over what was the most potentially fruitful relationship between an LEA and its schools. Success in implementing the EDP largely depended on resolving that debate. The government was clear, and set out its intention in the Code of Practice for LEA school relations, that it did not want increased interference in schools, though the SSFA gives LEAs extended powers of intervention where strictly necessary. The pressure for further delegation of funding was not relaxed, and the Fair Funding regulations defined more precisely what LEAs might retain and for what reasons. Support for largely autonomous schools remained at the heart of the LEA role, and, if that role was to be exercised successfully, it had to be done collaboratively.
- 40.** The management of LEAs during this period was dominated, therefore, by management of change – at the corporate, departmental and service level. The process is not complete. Few, not least in LEAs themselves, doubted the need for change. Many had reservations about its pace or the sequence in which changes were implemented. Some LEAs were overwhelmed by the demands; more coped; the best anticipated developments and moved even faster than the timescales set out nationally.

The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements

1. Overall: the performance of the LEA in discharging its functions



*The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements***2. The percentage of LEAs inspected judged good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory in their performance overall**

- 41.** The overwhelming impression gained from the 91 inspections conducted to date is one of extreme variability. A majority (59 out of 91 LEAs) are performing satisfactorily or well. An unexpectedly large number of LEAs (17), however, has been found to be performing so large a number of functions poorly as to require some form of intervention by the Secretary of State. These include some of the country's major cities, such as Bradford, Leeds, Leicester, Bristol and Liverpool; large towns, like Walsall, Rotherham and Rochdale; and London boroughs, like Hackney, Islington, Haringey, Southwark and Waltham Forest, together with Metropolitan Districts, like Sandwell. No shire authority has yet required intervention.
- 42.** There is no clear link between LEA performance and size. The low-performing LEAs range in size from Leeds, which serves a population of three-quarters of a million, to London boroughs which serve 200,000 or fewer. Similarly, the best-performing LEAs include some very large shire counties, but also a substantial number of small London boroughs, two small new unitaries and the largest, as well as one of the smallest, of the Metropolitan Districts. The full list is: the Corporation of London, Coventry, Kensington and Chelsea, Warwickshire, Lewisham, Birmingham, Oxfordshire, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hartlepool, Newham, Wandsworth, Barking and Dagenham, the City of York, North Yorkshire, Solihull, Hertfordshire, Camden and Bury. Size is not a determining factor in overall success. However, there are certainly aspects of LEA work, such as the provision of school places, which are, as later sections of this report argue, more difficult to manage for small LEAs, working within large conurbations. The experiences of Hackney, Islington and Southwark also suggest that small LEAs may be more vulnerable to changes in personnel at senior level.
- 43.** All the low-performing LEAs serve populations which are disadvantaged overall, or contain large elements of disadvantage. Leeds is the least disadvantaged overall, in that its socio-economic profile closely matches that of the nation as a whole. The other LEAs in this category serve areas which are broadly more disadvantaged than average. So too, however, do half the high-performing authorities. Disadvantage is not a determinant of poor LEA performance, but there can be little doubt that it makes the job harder, particularly when, as in Bradford, Rotherham, Sheffield and Liverpool, it is combined with a history of parsimonious expenditure on, for example, school buildings, or when the schools themselves are unable to balance their budgets, as in Manchester or Rochdale.
- 44.** The degree of variation in LEA performance may be illustrated by consideration of the inner London LEAs. The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) was disbanded in 1990, and replaced by 13 separate LEAs. All these LEAs had been inspected (and three reinspected) by May 2000.
- 45.** All these LEAs and their schools face many challenges: low attainment, high levels of poverty, crime and social exclusion; high pupil mobility; large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, substantial

- proportions of pupils for whom English is a second language, and who speak a very large number of first languages; high staff turnover and difficulties in recruitment. None of these are unique to London, but London schools have them all, and in greater intensity than is usual elsewhere. Partly because the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) – the government’s expectation of expenditure on education – reflects disadvantage, as well as the greater cost of provision in London, these LEAs, and their schools, are much better funded than other LEAs.
- 46.** The quality of these LEAs, as judged by inspection teams, displays extreme polarity. Seven of them are among the best LEAs in the country: they are impressive organisations – well-managed, innovative, dynamic, challenging. Four of them, by contrast, are among the worst-run. This polarity in the performance of the LEAs was not, however, matched by a similar polarity in the performance of their schools. The schools in most of the LEAs when inspected had GCSE and end of key stage results well below national averages, though often comparable to LEAs outside London with similar socio-economic characteristics. The most recent data (1999) shows some improvement at Key Stage 2, with four of the LEAs having results in line with national figures. However, only two of the LEAs had higher grade GCSE results which were close to the national average. There is very little correlation between judgements about the overall quality of the LEAs and test and GCSE results, either in terms of the raw results or the rate of improvement. There is some relationship between the quality of the LEAs and the education provided in their schools, as judged by OFSTED inspections. The better London LEAs tend to have a higher proportion of schools providing education of a good quality, and a lower proportion causing concern or in special measures than the worse performers.
- 47.** This is, however, a modest outcome from the level of resources allocated to these LEAs and their schools, and poses, rather sharply, the question, “How much value do LEAs add to school improvement?” In a general sense, the question appears almost to answer itself. All objective evidence suggests that the school system as a whole is steadily improving. Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools’ (HMCI’s) annual reports in recent years have pointed to generally improving standards and quality. Crucially, the government’s attainment targets, which initially appeared very ambitious, now look very likely to be met. Moreover, the school system has, over the last decade and a half, shown the flexibility to respond to repeated reform. The introduction of the GCSE, the National Curriculum, Local Management of Schools (LMS) and the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies were all major reforms, in whose implementation LEAs were centrally involved. This is not a record of obvious failure.
- 48.** The question remains, however: how effective are LEAs in their specific contribution to the standards agenda? Much rests on the assumption that by the provision of challenge and support LEAs can materially contribute to a significant rise in standards. OFSTED has sought to test this assumption against the evidence of inspection. The most that can be said is that it is not definitely disproved by the evidence, but neither is it borne out. The evidence is set out in detail in the appendix to this report.
- 49.** We have made the assumption that if it is true that the performance of LEA functions can have a measurable impact on school standards, that impact should be most obvious where the functions are well, or very well, performed. We have accordingly sought correlations at three levels:
- between our judgements of LEA quality and the standard school performance indicators;
 - between our composite judgements of LEA performance in broad categories, such as school improvement, and the corresponding judgements on schools in OFSTED inspections; and
 - between our judgements of specific LEA activities (such as support for literacy) and the performance of schools in those particular areas.
- 50.** This has been a detailed, but not exhaustive, investigation. There is a good deal more data that remains to be fully analysed – and we shall do that analysis at the conclusion of the inspection cycle. It is, however, worth saying that the “LEA effect” has not proved easy to find – and that itself must raise important questions about value for money. There is, for example, no correlation between OFSTED’s overall judgement of the LEA and the global performance of its schools. There is little correlation between our composite judgements of large areas of LEA work and schools’ performance in those areas. There is some correlation between the quality of LEA work in specific aspects such as literacy and numeracy and schools’ performance in those aspects, but only where the LEA work is good or very good (i.e. graded 1 or 2) and where the leadership of services in support of school improvement is also

good. Our tentative view at present would therefore be that only the best LEA work makes a clear and consistent difference and – equally importantly – that any “LEA effect” is a much less important influence on pupil attainment than socio-economic disadvantage.

51. It would seem to follow that, if LEAs are to make a significant contribution to raising standards nationally, a considerable improvement is needed, not merely in the worst performing LEAs, but among the satisfactory performers, too. This is an area in which it really does seem to be true that “only the best is good enough”. Moreover, that improvement is needed not only in the functions specifically directed towards raising academic standards, but also in relation to access and special educational needs. However, the inspection reports are very clear about the main factors that underlie inadequate performance by LEAs.
52. The reasons for poor performance are various, but the worst inadequacies stem from a defective infrastructure characterised by poor corporate management and leadership, above all by elected members. The inspections show that the leadership and advice given by officers have more strengths than weaknesses, but this is not in general true of members. Poor corporate working involves:
 - poor strategic management by elected members;
 - ineffective leadership and management by senior officers;
 - an inability to recruit and retain suitably qualified and experienced staff;
 - poor financial management, and a lack of openness in financial decision-making; and
 - a poor working relationship with schools.
53. These factors are of course interdependent. Where elected members provide inadequate, misguided or excessively interfering leadership, officers with initiative seek posts elsewhere, and it proves difficult to attract others of equivalent calibre. Frequent changes in professional leadership, or long periods during which posts remain unfilled, give rise to incoherence, or impasse, as in Leeds, which was without a substantive director of education for four years. Where members fail to establish clear priorities, budget-setting cannot be founded on well-understood principles. This can lead to expedient decision-making which can, at worst, give rise to mismanagement characterised, for example in Waltham Forest, by sudden expenditure freezes. In these circumstances, the LEA appears to its schools at best capricious, at worst incompetent. Trust is damaged, and the confidence of professional officers fatally undermined. In the worst LEAs, competent officers despaired of doing an effective job in an impossible context. Performance management systems broke down, objectives were not set, communication did not occur.
54. The importance of trust between LEAs and schools is abundantly clear. The best LEAs – indeed, most LEAs – now accept that schools are largely autonomous institutions and that the core-task of the LEA is to reinforce that autonomy and make it effective. LEAs cannot control schools, but can and should seek to influence them through persuasion and the authority that ultimately springs, not from statute, but from being seen to make a contribution. That depends, as has been said many times, not least by the Audit Commission, on establishing a confidence in the schools that the LEA is well intentioned, fair-dealing, effective and expert.
55. Once that trust is gone, it requires leadership of an exceptional nature to restore it, and this can give rise to a breakdown in relationships between the LEA and its schools. In avoiding that breakdown, and in restoring an authority to health – as, indeed in establishing a clear strategy, an appropriate tone and decent working practices in the first place – the influence of elected members is crucial.
56. It would be wrong, though, to suggest that the whole responsibility for failure, or the whole onus for achieving improvement, must necessarily lie solely with members, or even with the LEA as a corporate whole. A disquieting number of inspection reports continue to refer to a culture of dependency in some LEAs. That does not occur solely because the LEA wishes it to, but only where the schools are prepared to accept it or where there is a gap in leadership that the LEA is driven to fill. There are hints in the reports that that vacancy most often occurs in the area of school governance. LEAs provide copious information, high quality training and good administrative support for governors, but this is not enough to equip them to monitor and evaluate the standards achieved in the school, or to assess the strategies for raising them. “Challenge” to the management of schools is properly a function of the

LEA, but on a day to day basis it is also, and more usually, a function of effective governance. Often it appeared not to be well-performed. The effectiveness of LEAs cannot, we suggest, be considered separately from the functioning of the system as a whole, and there is some evidence of a gap in this area.

57. The evidence of reinspections, although not large as yet, nevertheless suggests that improvement is possible, even from a very low base and may, in the right circumstances, be very rapid. Ten reinspections have been conducted (two of them of Calderdale). Not all of the LEAs reinspected were originally performing poorly or very poorly. Kent and Buckinghamshire were not, although both had weaknesses which warranted a revisit (and both had improved).
58. Seven of the nine LEAs had been found to have improved at the time of reinspection, though not sufficiently so (in 1999) in the case of Hackney and Calderdale. Three, Tower Hamlets, Manchester and Barnsley, had improved very rapidly and in some aspects of their work almost to the point of being unrecognisable. The common factors leading to improvement in the most rapidly improving LEAs were:
- highly competent professional leadership from the director;
 - political backing; and
 - a determination across the authority to address the issues raised in the inspection.

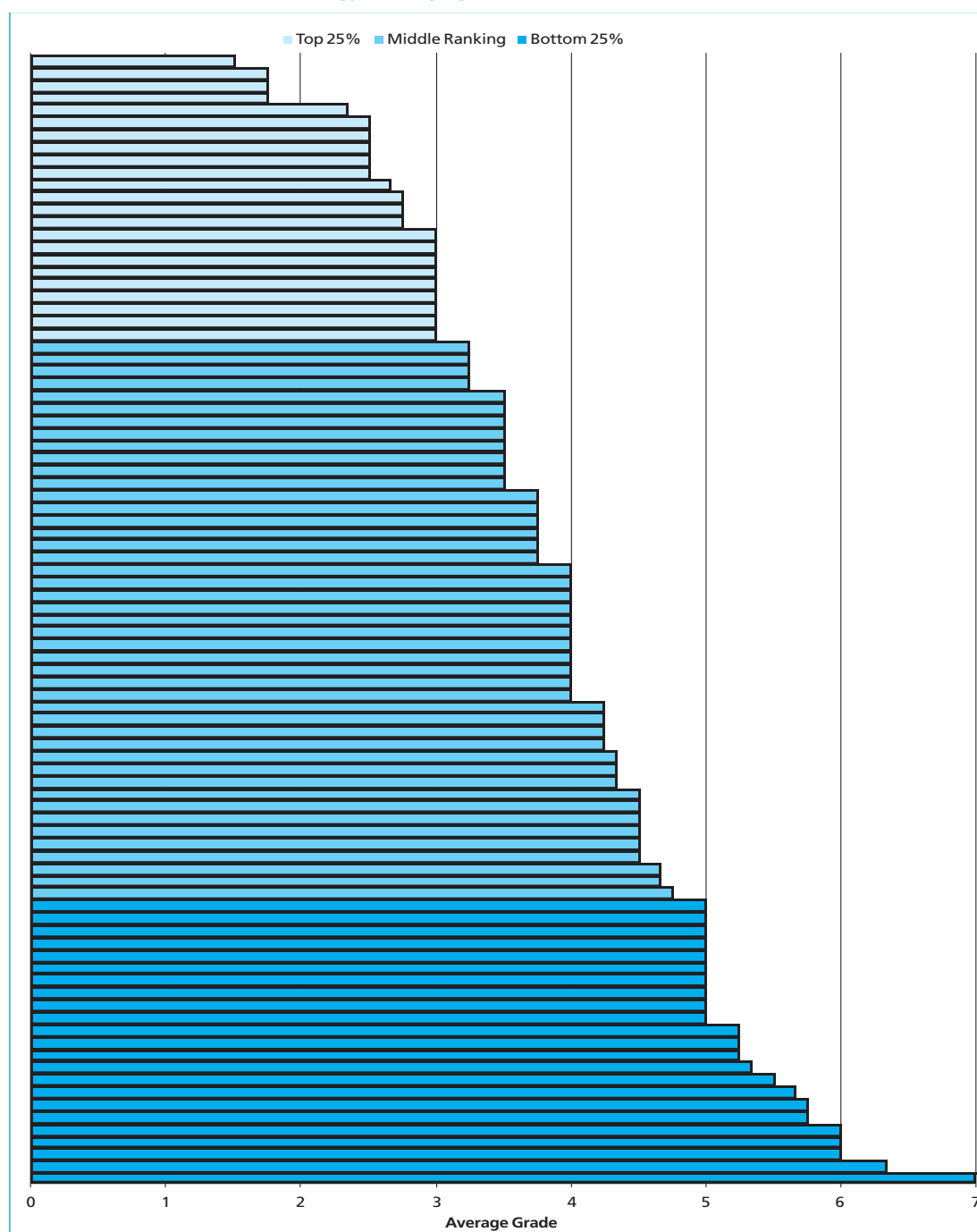
None of the LEAs reinspected had, at the time of reinspection, been subject to “outsourcing”, which therefore remains untested as a strategy for improvement. All, or most, had received some support from the Standards and Effectiveness Unit.

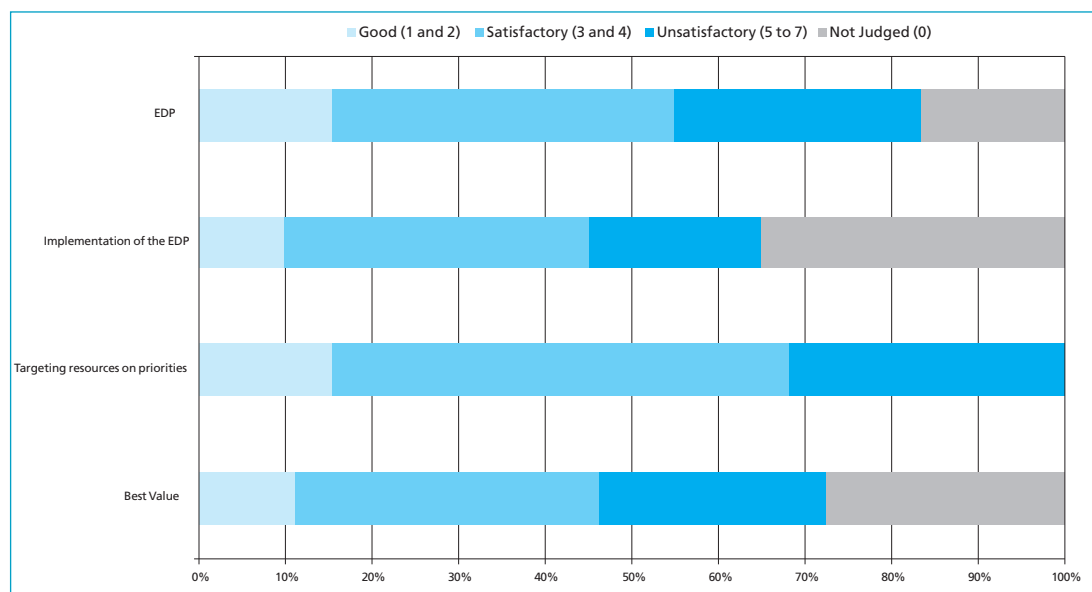
59. By contrast, two LEAs, Sandwell and Southwark, declined during the period following their original inspection. In both, the original inspection report referred to a potential for improvement which rapidly dissipated, owing, in Sandwell to a particularly misguided financial decision and in Southwark to a poorly managed delegation, combined with a chronic difficulty in appointing key staff. In both LEAs, the schools lost confidence in the education department. Nevertheless, the important message remains that, given the right leadership, improvement can occur.

60. Overall judgements were made of LEAs' strategy for school improvement, and of the quality of the support provided. Good practice was seen in both respects, but it was outweighed by that which was less than satisfactory. In all four of the categories within which the strategy for school improvement was judged, the majority of LEAs were at least satisfactory, but the proportion judged to be good was lower than that judged unsatisfactory.

The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements

1. The school improvement strategy: average grades



*The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements***2. The percentage of LEAs inspected judged good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory in their performance for school improvement strategy**

61. LEAs are required by the SSFA to set out in their EDP how they propose to discharge their functions with a view to promoting high standards in schools. Judgements were made of the EDP in 83 per cent of inspection reports: 15 per cent were good, 40 per cent satisfactory and 28 per cent unsatisfactory. Thus, a third of the plans inspected were judged not to be helpful working documents. The most common, and crucial, weakness was a lack of connection between the priorities set and the detailed activities and actions proposed. Too often, the latter appeared to be merely a continuation of the LEA's current work, with no shift of strategic focus. Other common weaknesses were:

- lack of connection between the audit of performance and the targeting of activities;
- insufficient information on resourcing;
- inadequate success criteria;
- excessively numerous activities;
- ill-defined responsibilities;
- lack of logical sequencing; and
- overlap between priorities.

For the other aspects of school improvement strategy – implementation of the EDP, targeting of resources to priorities and securing best value – the proportions of good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory judgements followed the same pattern as for the EDP. About a third of LEAs are, despite much government pressure, still able neither to plan, nor implement plans, adequately.

Monitoring, intervention, challenge, support

62. These four concepts are at the heart of the LEA's role in support of school improvement. If the LEA is performing the associated functions adequately, it is taking reasonable steps to meet its statutory duties under the SSFA. Standards in schools may, nevertheless, not be rising, but in that case the failure does not lie in the LEA. These terms are, however, somewhat variously interpreted. They need closer definition to serve the purposes of national policy, rather than the institutional needs of LEAs.

Monitoring

63. Monitoring involves the collection of information in relation to school and pupil performance and statutory compliance. Nationally available data (from OFSTED, Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)) on the performance of pupils are increasingly copious and powerful. Inspection adds significantly more information. Data on attendance and exclusions are immediately transmissible electronically to LEAs. Evidence of

non-compliance, for example with the National Curriculum or the provision specified in SEN statements, is likely to come from reports, reviews, parental complaints, scrutiny by school governors, visits by educational psychologists, education welfare officers (EWOs), etc. There is no need for LEAs to visit all schools repeatedly in order to monitor them. Although monitoring visits do not constitute a breach of the Code of Practice, under Best Value, LEAs should ask: do we need to do this? The answer, often, is no. Indeed, a prime objective of monitoring may be to **trigger** a visit. LEAs should not suppose that monitoring **entails** visiting, although it may occasionally lead to intervention, which may involve a visit.

Intervention

64. The SSFA (sections 14–17) defines an LEA's powers of intervention in schools. These are broadly:

- a power to issue a formal warning;
- a power to appoint additional governors; and
- a power to suspend a governing body's right to a delegated budget.

These are powers of last resort, intended to apply only in a small minority of schools (in most LEAs) where standards are unacceptably low or there has been a serious breakdown in the way the school is managed or governed, or where the safety of pupils or staff is threatened. The presumption is that powers of intervention apply **only** in such cases, not in the generality of schools. An LEA may also, self-evidently, on occasions need to visit schools, on the basis of evidence of emerging problems, to prevent a situation occurring in which the use of these powers is necessary.

65. In practice, many LEAs continue to insist on what is in one sense an intervention in all schools. An intervention is an action through which the LEA incurs expenditure (other than that defrayed through a school's delegated budget), and in so doing requires a school to take action the school would not otherwise have taken. An advisory/inspection visit is in that sense an intervention. It is disruptive of the school's normal procedures, entailing, as it invariably does, a significant amount of the headteacher's time. Many schools, particularly primary schools, welcome such visits, but this is not an argument for considering them as integral to the LEA's functions of monitoring and necessary intervention. Where schools want such visits, they should pay for them, and they should do so through **comparing** alternatives and establishing what is thought appropriate for the school.

Challenge

66. The notion of **challenge** arises particularly in relation to the setting of performance targets. It is possible to extrapolate from the performance of a cohort of pupils at, say, 11 that their performance at 14 or 16 will fall within a given range, on the assumptions:

- that the cohort does not change significantly; and
- that it makes the expected progress.

However, if all pupils make the **expected** progress, and no more, from a given baseline, overall standards will not rise. Schools, or at least some schools (that is, those performing no better than the average for similar schools), should therefore set targets which are above projections, on the assumption that their provision will change, so as to secure greater added value.

67. Where schools understand this process, LEAs do not need to involve themselves in extensive discussion with them. There is nothing requiring any contribution external to the school, other than that which is provided through national dissemination of benchmarking data. Nothing more is involved than simple arithmetic and recognition of the fact that the school is, if this is the case, performing no better than comparable schools. However, securing a rise in standards beyond projections is not simple. It is, to some extent, taken care of by the existence of national strategies which work, but it nevertheless remains the basic, and most difficult, task for school management and governance to identify the changes in provision which **lead**, via **improvements in quality**, to a rise in **standards**. Many schools are capable of this. It is those which are not which benefit from challenge and intervention.

Support

68. All schools at times may need, and most benefit from, **support**. Some, such as very small schools, or schools in very disadvantaged contexts, are likely to need regular access to support. For most,

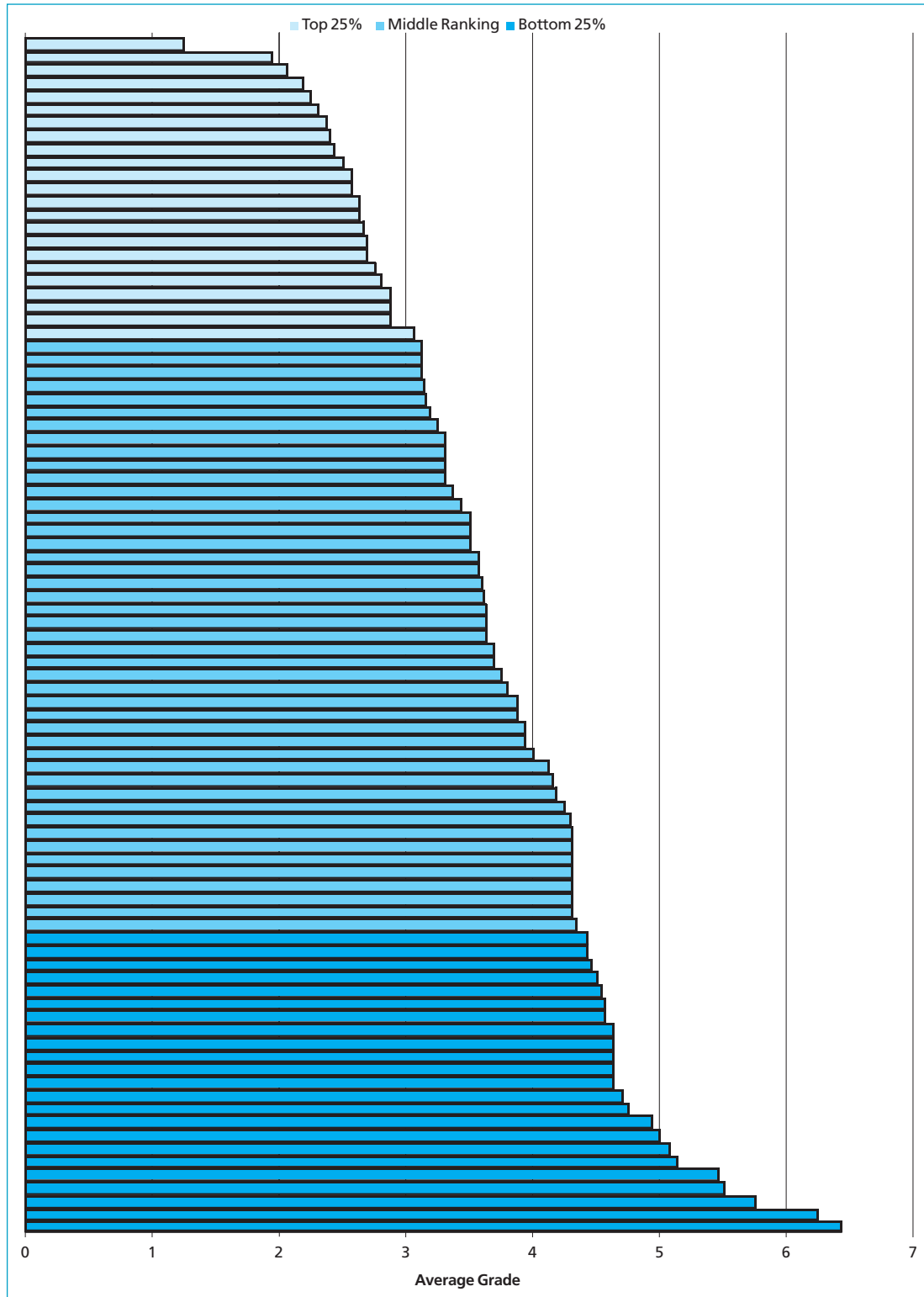
however, that support most helpfully consists of detailed **diagnosis**, leading to **recommendations**, such as inspection provides. Schools may feel that they need more than this, or that they need it more often, or in more detail. If so, under Fair Funding, they should pay for it.

69. There is, however, a potentially (sometimes actually) worthwhile role for the LEA to help create the conditions for self-sustaining continuous improvement, through reinforcing both a school's capacity for self-diagnosis, and its exercise of consumer choice. That can be accomplished by the school utilising analytical and management skills. When those competencies have to be acquired, the LEA can assist the school in securing those skills. That assistance cannot be delivered solely by link inspector/adviser visits, nor is supported self-review best considered as a preparation for inspection. Rather, it should be viewed as development, managed by the school, using analytical and management capacities which may need to be acquired. Where that is the case, LEAs should, as part of a thrust to ever-increasing delegation, seek to assist that acquisition.
70. The inspection reports show an unacceptable variability in LEAs' performance of these key functions. Overall, 15 per cent of LEAs were judged to be good in this respect, 40 per cent satisfactory and 45 per cent unsatisfactory. However, the LEAs inspected in the last year improved considerably, in response to the Code of Practice and as the task of redefining their relationship with their schools became more familiar. The proportion of those performing unsatisfactorily fell to about a quarter, while the proportion of those doing well rose to two fifths. Five of the LEAs that demonstrated good practice were London boroughs. Here and elsewhere the features contributing to quality were:
- clear definition of the respective functions of schools and LEA, with adequate resourcing;
 - close, but not cosy, relationships, with schools accepting that the LEA had the right to challenge them;
 - high calibre LEA staff, usually link advisers or inspectors, who had credibility with schools and were able to provide, not only rigorous evaluation, but also strategies for improvement;
 - a preparedness to "take on" complacent schools;
 - detailed knowledge of schools, supported by effective use of good performance data; and
 - effective targeting of the work of the service, based on the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success.
71. Even in the best LEAs, there was some reluctance to concentrate the resources retained to deliver the statutory functions set out in the SSFA on the most needy schools. In part, this was related to a reluctance on the part of some headteachers and governors to accept full accountability for managing their institutions. Even where it was a stated purpose of the LEA, rigorously pursued, to combat it, a comfortable (or sometimes, on the part of governors, anxious) dependency too often persisted. Few LEAs, moreover, had convincing evidence of any impact of their strategies for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support, and almost all had experienced difficulty in attracting and retaining staff of sufficiently high calibre, particularly to support secondary schools.
72. In the less well-managed services, staff tended to be overloaded and of variable quality. The general levels of service available to schools, their costs and the criteria for deployment of staff were not clear. Data were not effectively used: in the worst cases, the credibility of the entire LEA was damaged where advisers attempted to guide senior managers whose understanding exceeded their own. Coverage of special schools or Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) was sometimes lacking.
73. The overall picture is one of great inconsistency, both across LEAs and within particular LEAs. That inconsistency reflects inadequate performance management of services in many LEAs (a third, even of those most recently inspected) and also – a related point – the absence of a national framework of competencies required by local authority advisers and inspectors. As a minimum, adequate performance management requires:
- clear definition of objectives, tasks, expected outputs and outcomes;
 - careful monitoring and evaluation of work and its impact;
 - effective induction and mentoring;
 - opportunities for training and other professional development (including joint working);

- opportunities for discussion of performance, with careful feedback, not least on written outputs; and
 - leadership which sets clear expectations and models high standards.
- 74.** This is, of course, no more than a list of truisms, but the frequent absence of what is obviously necessary is striking evidence, not of LEAs' incapacity to understand what is required, but their inability to afford it, given the current volume of their work. Our view is therefore that the current pattern of visiting undertaken by the majority of LEAs is neither consistent with the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success, nor compatible with the need adequately to resource the well-planned and expensive interventions that are sometimes required in the most difficult schools, and which are at the heart of the LEA's role.
- 75.** It is fair to add also that the salary structure for LEA advisers (or the LEAs' incapacity to pay over the odds) now makes it difficult to attract candidates with management experience at a sufficiently high level. A number of LEAs are seeking to address this problem by making use of seconded headteachers or deputies. They have credibility as managers, but usually lack experience as inspectors (and their management experience may be restricted to one or two schools). They therefore have training needs, which often cannot be met adequately within a relatively brief secondment of, usually, not more than a year.
- 76.** The link adviser role is of key significance. For most LEAs, it is the linchpin for their support of schools. That it is so often inadequately performed – indeed that there is no agreed definition of what adequacy would look like – seems to us to constitute a severe limitation on the overall effectiveness of LEAs. This gives rise to a recommendation discussed later in this report.
- 77.** The following sections discuss detailed aspects of LEA support for school improvement.

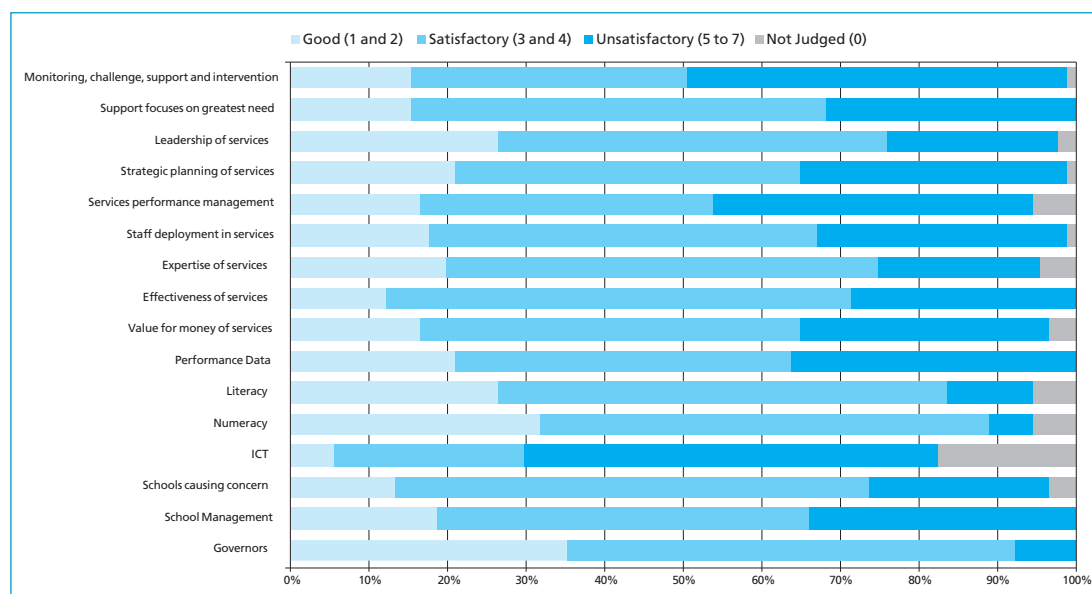
The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements

1. The school improvement support: average grades



The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements

2. The percentage of LEAs inspected judged good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory in their performance for school improvement support



Support for the use of performance data

78. About 22 per cent of all the LEAs inspected were judged to be performing well in this aspect of their work, 43 per cent were satisfactory, and 35 per cent unsatisfactory. However, this is an area in which practice is developing very rapidly, and there were clear signs of improvement in the most recently inspected LEAs. Nevertheless, it is still not unusual to find LEAs providing performance data that do little more than duplicate what is nationally available. In a few LEAs, moreover, the guidance provided fails to meet the needs of those schools, especially secondary schools, which already make good use of assessment data. Link advisers usually play a key role in assisting schools to interpret data and set targets. Their advice is of variable, but generally improving, quality. Data on the performance of various groups of pupils are collected and analysed in an increasingly systematic way. In most LEAs, though, there is often still room for improvement, particularly in the extent to which such information is actually used for planning purposes. Few LEAs supported special schools effectively in their attempts to analyse data and set targets, partly because they were awaiting further guidance from QCA at the time of inspection.

79. The LEAs that perform best in this area have a clear strategy on the use of management information, often underpinned by strong corporate policies. Most have a research and analysis department, usually small, which both fulfils the LEA's functions and provides a responsive service to schools. The data sent to schools are clearly presented, supported by effective guidance and accompanied by text which raises questions and hypotheses for the school to consider. Effective training is provided for headteachers, teachers, governors and advisers. Crucially, the transition from key stage 2 to 3 is well managed, with timely transfer of informative data. In the best practice, data are used to identify common strengths and weaknesses in provision, for example, by analysis of pupils' responses to questions in SATs, and the performance of individual pupils is tracked, so that the value added at each key stage, or within key stages, can be determined.

Best practice

Bury

80. Staff in the schools visited had a sound grasp of the data presented by the LEA and this helped them to identify salient features in their schools' performance. The recent introduction of baseline assessment has already caused some changes to teaching as teachers take better account of children's prior attainment. Some schools have taken heed of the LEA's analysis of their end of key stage performance, as compared with local schools, and have identified aspects which need a further focus in their curriculum. In at least a small number of cases, this has led schools to make changes in

curriculum organisation. In several schools, Year 6 staff report the benefit they have received from the LEA's courses briefing them about developments in the National Curriculum tests, and this appears to have been a positive influence on their teaching. The attention schools are now giving to analysing their overall performance has helped some to move further towards setting targets for individual pupils.

Support for literacy

81. Support for literacy is one of the strongest aspects of the work of LEAs. It was judged good in just over a quarter of all the LEAs inspected, satisfactory in about two-thirds and unsatisfactory only in just over ten per cent.
82. LEAs which have introduced and supported the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) effectively have provided management support at a high level, usually through a steering group ensuring wide representation, often including other departments of the Council, and other agencies. The key factor, however, has been the quality of the consultants and the extent to which their work has been effectively managed and monitored, usually by advisers. In virtually all LEAs, the work of consultants has been highly regarded by schools, deservedly so. In the best practice, effective training for teachers of English as an Additional Language (EAL) has led to the integration of support for those pupils into whole-class literacy work, and detailed guidance on the implications of the NLS for special needs provision has been issued.
83. The training provided by consultants has usually been good, as has their work in schools. Advice and guidance on the teaching of the literacy hour have been effective; so too have been the observation of class teaching and the resultant advice given to teachers. The quality of teaching has risen as a result, and increasing collaboration between phases is leading to improved arrangements for transition.
84. Specialist literacy provision has been almost everywhere at least satisfactory and improving. Where, occasionally, there are unsatisfactory aspects of support for literacy, they relate to overall management in the LEA (which is sometimes too remote), less than effective monitoring by link inspectors in small LEAs, lack of coherence in Key Stage 3 strategies and insufficient targeting of support on particular groups of pupils.

Best practice

Sheffield

85. Support for literacy is very good. The LEA established a target of pupils attaining Level 4 in the English test at Key Stage 2 in 1999. This target has been met and exceeded by 4.1 per cent. A rise of a further 15.9 per cent is required to meet the 2002 target. The literacy team is well organised and effectively managed. A wide range of activities to complement and supplement the National Literacy Strategy, such as family literacy programmes, reading recovery, summer literacy schools and a Key Stage 3 literacy programme, are being managed in a coherent and effective manner.
86. The first year of implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) was well organised. The literacy team provided training which was at least good and often very good. As well as using national materials skilfully, the consultants provided additional good quality support materials. Support for the "intensive" schools has been particularly good; advice has been well focused and much appreciated. The impact overall has been to improve the quality of teaching. For instance, in the five schools visited which received intensive support, standards have risen by an average of 13.9 per cent, compared with 8.8 per cent over all schools.
87. All secondary schools are involved in a phased Key Stage 3 literacy project. The schools visited, in the first cohort, have received well focused and expert advice. They have developed practical strategies which are increasingly being used across the curriculum. One school is teaching an adapted literacy hour once a week in Year 7. The second cohort school visited has also received good support. Support for all the schools includes termly meetings for coordinators and a summer conference where good practice was shared.

Support for numeracy

88. Support for numeracy, like support for literacy, is generally a strength. It is clear that in planning for the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) LEAs have built on the experience of the NLS in order to avoid some of the relatively few weaknesses of their support for literacy. The support provided was at least sound in 95 per cent of the LEAs inspected and good in a quarter.
89. A small number of LEAs had piloted schemes in advance of the NLS, so that their schools were particularly well prepared. In these LEAs and others, the training provided had been effective, the work of leading mathematics teachers (LMTs) was proving similarly so, performance data had been well used to target support, and numeracy plans were well-targeted and costed, and defined clear and appropriate actions. SEN coordinators and Ethnic Minority and Travellers' Achievement Grant (EMTAG) staff had been valuably involved in training. The most effective LEAs had been able to widen the support to include training for teaching assistants.
90. In many cases, schools and LEAs had initially been guilty of underestimating the potential of the NNS for bringing about improvement. Targets were therefore often too low. That evidence of low expectations was particularly clear in secondary schools, which were often not building on attainment demonstrated at KS2; nor were LEAs always challenging them sufficiently to do so, partly because their support was, rightly, concentrated on the primary phase. Nevertheless, a large minority of LEAs were not able to provide levels of support sufficient to match the needs evident in the secondary schools. A notable exception was Sheffield.

Best practice

Brighton and Hove

91. Support for numeracy is very good. The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) has been well implemented. Standards were rising in eight of the primary schools visited and had risen significantly in three of the four schools receiving intensive support for numeracy.
92. The LEA's overall strategy is well thought out and ensures that numeracy developments contribute to a number of other EDP and lifelong learning priorities. The NNS builds effectively on the LEA's pilot numeracy project in ten schools prior to the launch of the NNS. The daily mathematics lesson has become well established in primary schools and the development of mental and number skills is effectively promoted. The identification and training of leading mathematics teachers (LMT) has also been well organised and the initiative well managed. HMI monitoring visits for the NNS found the quality of teaching in LMTs' lessons observed to be generally good or very good.
93. The training for the NNS was good and schools not receiving intensive support have been able to buy into the training programme. The numeracy team is highly regarded by schools. The full involvement of the EAZ numeracy consultant in coordinating planning and support to schools is a particular strength and has had a significant impact on improvements in Zone schools. Secondary and special schools also rate the LEA's support for numeracy highly, reflecting the LEA's positive actions in fully including these schools in the NNS training. Family numeracy courses have recently started and the LEA is planning to extend the successful numeracy summer schools which ran at two secondary schools in 1999.

Support for ICT

94. Support for ICT was one of the weakest aspects of the work of the LEAs inspected. It was good in only five per cent and unsatisfactory in 67 per cent of the LEAs in which a judgement was made, with no sign of recent improvement.
95. Most LEAs included support for ICT in their EDP and this helped, to some extent, to reinforce their strategy for the introduction of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). However, the actions planned in the EDP usually related to provision, rather than standards, owing partly to a general dearth of attainment data on ICT capability. Although there was usually evidence of links between the ICT advisory team and support for literacy and numeracy, there was little indication that this had any impact. These endemic weaknesses, particularly in the early stages of NGfL implementation, were exacerbated by shortages of staff, a lack of information and a lack of understanding of the needs of

individual schools. Generally speaking, technical installation and support had a much higher profile than consideration of the implications of ICT for teaching and learning. Monitoring and evaluation were weak, and support for school development planning was very variable.

96. In the few examples of effective support, LEAs struck a balance between the provision and installation of equipment and infrastructure, support for teaching and learning and support for school planning, recognising that effectiveness depended on dealing with all three elements coherently and in a planned sequence. This was most likely to occur where senior officers and key elected members took a close personal interest, and where the Council as a whole had a convincing ICT strategy. Introduction of the NGfL sometimes acted as a catalyst for better liaison between the education department and corporate ICT services.

Best practice

Lewisham

97. The LEA has a clear and coherent strategy for developing learning through ICT. The audit for the EDP identified ICT as a relative weakness and it is a key part of the actions supporting the priority to improve teaching and learning. One of the strengths of the ICT strategy is the way it is related to literacy and numeracy and to other priorities within the EDP. Support for ICT is a key element in the Downham Pride Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)-funded initiative and an important part of the EiC and EAZ strategies.
98. An important part of the LEA's ICT strategy is developing the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). The LEA has secured £450K of Standards Fund finance (of which £225K is matched funding) to support the NGfL. Other funding for ICT comes through the EiC and EAZ initiatives. There has been good consultation with schools over the NGfL and its introduction has proceeded smoothly with a considerable number of schools benefiting from improved computing facilities and access to the Internet.
99. The LEA has provided support to schools in preparing ICT development plans, a range of in-service training, written guidance on developing ICT and advice on purchasing hardware and software. The LEA has also made good use of private consultancy in supporting ICT in schools. Schools in the survey rated the support for ICT in the curriculum as satisfactory or better and this view was confirmed by visits to schools. In most schools it was too early to find evidence of the impact of the NGfL on **standards** but there was evidence of increased teacher confidence in applying information technology. There was also evidence of schools adopting better planning for ICT. The assessment of ICT and the development of ICT across the curriculum to enhance teaching and learning are weaknesses in a considerable number of schools. The LEA is aware of these shortcomings and is providing additional support in these areas. It has made sure that it has rigorous systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the various initiatives in raising standards.
100. The LEA rightly sees ICT as making an important contribution to its EDP priority of narrowing the differentials in pupil attainment. An example of this is the development of a community ICT centre based in an area of severe social deprivation.

Support for schools causing concern

101. Overall, support for schools causing concern was judged satisfactory or better in 73 per cent of all LEAs inspected, and good in 13 per cent. There are some signs of improvement in the last year, in that the proportion of LEAs judged good in this respect has risen slightly, while the proportion judged unsatisfactory has fallen a little (i.e. from 25 per cent to 18 per cent). None of the LEAs inspected in the last two years was found to be failing in its statutory duty to support schools in special measures. Even in LEAs which otherwise had considerable weaknesses, such support was often effective; in the case of intractable failure to improve, LEAs were increasingly prepared to take steps, including the closure of schools, to bring about necessary change.
102. The majority of LEAs inspected in 1999–2000 had in place an agreed policy statement and strategy, usually developed in consultation with schools, for dealing with schools at different levels of concern. The most effective of these policies had clear criteria for triggering intervention, which was clearly

defined, robust, differentiated and costed. These procedures were set in a context of good local knowledge and a capacity rigorously to analyse and interpret school performance data.

- 103.** There is an important distinction to be made between support for schools in special measures and that for schools with serious weaknesses, which is much more variable. Several instances have been met on inspections of schools with serious weaknesses declining to the point of requiring special measures, and nationally some 12 per cent of schools with serious weaknesses have declined into the more serious category. About a third of the reports express sufficient dissatisfaction with support for these schools to justify an explicit recommendation. That dissatisfaction is particularly acute in relation to schools identified by the LEAs themselves (rather than by OFSTED) as causing concern.
- 104.** In the best practice, LEAs have established effective mechanisms for monitoring the progress of schools causing concern and for ensuring that governing bodies and elected members are kept fully informed of their progress. However, even in these instances, strategies for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of the LEA's support were underdeveloped.

Best practice

Salford

- 105.** Over a number of years the LEA has developed a very effective strategy for supporting schools causing concern. The strategy, detailed in a supplement to the Education Development Plan (EDP), is clear, comprehensive and understood by schools. In the school survey, primary schools evaluated the support as good, secondary schools as at least satisfactory.
- 106.** The LEA has four categories of schools causing concern, ranging from those in special measures to those needing special support as a result of, for example, reorganisation or the long-term absence of a senior member of staff. The LEA has increasingly effective measures for identifying schools in difficulties including a twice yearly annual review by senior officers of all schools' quantitative and qualitative data such as OFSTED reports, LEA reviews and reports. A project group considers, half-termly, the progress of schools receiving additional support.
- 107.** All the schools visited that have received additional support recognise the significant contribution made by the LEA to their improvement. In cases when intensive support is required, a project officer is appointed to the school from the Inspection Advisory Service who will coordinate strategies for improvement and draw on expertise from a wide range of LEA services as necessary. A mentor or associate headteacher may be designated to support improvements in a school's management. Associate headteachers have been successfully seconded on several occasions to schools in difficulties for a specific period, usually two terms.
- 108.** Since the categorisation of schools began, a total of six schools have been placed in special measures. Of these, two have been closed, two have been removed, one no longer requires special measures but still has serious weaknesses (and is on the path to closure) and one remains. A total of three schools (two primary and the secondary referred to above) have serious weaknesses. The LEA has a good record of supporting schools in difficulties and numerous examples were provided of instances when early intervention had prevented a further deterioration in schools.

Support for school management

- 109.** Almost all the LEAs inspected had identified leadership and management as a priority in the EDP. Nevertheless, unsatisfactory practice was more common than good. About 18 per cent of LEAs were providing or securing consistently good support for school senior management teams, compared with a third in which the support was unsatisfactory.
- 110.** The role of the link adviser, inspector or officer is usually central to the LEA's strategy. Not all LEAs have, or could afford, personnel of the calibre to operate effectively in all schools. The challenge, particularly for the smaller LEAs, is to achieve a balance between what can be provided internally and what can be brokered from external providers. About a third of LEAs were reported to have established productive partnerships with outside agencies, consultants or, more often, higher education. Even in these, however, the link role remained pivotal. In about a quarter of LEAs, it was performed particularly well, challenging management teams to make good use of management information to investigate and

solve problems, and to set targets. By contrast, in about a third of LEAs, the performance of the link role was unduly variable, indicating a lack of adequate performance management.

- 111. Most LEAs gave good support to the national programmes for headteacher training, utilising to the full the funding available. Only a minority, however, had good programmes for the induction of new headteachers which included appropriate guidance materials, training and the pairing of new heads with more experienced colleagues. By contrast, induction arrangements for newly qualified teachers are mostly sound or better.
- 112. During the four years of inspection, developing schools' capacity for self-evaluation became an increasingly familiar aspect of LEA support for school management, reflecting the national priorities. Only in a fifth of LEAs, however, had the developments reached a point at which any effectiveness could be detected. In this regard, excellent practice was seen in Wandsworth, which was working towards accrediting schools with systems robust enough to support continuous improvement, linking this with reduced LEA monitoring. Few LEAs, on the other hand (25 per cent of those judged in this respect) provided appropriate advice to assist schools in securing curriculum support from sources other than the LEA.
- 113. In all reports (66 per cent) in which the judgement was made, LEAs were meeting requirements with regard to provision for newly qualified teachers (NQTs). One report (Bradford) questioned the extent to which the LEA was assuring quality. On the other hand, provision for NQTs was at least satisfactory in the great majority (91 per cent) of LEAs, and good or very good in 55 per cent.

Best practice

Warwickshire

- 114. Regular support for headteachers, in particular, is provided by their link inspector and area education officer. The amount of contact and support varies according to need, and is appropriate, well-regarded and well-matched in almost all the schools visited. It had been of crucial importance in those schools in most need, for example, those identified as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses. In several schools, it was evident that advice and support had been maintained until issues had been resolved; this sustained commitment was important to headteachers and valued by them.
- 115. There is an induction programme for headteachers new to the job, existing headteachers new to Warwickshire and acting headteachers. Several schools were visited where the headteacher had been on this programme: almost all found it to be well organised and to have influenced their management of their schools.
- 116. Aspiring headteachers are taking up the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) in increasing numbers with support from the LEA. The LEA has maximised the budget to enable serving headteachers to participate in the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) – 13 in the first year and 26 in the current year. This was rated highly. New headteachers had been supported by the LEA on the Headteachers Leadership and Management Programme (HEADLAMP), which had helped some to implement and sustain improvements in their own schools; the LEA had also provided useful follow-up.
- 117. The LEA has successfully promoted the career development of a number of headteachers through secondments. These have also helped develop those headteachers' knowledge and expertise and to spread good practice. The LEA has also facilitated industrial links for senior managers through short-term industrial secondments and training. Others have been seconded to headships of other schools and received a very high quality of support.

Support for governors

- 118. Support for governors was judged to be one of the strongest aspects of the work of the LEAs inspected. However, comment in the reports focused largely on the quality of governor training and information provided, and on the arrangements for involving governors in discussion and consultation. In relation, for example, to schools causing concern there were indications that many LEAs found the inadequate governance of some schools a significant barrier to progress. Nevertheless, in the respects on which the reports largely focused, 92 per cent of LEAs made satisfactory or better provision.

- 119.** Recruitment of governors was a problem for a minority of LEAs. In more than one in eight, governor vacancies had remained unfilled for long periods, often over a year. Two LEAs, however, had held particularly successful recruiting campaigns. For example, Lewisham, as part of its modernising local government agenda, had adopted a scheme whereby nominations for LEA governors were made from the community, partner organisations and council staff, as well as from political parties.
- 120.** LEA training sessions were almost always regarded by governors as good, but, where inspectors probed further, few examples could be given of improvements in the performance of governing bodies which had resulted from such training. Eleven reports in the last year of inspection commented specifically on the extent to which the LEAs in question were enabling governing bodies to fulfil their responsibility to monitor standards in schools. Five were unsatisfactory in this respect, doing little or nothing to dispel governors' dependence on their support. To secure effective management of schools in an increasingly delegated service, there needs to be challenge and support not merely between LEA and schools but between governors and senior management. If both are not present, it is unlikely that standards will improve as quickly as they need to.
- 121.** To exercise challenge and support requires a great deal from a governor: both the time to be effective, and a grasp of technical issues such as data analysis, target setting and the monitoring of standards that only a minority are likely to possess. Governors are volunteers, who give their time as a matter of public duty. Arguably, too much is asked of them. Recruitment of governors had become more difficult in many of the LEAs inspected. How governors with the right skills and experience can be provided for all schools is an issue which needs to be addressed nationally, and which gives rise to a recommendation later in this report.

Best practice

Lewisham

- 122.** School governors are supported exceptionally well. The high regard in which the Governor Support Service is held is evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of schools choose to buy into all or most of its services. Every effort is made to ease the burden of keeping up to date by issuing to governors termly information packs which are relevant and concise. There is a comprehensive programme of induction and continuing training which governors say is generally of good quality. Nearly every governing body employs an LEA clerk, trained by the Service, not just to manage meetings, but to be an authority on LEA procedures, national requirements and current issues. The clerks command great respect. The Service gives useful help in the recruitment of parent and other governors. Its innovative approach to the recruitment of LEA governors, so often a problem elsewhere, provides a model worthy of emulation. The Council, as part of its modernising agenda, has adopted a scheme whereby LEA nominations can be made from the community, partner organisations and Council staff, as well as the political parties. The effect has been to fill vacancies promptly with people whose commitment is primarily to education and who are more representative of the whole community, including its various ethnic groups. Schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses have found the contribution of the Service to be a key factor in recovery, especially in retraining and the appointment of additional governors of experience and ability.

Support for early years

- 123.** Pre-school education does not strictly fall within the remit of LEA inspection, since HMCI's powers under the Education Act 1997 apply to education of pupils of compulsory school age or of pupils above or below that age who are registered as pupils at schools. Nevertheless, early years education frequently appears as an EDP priority and, where this is the case, and the authority is willing for OFSTED to inspect, OFSTED has done so. About half the reports of the last year contain comment on support for early years education.
- 124.** Every LEA is required to have an early years development and child care plan (EYDCP) which must, as a minimum, set out how the LEA proposes to secure a free early education place for all four-year-olds for three terms before they reach compulsory school age. From April 2000, the plans are required to indicate how the LEA proposes to secure a free education place for all three-year-olds. They should also set out strategies for developing early years education and childcare, and describe how the LEA will pay nursery education grants to registered providers.

- 125.** LEAs have three main tasks in implementing the plans:
- coordinating the planning and development of early years education and child care, in cooperation with the private and voluntary sectors and other interested parties;
 - providing nursery education; and
 - paying the nursery education grant to private, voluntary and independent providers.
- 126.** The work of the LEAs inspected in this area has been at least satisfactory and often good, and has often been a prominent feature of the LEA's overall support for social inclusion. LEAs have been instrumental in establishing partnerships which have taken forward corporate working and improved working practices and relationships with the private and voluntary sectors. These partnerships have developed sound plans, accompanied by high quality training, for improving the quality and range of provision for young children and families. Sure Start was beginning to be influential in several authorities, including one (Wolverhampton) where it was beginning to make a very positive contribution to developments.
- 127.** There were isolated weaknesses, which included insufficient training in the NLS and NNS for nursery staff and governors, poor planning, leading to over-supply of places, insufficient involvement of parents in the early assessment of children, lack of strategic coordination, insufficient dissemination of good practice, lack of clarity about the way in which effective early years education may contribute to later attainment and inadequate staffing in some nursery classes.

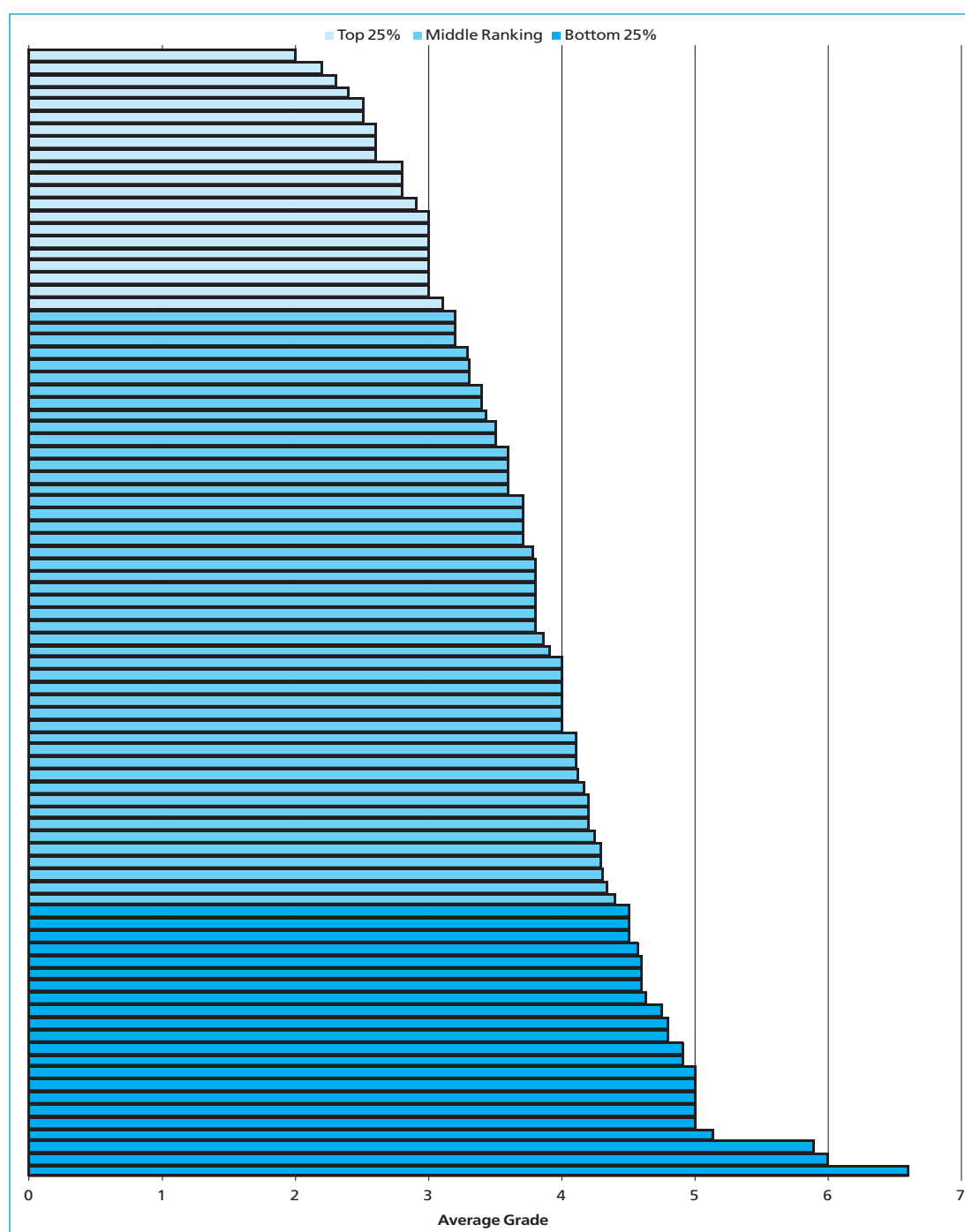
Post-compulsory education

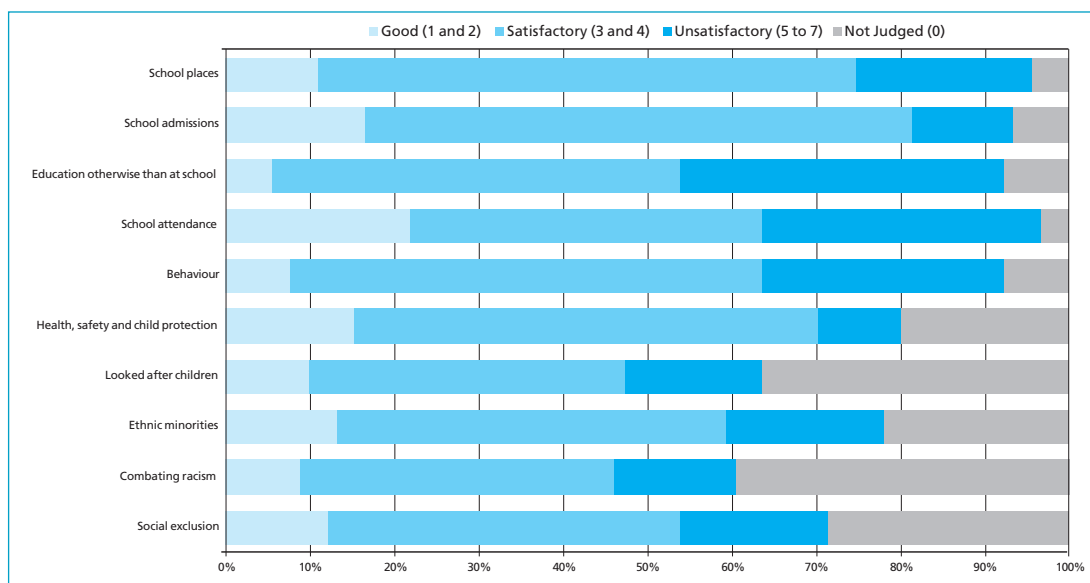
- 128.** Post-compulsory education outside schools does not strictly fall within the remit of LEA inspection. Nevertheless, because the LEAs themselves, with some reason, see strong links both between the various strands of post-compulsory education and between KS4 and what follows, most inspection reports make at least some broad comments which go beyond sixth form education in schools.
- 129.** Attainment post-16, where it was commented on, was generally said to be rising, although at very variable rates. There was no obvious correlation between attainment post-16 and the general quality of the LEA; nor, more interestingly, was any relationship observed between the size of sixth forms and attainment. Indeed, one LEA (Leeds) which was described as having a proliferation of small sixth forms also has higher than average attainment post-16. Many of the LEAs inspected which serve areas in the north or midlands formerly associated with heavy engineering had particularly low staying-on rates. Given the current division of responsibility for post-16 education, that is hardly a situation for which the LEAs can be held responsible.
- 130.** A small number of LEAs were seeking to promote development of the 14–19 curriculum. In this respect, the leader among those inspected was Wandsworth, which was using a business partnership arrangement, and attracting substantial funding.
- 131.** A significant minority of LEAs face contentious issues relating to small sixth forms. A few, such as Leeds, Bristol, Bradford and Walsall, had, at the time of inspection, no viable plans to rationalise expensive and (except in Leeds) not especially successful provision. Elsewhere, some imaginative efforts at collaboration were seen. Lewisham, for example, had set up consortia; in Wolverhampton, an innovative plan to bring all the sixth forms together in a consortium with the existing college as The Wolverhampton Sixth Form had been devised. In Hammersmith and Fulham, a similar arrangement has created the William Morris Academy, described as “an imaginative and successful institution”.
- 132.** Virtually all reports refer to some successful links with Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), careers services, increasingly with Further Education (FE) colleges, and often with local business and industry, usually through Education Business Partnerships. All these may aid the development of the work-related curriculum, or assist the provision of alternative placements for disaffected pupils. A number of reports also refer to links with local universities, to facilitate entry for pupils or training for staff. About a third of recent reports have substantial comments, almost universally favourable, about LEAs' support for lifelong learning.

133. LEAs were judged in ten separate categories of activity within this aspect of their work. The majority were satisfactory in all ten, although the proportions that were unsatisfactory in each category ranged from just under ten per cent (health, safety and child protection) to 40 per cent (attendance and the provision of education otherwise than at school was only slightly lower).

The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements

1. Access to education: average grades



*The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements***2. The percentage of LEAs inspected judged good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory in their performance for access to education****The provision of school places**

- 134.** The provision of sufficient suitable school places is the most basic task of LEAs. During the course of the inspection cycle, LEAs were formulating School Organisation Plans (SOPs) and setting in place School Organisation Committees, reflecting changes in the statutory framework for planning school places. The majority (74 per cent) of LEAs inspected were carrying out this function at least adequately, but only 11 per cent were performing well in this aspect of their work. There was some evidence that the emphasis on “standards, not structures”, whatever its general validity, was taken somewhat too literally. It was certainly the case that some inner-urban schools were experiencing structurally induced failure. Because they were not full, owing to the operation of parental choice, they had little option but to receive pupils excluded or otherwise moved on by other schools, thereby becoming even less attractive to some parents. There were few examples of LEAs seeking structural solutions to this problem.
- 135.** The location of the majority of LEAs within large conurbations creates difficulties in managing the supply of school places and for tracking pupils at risk of social exclusion. City populations are highly mobile (and additionally a few LEAs, especially in inner London, are highly vulnerable to the arrival of large numbers of refugees). Pupils move unpredictably, and in large numbers between schools, at all stages of education, but especially at the KS2/KS3 transition. In some London LEAs as many as 50 per cent of pupils cross LEA boundaries at this point.
- 136.** LEAs have done little together to develop common recording systems across conurbations. Transfer of information is thus at best haphazard. It may be that there is a case for handling the transfer of records on a regional basis. There is equally a case, and in London an inescapable one, for regarding the supply of special school places and places post-16 as something which it is not practicable for small LEAs to manage.
- 137.** Increasingly, LEAs have established clear criteria for reviewing the viability of schools, particularly small schools and those with a large number of surplus places. The criteria generally include measures of the schools’ performance. However, there is little evidence that the management of school places is systematically used to improve standards. For example, integration of the SOP with the EDP is uncommon. In some LEAs, such as Oxfordshire, there was clear, rigorous analysis of school performance, which led to reorganisation proposals, but this was rare. Elsewhere, there was little evidence of a sufficiently analytical approach to the impact of organisational patterns on standards of attainment.
- 138.** Many LEAs were, appropriately, attempting to rationalise special school places to provide a better match to needs and to improve value for money by, for example, seeking to provide locally for pupils,

rather than secure provision outside the LEA. Often, this was part of a drive for inclusion. However, the impact of this was not always taken fully into account when considering reducing surplus places in mainstream schools.

- 139.** Consultation about the number of places, for example with Diocesan Authorities, was usually satisfactory or good, though some fears about the potential impact on consultation of new scrutiny arrangements were expressed.
- 140.** Except where there were particular complexities, such as a very high population of grant maintained secondary schools or a system of selection at eleven, LEA administration of admissions was found to be generally efficient, although several large shire LEAs needed more effective monitoring procedures to ensure equity between local areas. Appeals, in so far as there was a trend, appeared to be rising, with Bury paying a particular price for the attractiveness to parents in surrounding LEAs of its secondary schools.
- 141.** According to the school surveys, schools judged LEA performance in this area to be satisfactory. However, this is not the whole story, as individual schools rarely welcome the attentions of LEAs when they seek to exercise, quite properly, tight control on removal of surplus places. On this criterion, the judgement of inspectors was more positive, overall, than that of schools, with three-quarters of LEAs judged satisfactory or better. In those LEAs judged unsatisfactory, the unwillingness of elected members to take politically sensitive decisions on school closures was the major factor. No LEA was judged “very good”, but Bolton, Brent, Camden, Derbyshire, Durham, Hartlepool, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Solihull were judged as good.
- 142.** Recent reports show that LEAs have generally worked successfully to prepare SOPs and set up School Organisation Committees. The need to present a standardised plan to outside partners has resulted in greater openness and transparency in the planning process.

Best practice

Derbyshire

- 143.** In Derbyshire, effective action has been taken to reduce the number of surplus places and a major programme of action was underway at the time of the inspection in 1999 to meet the government’s Key Stage 1 class size target. In both its school organisation and infant class size plans the LEA has a sound strategic overview as well as the command of the detail of action planning. The school organisation plan was approved by the newly formed school organisation committee at the end of September 1999, and includes comprehensive analyses of projected need for school capacity by local area; an explicit policy statement on small schools; and a short, clear summary of the anticipated need for action in each area. Plans were submitted to the DfEE on schedule and approved. Proposals for action were developed in consultation with primary headteachers. Consultation was very wide-ranging and received strong support from schools. The plan is methodical, detailed and readable. The LEA secured very substantial funding, both capital and revenue, as a result of its submission being approved

Admissions

- 144.** Inspectors judged 88 per cent of LEAs to be satisfactory or better in the administration of admissions. However, admissions remain problematic in some areas where there is a multiplicity of admission arrangements and authorities, especially when compounded by cross-border flows. The experience of youngsters, particularly at secondary transfer, can be an unhappy one in these circumstances. LEAs generally work hard to ensure children are placed before the end of the summer term, but in some cases the complexity of the situation within the current statutory framework defeats this aim.

Best practice

Barnet

- 145.** Barnet LEA is grappling with a difficult admissions situation, but the LEA’s admission arrangements were judged to be nonetheless well-managed. Secondary admissions are managed by 13 different admission authorities: the LEA for nine community schools and 12 separate governing bodies of Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools. Many parents express preferences to a number of

admissions authorities. This process generates strong feelings; in some it leads to hostility towards the LEA. At the time of the inspection, about one month into the school year, the parents of 17 Year 7 children had not accepted available places and were making arrangements to educate them otherwise.

- 146.** However, the inspection found no evidence of the LEA failing to meet its statutory duties on admissions and concluded that most aspects are managed well. The LEA does not make offers of secondary school places to parents but fulfils its statutory responsibilities by publishing information on where there are vacancies. It publishes clear guidance and advice to parents of Year 6 pupils on how to express their preference for secondary school. The publication includes all community, Foundation, Voluntary and borough schools on an equal basis. The LEA has negotiated a common admissions timetable between all the secondary schools and is trying to negotiate a common application form. There is strong pressure on places in the single-sex secondary schools, particularly for girls. The LEA has responded imaginatively by sponsoring single-gender teaching groups in one mixed school.

Asset management

- 147.** School buildings represent one of the largest categories of public assets nationally. In recent years, the stock in many LEAs has fallen well below acceptable standards, for reasons by means wholly within the control of LEAs. Failure to keep buildings waterproof has led to damage costing far more to put right than the preventive painting or roof covering would have. Teachers have been working, and children learning, in environments that would be quite unacceptable in most adult workplaces. In a number of LEAs, getting out the buckets when it rains has been, and in a few places still is, a normal feature of school life.
- 148.** The inspection of Rotherham LEA's building maintenance work late in 1998 was the first specialist LEA inspection to be directed by the Secretary of State and was led by the Audit Commission. It revealed a sorry tale of low expenditure, fragmented responsibility, lack of technical advice and hence lack of ability to plan and prioritise. Warwickshire and Solihull LEAs, on the other hand, both inspected in the summer of 1999, provided a standard of property management highly regarded by schools and by the inspection team. Generally, although not universally, Metropolitan and London boroughs with large Housing direct labour organisations (DLOs) were not providing a good service to schools, which tended to come second to the housing service. Often, too, employment levels in the DLO were the political priority, rather than the level of service to schools.

Best practice

Solihull

- 149.** Solihull LEA has carried out the principles of asset management planning for many years. The condition of school buildings has been surveyed regularly, most recently in 1995. A complete re-survey is currently being carried out, to be completed by December 1999. The LEA has placed a high priority on maintaining the quality of the building stock in the borough. The LEA has achieved continued investment over many years by a combination of success in bidding for capital resources and local decisions to invest resources.
- 150.** There has been a remarkable turnaround in the last two years. LEAs have respond well to the statutory Asset Management Planning requirements introduced in 1999. These have brought the performance of the many up to that of the few. Most LEAs met the requirement to survey the condition of their schools and produce the maintenance plan by the required DfEE deadline. LEAs were still compiling suitability information by the end of the period, and were for the most part doing so assiduously.
- 151.** For a number of LEAs this planning discipline produced a clear improvement in performance. Not all, however, have yet carried the required financial investment arising from the Asset Management Plan into revenue and capital plans of the LEA and schools. Some LEAs are still making inadequate provision for funding recurrent responsibilities and are placing too much reliance on the government capital grants to bail them out of their difficulties. Assets expensively reclaimed with government grant are at risk of another cycle of decline.

152. The requirement to delegate building maintenance has generally been less well-handled. In too many cases the division of responsibilities between school and LEA is less clear than previously. Schools have not always been given funding and guidance to ensure that they make use of adequate technical support and advice to fulfil their responsibilities. Many LEAs have not yet provided for appropriate monitoring to ensure that assets are adequately and safely maintained by schools.

Best practice

Isle of Wight

153. Good practice following delegation is harder to find: the Isle of Wight provides an excellent service using a pooling arrangement – the LEA is very effective in asset management planning and in supporting schools with their premises responsibilities. It has produced a clear and detailed local policy statement and has established a comprehensive property database on compact disc. There are close links with school organisation and class-size planning as well as with the EDP. Suitability surveys are completed ahead of time. School buildings are in good condition and there is evidence of considerable recent capital investment, while the condition surveys show spending needs are mainly in non-urgent categories. Schools are clear about the LEA's priorities for capital investment and those visited agreed that the allocation processes were fair.
154. Building work is very well managed by the premises development officers and there is close involvement of schools in planning projects, with different options being presented within the available budget. Premises repairs and maintenance services are offered under a property indemnity insurance service level agreement in collaboration with the corporate property services team and all schools have bought into this. Links with schools are strong: they receive an annual monitoring visit from their building inspector, who attends a governing body meeting once a year, and many schools visited spoke highly of the knowledge and responsiveness of the LEA managers. Schools had a clear understanding of the service and of the service level agreement (SLA) and, although work is largely reactive, most schools had seen some benefit from their contribution to the pooled maintenance budget. Emergency support was reported to be excellent.
155. Some LEAs too are realising belatedly that major building projects require considerable management effort. Some small LEAs undertaking significant school reorganisations have got into difficulties arising from having assigned insufficient capacity to manage the project through.

Support for attendance

156. Support for attendance was judged good in 22 per cent of LEAs, satisfactory in 42 per cent and unsatisfactory in 30 per cent overall, though in this area of work as in many others the more recent inspections showed evidence of improvement.
157. The key to satisfactory or good support was, predictably, a well-managed education welfare service (EWS), which targeted support effectively on pupils most in need, making good use of data. In such LEAs, consistent procedures were followed, routes of referral and criteria for referral were clear, and case loads managed so as not to impair effectiveness by overloading. Non-attendance was vigorously pursued, and prosecution appropriately used.
158. In Hertfordshire, for example, the work of education welfare officers (EWOs) was particularly effective: registers were rigorously checked, and absences followed up with home visits and meetings with parents. EWO time was allocated carefully according to need and greatly valued by schools. The same was true in North Yorkshire. Some particularly valuable initiatives were also seen. For example, the Salford Truancy Project fostered whole-school approaches, and was highly regarded by the schools involved. Plymouth had a joint project with the EAZ, called MEMO (miss education miss out), which involved electronic registration, contact with families on the first day of absence, family counselling and reward schemes. Moderate gains in attendance overall had been recorded, with significant improvements in some schools. Plymouth was, moreover, one of a large number of LEAs which had successfully promoted partnership with, for example, social services in support of attendance. About a third of LEAs were judged to have strong and effective partnerships with the police over truancy.

159. Even well-managed services, however, struggled to have an impact in some areas where problems of non-attendance were particularly intractable. For example, in Kingston-upon-Hull:

“The pattern of deployment of education welfare officers to secondary and their associated primary schools is appropriate. A thorough programme of initiatives has recently been introduced such as spot checks of registers, published guidance for schools, rewarding attendance through the award of certificates and Active Lifestyle participation, tracking pupils whose attendance is erratic, funding school-based liaison assistants, computerisation of registration, following up absences on the first day and a sizeable increase in the number of parental prosecutions.”

The effects of all this, however, were slight – yet it is hard to see what more can be done by the LEA. What is needed is a change in parental attitudes in this and other areas, and a rise in educational expectations.

160. Where support for attendance was poor, the principal reason was usually a failure to target the work to need, often resulting from weaknesses in the collection and analysis of data. A surprising number of otherwise competent LEAs have inadequate data on the attendance of vulnerable groups of pupils. Several of the weaker LEAs also had problems in the management of the EWS, leading to very variable service to schools. Even in the better LEAs, service level agreements are often not specific enough to enable schools to know what they should receive and ensure that they get it. Some services, however, are simply underfunded, making it difficult, for example, to cover for staff absence. A few reports comment on irregularities in procedures for taking pupils off roll.

Best practice

Newham

161. LEA support to improving attendance was inspected in nine schools. In six of these, attendance had been considered unsatisfactory at the time when the schools were last inspected by OFSTED but in all of them, levels of attendance have improved. In one school, levels of unauthorised absence had been halved. Nevertheless, levels of attendance remain below, and levels of unauthorised absence above, the national average.
162. The LEA has employed sound strategies to support schools in improving attendance. It has made good use of IT systems to monitor attendance leading to the targeting of services at schools, pupils and families who are most in need.
163. A wide variety of methods are then used to improve attendance including:
- the use of school attendance orders;
 - frequent and consistent contact between the LEA’s education welfare service and school staff;
 - home visit to families when a child is absent for more than four days;
 - stringent guidelines to deter parents from taking their children on extended holidays abroad;
 - the active involvement of other agencies in providing an alternative curriculum for older disaffected pupils; and
 - frequent use of the magistrates court to prosecute parents.

The diligent use of combinations of these methods has been very successful in improving levels of attendance in schools over four years, against significant odds.

Support for behaviour

164. Overall, the picture is a mixed one, with about 67 per cent of LEAs judged at least satisfactory in this aspect of their work, but fewer than ten per cent judged good. There was no evidence of improvement in the most recent inspections.
165. The Behaviour Support Plan was having a beneficial effect in the majority of LEAs, particularly where it had been updated in the light of the most recent guidance on social inclusion. The best plans, as in Oxfordshire, were based on a comprehensive audit of need and tightly focused on assisting schools through advice and training, subject to wide consultation and clear about targets and priorities, linked to raising attainment. Some of the earlier plans, by contrast, were a great deal more specific about the wide collaboration that was intended than they were about what it was meant to achieve.

- 166.** Behaviour support services (BSS) were judged effective in two thirds of LEAs. The best services, as in Lewisham or the City of York, were well managed and coordinated, had clear procedures, understood by schools and responsive to need. In Bristol, the work of the service was particularly well-targeted on groups known to be vulnerable to risk of exclusion, such as African-Caribbean boys and children in public care.
- 167.** Common weaknesses were: a lack of clarity in schools about what was available, and about the criteria for referral and allocation of support; weak links with other services; difficulties in gaining access to support; lack of sufficient support, especially for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and insufficient support to help schools manage behaviour for themselves. Sometimes, no challenge was offered to schools with inordinately high rates of exclusion.

Best practice

The City of York

- 168.** The BSS was viewed positively in the school survey and in all mainstream schools visited during the inspection, although its staff is in high demand and cannot always respond as quickly, or as fully, as schools would like. Its tutors are expert and well trained and a skilled team of learning support assistants (LSAs) supports them. Much good work has been achieved with the specialist educational psychologists and successful whole-school training, particularly in assertive discipline and behaviour modification, has been provided. Good preventative work has been undertaken that is beginning to bring about long-term institutional change. This is aided by, for example, the accredited course for teachers with responsibilities for inclusion.

The provision of education otherwise than at school (EOTAS)

- 169.** Overall, provision for EOTAS was judged satisfactory in only just over half (55 per cent) of all LEAs, and good in just five per cent. There were some signs of improvement in 1999–2000, but even then, five LEAs were judged poor or very poor, with Rochdale and Waltham Forest failing to meet their statutory requirements.
- 170.** Comment in the reports mostly focused on the provision made for permanently excluded pupils. The range of provision included PRUs, home tuition, college courses, work experience and provision by voluntary sector providers. Where the provision works best, it is adapted to need, rather than an outcome of a long series of expedient decisions, and supported by careful tracking of pupils' progress. The work of the PRUs and associated services focuses on boosting attainment, leading to reintegration; and relationships with the mainstream make this possible.
- 171.** In some LEAs, there is simply too little provision, or the wrong range of provision, with the result that pupils have to wait too long for a place, or receive insufficient time. In nine LEAs inspected in 1999–2000, the amount of education offered to some pupils was less than ten hours a week. A few LEAs still had insufficient data on the progress, or sometimes the whereabouts, of excluded pupils.

Best practice

Oxfordshire

- 172.** There are effective arrangements for provision of pupils with long-term illnesses through the hospital schools and outreach services which also provide home tuition when needed. Provision for excluded pupils is very good. The LEA's aims for inclusion are effectively translated into practice as a result of targeted central support and a high degree of collaboration between schools, especially secondary schools and with other agencies including the Youth Service.
- 173.** Permanent exclusions in Oxfordshire are very low, falling by eight per cent to 74 pupils in 1998–9. Rates of exclusion are high in a small number of secondary schools and this is being addressed effectively in most cases. Provision is made through the six PRUs and two schools for EBD pupils, although the LEA's policy is one of speedy re-integration and the PRUs have a remit to support reintegration and to assist secondary schools in early intervention strategies to prevent exclusions occurring.

Support for children in public care

- 174.** Support for children in public care was satisfactory in about three quarters of the LEAs (64 per cent of the total) in which it was evaluated. It was good in one LEA in ten. Fewer than half the LEAs inspected knew the educational attainment of children in public care. It is therefore a moot point how targets were set for these pupils. Where data were available, exchange of data between education and social services was often technically problematic. The use and availability of information were sometimes so poor that they led to waste (one LEA was paying £150 per hour to educate a pupil who had, in fact, left school), or to a failure to fulfil child protection requirements.
- 175.** Better practice is fostered by the strong commitment of members and good liaison with social services. Where these existed, the LEAs give priority to the needs of these most vulnerable children. There were some signs in the last year of an increase overall in LEA monitoring, but there was less indication of purposeful action to rectify the unacceptable situation the monitoring usually revealed.

Best practice

Salford

- 176.** Links between the education and social services departments are productive and effective at all levels. Both departments co-operated fully on the three key plans, for Children's Services, Behaviour Support and Quality Protects; development of work with "looked after children" is well integrated into four of the Education Development Plan priorities. The joint work of the two departments has helped to produce effective plans with clear targets and procedures for attaining them.
- 177.** This LEA is amongst the leaders in developing and implementing a strategy for looked after children. It is proactive in its work that includes raising the awareness of the issues for all those involved. An informative one-day conference was held in October to which school representatives, elected members and governors were invited. The LEA has performance data on all the pupils and is collecting targets on individual pupils from schools. Schools know their looked after children. The Education Development Plan (EDP) includes appropriate targets for the LEA as a whole.
- 178.** Training for foster parents emphasises their responsibilities in supporting these children to do homework, target setting and promoting higher attainment. A post of a coordinator for Care and Education, funded by Education, has been created. Already there is evidence that the appointment is having a beneficial effect on provision; all children's homes now have a designated time for children to do homework. Schools have been asked to nominate a senior teacher to have responsibility for these pupils and evidence from the school visits indicated that most had done so; the responsibilities of the nominee are clear.

Support for the protection of children

- 179.** Arrangements for child protection were sound in the great majority of LEAs, and in all those inspected within the last year, as was the guidance given to schools. Training programmes were in place, although not all LEAs had a record of which staff had been trained.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

- 180.** Reference to provision for gifted and talented pupils is usually made in relation to EiC. It is clear that that initiative has given a major boost to provision for these pupils.
- 181.** Several of the participating LEAs had successfully linked their EiC planning into their overall EDP strategy and made at least satisfactory progress in the early stages of development of the gifted and talented strand. Sheffield had made good use of data to audit pupils' needs, and Camden had devised a clear approach to allocating resources to the support of gifted and talented pupils. Kensington and Chelsea was developing a range of summer schools, and had established a centre for excellence in mathematics. Tower Hamlets was working on promising strategies to improve teachers' planning for gifted pupils and to utilise the new city learning centre to support their progress, and Manchester was working effectively with schools to raise the aspirations of very able pupils.
- 182.** Some LEAs, and not only those within EiC, had developed good links with other partners to improve their provision. For example, Rutland had a promising project with a local university to improve the

standards reached by able pupils, and Tower Hamlets had a range of projects, which included a summer university, in place. Rochdale was working with professional filmmakers to enrich the work of gifted and well-motivated pupils.

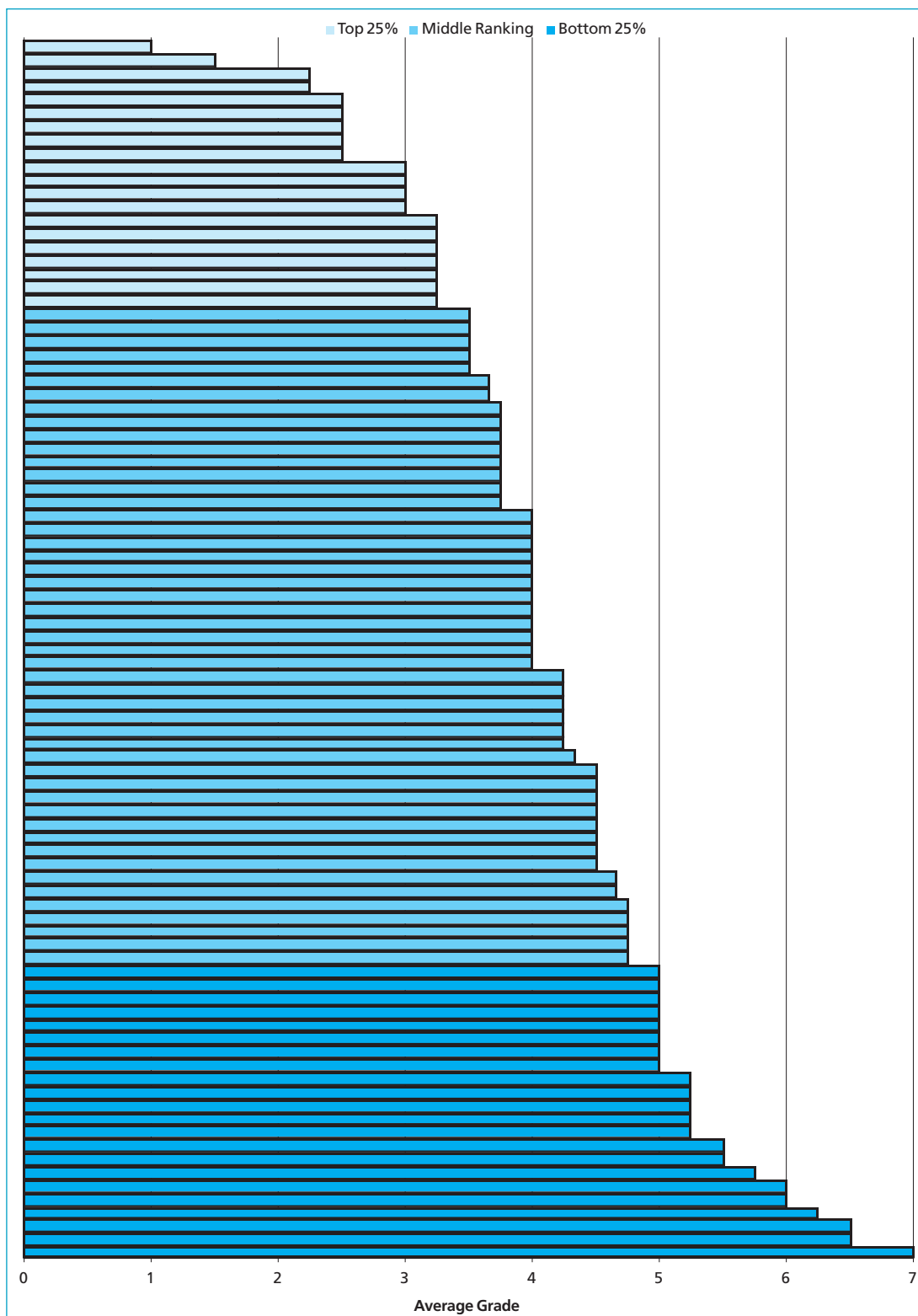
Support for ethnic minority pupils

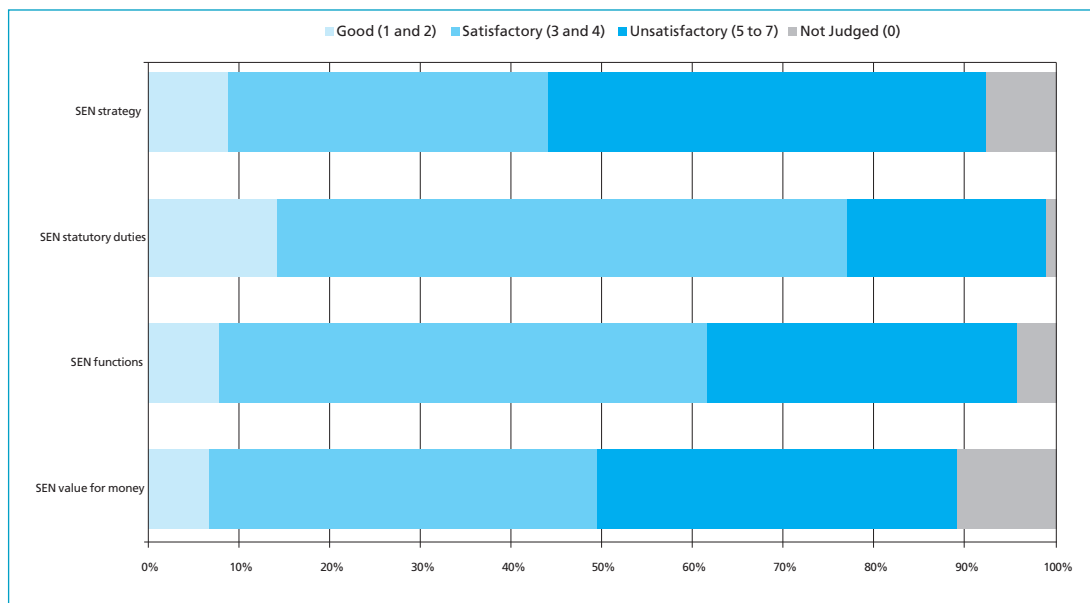
- 183.** This is a somewhat stronger (and improving) area of LEA work than other aspects of support for access to education, in that most of the work is at least satisfactory, and there is as much good work as poor. This aspect was separately evaluated in 78 per cent of all reports. In 14 per cent it was good, in 45 per cent satisfactory and in 19 per cent unsatisfactory. The LEAs inspected in 1999–2000 were doing rather better than this, and little very poor provision was seen overall.
- 184.** The change from Section 11 funding to the EMTAG was too recent to have had a discernible impact on attainment, but it appeared to be having a beneficial effect on provision. The requirement to monitor attainment by ethnicity has greatly improved the management information available to LEAs, and that information is now being much better used. There were clear signs of a broadening of focus, from concentration on language acquisition to increased attention to attainment across the mainstream curriculum. Moreover, the requirement to delegate was leading to clearer definition of the respective role of LEAs and schools and shifting the onus for raising the attainment of ethnic minority pupils, appropriately, to the schools.
- 185.** In the LEAs which managed the provision best, inspectors found:
- a clear delineation of responsibilities;
 - genuine delegation of management responsibility to schools;
 - a clear understanding of shared principles;
 - an acceptance by schools of provision for ethnic minority pupils as integral to the central standards agenda;
 - the use of attainment data to identify need;
 - the allocation of funding and the deployment of staff to meet identified need;
 - effective transition arrangements to cushion changes in funding;
 - clear arrangements for joint planning at school and LEA level;
 - competent, highly regarded professional staff for whom opportunities for development are provided; and
 - the retention of contingency funding to cope with influxes of asylum seekers.
- 186.** These elements of good practice are most often (although not solely) present in London LEAs, such as Camden, Lewisham and Wandsworth, although LEAs such as Oxfordshire, Portsmouth and Derbyshire also do an effective job for much lower concentrations of ethnic minority pupils. By contrast, it was of some concern that a few large towns or cities, such as Bradford, Leeds and Walsall, had considerable weaknesses in their provision.
- 187.** Just over half the reports (and all the most recent) comment on LEA policies to monitor and prevent racially motivated incidents in schools. About three-quarters of the LEAs were satisfactory in this regard, and the report of the Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence had led to a general tightening of monitoring procedures and to improved guidance.

Support for provision for Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements

1. SEN: average grades



*The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements***2. The percentage of LEAs inspected judged good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory in their performance for SEN**

188. Overall, provision for SEN is the weakest aspect of the work of LEAs. They were judged in this area under four specific categories. In relation to SEN strategy, 48 per cent of all LEAs were judged to be performing unsatisfactorily, and 37 per cent gave less than satisfactory value for money overall. These are not reassuring figures. They imply the existence of a great deal of less than satisfactory performance. Most LEAs (77 per cent) took reasonable steps to carry out their statutory function and 62 per cent carried out their functions in a way which gave at least adequate support to school improvement.

189. Particular weaknesses in provision for SEN were:

- planning for SEN;
- the targeting of SEN resources; and
- monitoring the success of SEN provision.

Policy/strategy/planning

190. LEAs' overall plans and strategies for meeting the needs of their pupils with SEN varied considerably and they are poor at predicting future trends. Most had undertaken wide-ranging reviews of SEN provision in the light of government policies and initiatives, but only a relatively small number had produced long-term plans with shorter-term intermediate objectives. Too many had put forward short-term plans, adjusting part of the LEAs' provision, without always seeing the knock-on effects of the immediate proposals for change. They had sometimes concentrated on shoring up part of their SEN provision, apparently oblivious to other weaknesses. (It should be acknowledged, however, that LEAs are subject to the opinions and lobbying of various SEN pressure groups following consultation, which often slow up moves towards change, and therefore inevitably lead many authorities to be cautious in their plans for the future.)

191. All LEAs had a BSP and most had a written policy for SEN. These, however, often lacked sufficient detail for the reader to be clear as to how the policy will actually be implemented. LEAs varied considerably in respect of the clarity of their policies and plans which sometimes amount more to a "wish list" than a thoroughly thought-through plan of intent and action.

192. LEAs were working towards the greater inclusion of pupils with SEN – in line with current government policy – but in many policies there was no clear or coherent strategy on inclusion of pupils with SEN, or of any kind of stepped or sequenced progression towards a planned future goal. Many LEAs were trying to reduce their special school population gradually, and in particular, the number of pupils placed in out-authority provision. Some had undertaken rationalisation of their special school provision

although closure had been the exception; the amalgamation of two special schools had been more frequent.

Statutory duties/Code of Practice

- 193.** LEAs had given a great deal of attention to the main principles outlined in the SEN Code of Practice – translating principles into procedures, and providing schools with guidance as to the LEA's expectations in respect of assessment and referral criteria for statements. LEAs had overseen the establishment of SEN coordinators in all mainstream schools and most had provided some suitable professional development opportunities for them. Systems of varying effectiveness had been set up for statutory assessment (stage four of the Code) and most LEAs had some form of Panel or local authority Group who meet regularly to consider those children for whom statutory assessment has been completed in order to reach a decision as to whether a statement should be issued.
- 194.** Support for statutory assessment was generally adequately provided. The psychological services were heavily engaged in statutory assessments, limiting in many cases early intervention work with teachers which, if carried out, might have prevented some pupils from requiring a statutory assessment. Most authorities also had specialist teachers available, particularly in respect of pupils with a sensory disability, to undertake the specialist educational assessments necessary for such children. The contribution by the specialist services to annual reviews of children on statements, however, was very variable. Most authorities would claim to have sufficient specialists available to meet children's needs; in practice, however, many children on statements would not see their educational psychologist or specialist teacher between annual reviews. The contribution to annual reviews of children placed in a school outside of the authority was often non-existent.
- 195.** LEAs had different criteria by which they decide to issue a statement. This may relate to the amount of funds delegated to schools, but also to the overall available funds retained for statements, the extent to which the officers stick closely to the LEA's agreed criteria, and the extent to which they are prepared to agree to parents' requests. It may also relate to their willingness or otherwise for a case to be put to the SEN Tribunal.
- 196.** LEAs did not use their best endeavours to secure that the provision identified in the statement is being made. Most had failed to ensure that governing bodies (GBs) fulfil their statutory responsibility to report to parents on the detail, spending and monitoring of SEN funding. As a result, few GBs did this.

School improvement

- 197.** Dissatisfaction with LEAs' performance in relation to SEN remained high, both among schools and parents. That dissatisfaction rarely focuses on the support given to individual pupils. Where specific comment was made on learning support services, it was usually favourable, both with regard to support for individual pupils and advice given to schools. The work of such services was generally satisfactory or good, and so regarded by schools. Despite the growth in size of such services, commented upon in most recent reports, dissatisfaction focused on the frequent unavailability of the support provided, particularly for pupils who have (or whom schools suspect of having) emotional and behavioural difficulties. The same was true of educational psychology services. Their work was valued, but not sufficient in quantity.
- 198.** The picture in most authorities was generally of stretched services providing effective support to individual pupils but, in a third of LEAs, failing to convince schools that resources were equitably allocated to the right pupils. Particularly, but not solely, in those authorities, not all needs were met and the assumption was made that they were too great for the resources available. That assumption should be re-examined in the light of a clearer specification of criteria for moving between stages of the SEN Code of Practice levels of support, and evaluation of the overall effectiveness of support. In few authorities had there been a rigorous audit of the contribution of SEN services to raising attainment, and it was rare to find regular review leading to a decision to cease to maintain a statement.
- 199.** Above all, few if any LEAs were in a position to take a clear view of the overall success of their SEN provision in raising attainment. Costs are considerable, and increasing, but the outcomes of the provision for the children supported are largely unexamined. This is not a position that can be allowed to continue.

Value for money/resource management

- 200.** LEAs faced a particular problem of dealing with limited resources which need to be carefully targeted and, in some areas, inexorably rising demand. Particularly, but not solely, in London LEAs, expenditure on SEN is rising rapidly, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the overall budget, despite what seemed to be a widespread attempt to reduce the incentive for schools to move rapidly through the stages of the Code of Practice by increasing the level of delegation to them. For example, the first inspection report on Tower Hamlets spoke of “a rapid and unchecked growth in statements in the secondary phase”, and that growth no doubt reflects the desire of schools to use the statementing process as the key to unlock resources. The monitoring of placements out of the authority was often weak, with poor value for money not identified.
- 201.** The difficulty of targeting finite resources to meet increasing needs is self-evident, yet not to do so justly, and with the appearance of justice, is to risk undermining that trust which should be at the heart of an LEA’s relationship with its schools. In relation to SEN provision, LEAs are engaged in a task of necessary discrimination. Most are able to undertake that task with some success. A few cannot. Moreover, few if any, monitor effectively the use schools make of delegated SEN funding.

Best practice

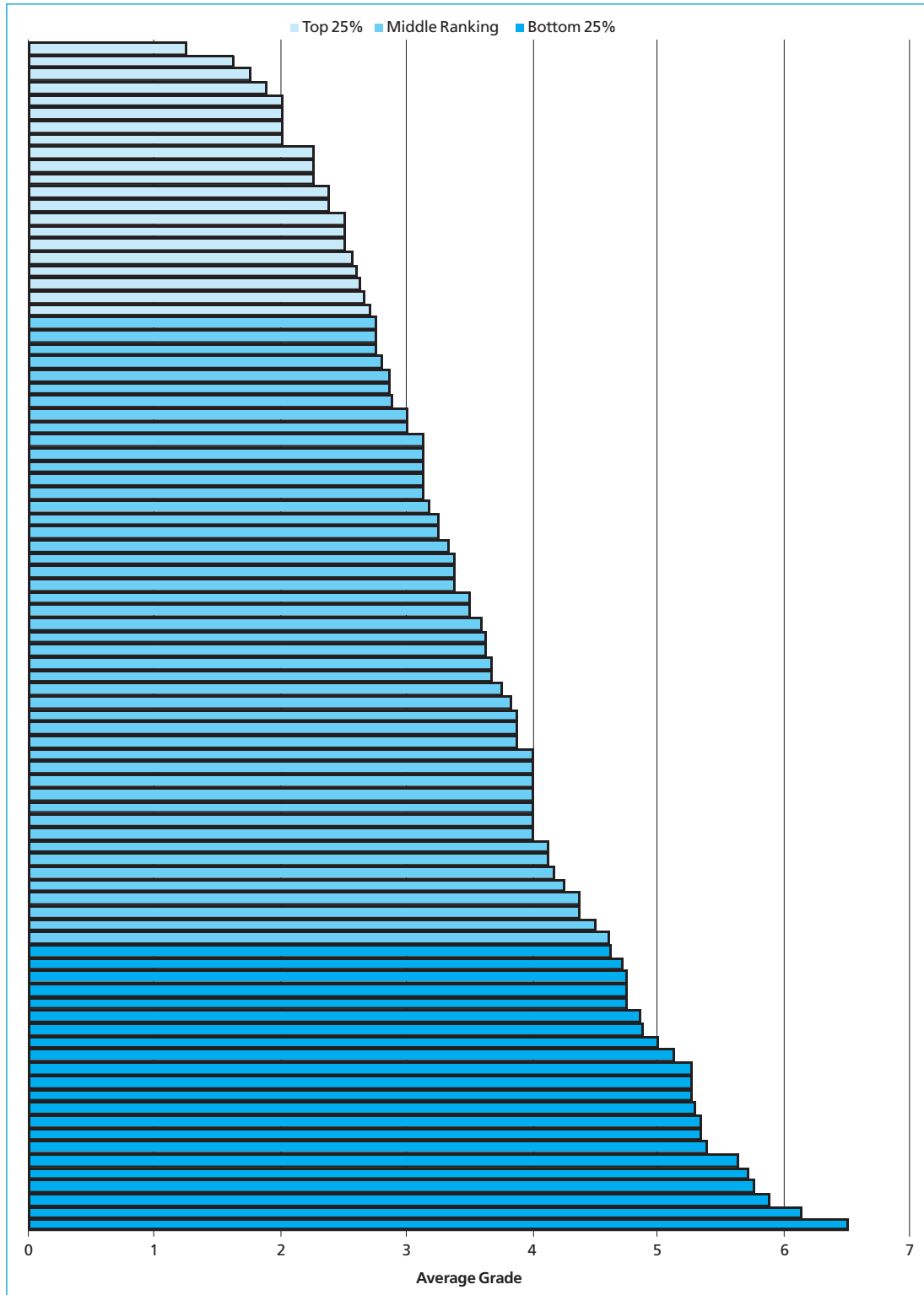
Kensington and Chelsea

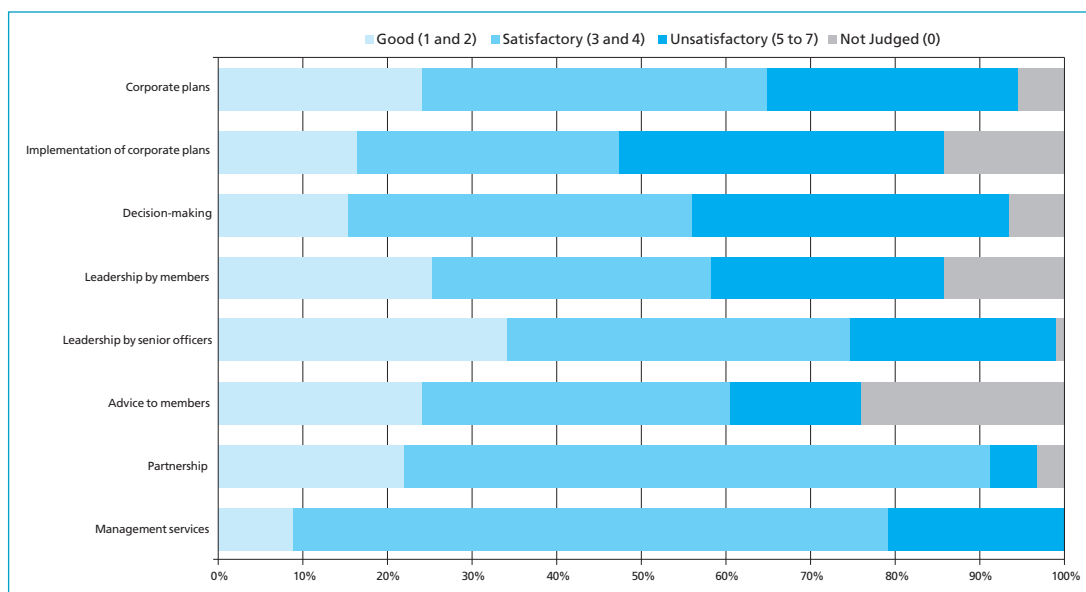
- 202.** The LEA has a coherent strategy for SEN. Schools appreciate the level and quality of support provided by specialist staff in teams for pupils with and without statements of SEN. These teams includes early years, Traveller support, the education psychology consultation service (EPCS), primary outreach team for behaviour support, and a team of teachers and learning support assistants. The teams work in close collaboration, where appropriate, with the education welfare service and social services. School staff are clear about whom to approach for different aspects of SEN provision. Primary schools are particularly appreciative of the level and quality of support provided.
- 203.** The LEA exercises its SEN functions with a clear focus on raising standards. With a small inspection team, the emphasis has been placed on direct support for schools by the EPCS, and teams of specialist teachers in the pupil support service (PSS). A priority is given to support for SEN in the early years to improve the prospects of children and to reduce the need for more expensive intervention later on. The EPCS aims to empower staff in schools to plan and implement individual education plans and to become more confident to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with learning and behaviour difficulties. The EPCS team is highly rated by schools, with several schools describing their support as outstanding. There is a good understanding in schools that pupils’ needs can be met without necessarily progressing through all of the stages to a statement.

LEA management and management services



The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements
1. Strategic management: average grades



*The inspection of LEAs – numerical inspection judgements***2. The percentage of LEAs inspected judged good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory in their performance for strategic management**

- 204.** LEA inspection reports consider the corporate governance of the Council only where it affects education. The quality of decision-making and interaction between elected members, officers and schools are, of course, powerful influences on the quality of the LEA as an organisation. This report has adduced a number of examples of the malignant effect of poor corporate processes. In Councils as different, both politically and in the nature of the communities they serve, as Kensington and Chelsea, Cornwall, Lewisham, Hartlepool, Solihull, the City of York, Camden and Coventry, effective corporate working, including effective leadership by elected members, was a necessary condition of the LEAs achieving quality.
- 205.** The reports make judgements in eight categories. The quality of corporate plans was judged in 93 per cent of all reports. It was good in 24 per cent, satisfactory in 39 per cent and unsatisfactory or poor in 30 per cent. Implementation of corporate plans was evaluated in 82 per cent of reports. It was good in 16 per cent, satisfactory in 30 per cent and unsatisfactory or worse in 36 per cent. These are not reassuring proportions. In too many Councils, there was a lack of overall purpose into which educational strategy could fit. By no means coincidentally, the leadership and decision-making of elected members displayed the same variability. Leadership by members was judged good in 25 per cent of LEAs, satisfactory in 34 per cent and unsatisfactory in 28 per cent. Decision-making was good in 15 per cent of LEAs, satisfactory in 42 per cent and unsatisfactory in 38 per cent.
- 206.** The professional work of senior officers is better, though also variable. The quality of advice to members was evaluated in 75 per cent of reports. It was good in 24 per cent, satisfactory in 37 per cent and unsatisfactory in 14 per cent. The leadership of senior officers was good in 33 per cent of LEAs, satisfactory in 41 per cent and unsatisfactory in 25 per cent. Unsatisfactory professional leadership usually occurred when the political context was ineffective. This is not, of course, to say that one was simply a result of the other. Members and officers exist in symbiosis: where the relationship works well, they reinforce each other's strengths. Where it works poorly, they can resort to blaming each other.
- 207.** What LEAs do best is forge partnerships. Their capacity to do so was assessed as satisfactory in all but four LEAs, and in 22 per cent it was said to be good, though it was better with external agencies than with other departments of the Council. For example, work with traditional partners, such as the police, health services and further and higher education institutions, was almost invariably said to be fruitful. Cooperation with race equality councils appears to be growing, and multi-agency approaches to the early years are also an increasing strength.
- 208.** Multi-agency strategies are most often associated with the promotion of social inclusion. They therefore focus predominantly on children most in need. These strategies are mostly new. It would therefore be tendentious to comment on their effectiveness. Two problems, however, are emerging.

Particular difficulties exist when the agency boundaries are not co-terminous. Derbyshire, for example, “faces a real challenge in relating consistently and positively to three training and enterprise councils, two chambers of commerce, two careers’ services, three education-business partnerships and the three health authorities which serve the area. This makes strategic coordination of policies and plans time-consuming and difficult.”

- 209.** The second problem is the proliferation of agencies with which liaison is necessary, or at least desirable. LEAs have a limited capacity for multi-agency working, liaison and consultation. Our impression was that that capacity was, in some instances, close to being exceeded.
- 210.** Key tasks of all LEAs are the acquisition of resources and the allocation of resources to priorities. The Council determines the proportion of its global resources allocated to education, and the LEA subsequently determines school budgets and the level of funding to be retained centrally.

Acquisition of resources

- 211.** During the period of LEA inspection, there have been significant changes in LEA financing. In early 1999, the great bulk of LEA recurrent finance was allocated through the SSA mechanism. Bidding for capital borrowing approval was the main mechanism for acquiring capital, the New Deal for Schools was still new, and few LEAs were seriously addressing the use of private finance for school building. Inspection reports have shown LEAs to have been increasingly successful in gearing themselves up to bid for capital and revenue grants, the burgeoning Standards Fund, EAZs and regeneration grants. Recent reports have noted a number of sizeable building schemes financed by private partnerships.
- 212.** LEAs have generally been less good at supporting schools in bidding for external grants. This has been one of only three items rated close to “poor” overall by the schools surveyed in both 1999 and 2000, although there are exceptions.

Best practice

Sefton

- 213.** In Sefton the Council has been successful in accessing considerable funds for education from various external grants. They are being used to good effect. The Council has developed effective exit strategies in preparation for the cessation of funding; for example, where projects have successful evaluations, such as the Family and Schools Together project, elected members have built the continuation of costs into base budget. Schools have benefited from the work of the successful external funding team, and external funds have made a substantial contribution to Sefton's improvement and regeneration strategy.

- 214.** The great majority of LEAs inspected have passed on the increase in education SSA to their education budget over the last two years. In a few cases, inspectors have had cause to question the funds included within the section 52 education budget statement. For example in two metropolitan authorities, officers were challenged during inspections over proposals to raise the apparent spend against SSA by including an unwarrantedly large proportion of the passenger transport subsidy in the education budget statement under “home to school transport” expenditure. Increasing scrutiny, coupled with more prescriptive guidance from the local government accountancy body, CIPFA, should bring the greater consistency and comparability of funding practice that Fair Funding seeks in future years.

Allocation of resources to priorities

- 215.** LEAs have generally responded to Fair Funding and the application of funding league tables by converging on the national norms. The proportions of centrally retained expenditure spent on Strategic Management, Support to School Improvement, Access and SEN and the proportion of the budget delegated to schools show less variation this year than last. However, there is excessive variation in LEAs’ effectiveness, within these categories, in targeting resources on priorities. In 15 per cent of inspections the extent to which the LEA targeted its resources on priorities was judged to be good. In 52 per cent of LEAs this was satisfactory, but in as many as 33 per cent it was unsatisfactory. Kensington and Chelsea and Lewisham LEAs were judged to be very good, and Brent, Bury, Camden,

North Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Hartlepool, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, Solihull, Wandsworth and the City of York were all judged to be good.

- 216.** Judgements on the speed and openness of decision-making, especially financial decision-making, showed an even greater spread, with nearly half of LEAs judged to be less than satisfactory. Thirteen per cent of LEAs were judged good, 40 per cent satisfactory, 40 per cent unsatisfactory and seven per cent poor. Targeting of resources and openness of financial decision-taking, appear to be a touchstone characteristic of the overall performance of LEAs. Strength in openness of decision-taking is a key characteristic of effective LEAs and vice versa.

Best practice

Portsmouth

- 217.** In Portsmouth the linkages between education planning and that across the authority are clear. There is heavy emphasis on this in the budget making and review processes, and particularly strong commitment to seeking the views of schools and other service users. The system depends on open relationships and trust in the LEA. Members are kept generally informed of developments and financial decisions made by officers through weekly members information system. Senior officers communicate effectively with schools and consultation is thorough. Support for financial management is good. The notification of delegated budgets is at the end of March, but briefings and discussions earlier in the budget process provide a reasonable indication of the eventual allocations.
- 218.** In both 1999 and 2000 the schools survey showed schools to be satisfied, overall, with levels of delegation. Where there was dissatisfaction, comments made by schools on the survey forms revealed concern about too much as well as too little. The delegation of building maintenance has been unwelcome to many schools, who fear that delegated resources are not adequate for the task, as a number of recent reports attest. Variation in the extent of delegation has changed markedly since LEA inspection started. There is in 2000–2001 relatively little variation in the proportion of the Local Schools Budget delegated to schools – 90 per cent of authorities are within three per cent of one another.
- 219.** Inspection has shown wide variation in LEAs' success in the extent to which LEAs manage the process of delegating budgets for central services in a way that enables schools to have genuine choice about their supplier or even their level of service. Those authorities which delegated budgets for services in the early 1990s have had relatively little to do in responding to the new requirements. In many cases they already understand the need to delegate funding in line with the true costs of provision. Others, with a centralist legacy, have struggled with both the concepts and the timescales of Fair Funding. They have learned disappointingly little from their colleagues who are further down the road. Some LEAs have given scant thought to delegation formulae, or have engaged in notional rather than real delegation. In consequence, their schools have little of the flexibility and choice that the policy was intended to promote, and their LEA services have yet to learn to be cost-conscious and customer-focused. Even so, inspection evidence suggests that the picture is improving as these LEAs learn the lessons of experience and start, in some cases with enthusiasm, to practise the principles of Best Value.

Management services

- 220.** Management services, on the whole, are performed better than other aspects of LEA work. Fair Funding has been a key area of activity for some LEAs over the last two years. It has been conscientiously implemented even by those authorities philosophically opposed to it. However, the latter have found the timescales and culture change more difficult. There is increasing acceptance of schools' role as customers. The awareness of potential competition is tending to drive costs down and to make staff more responsive. Best Value is impacting early on schools' support services, and LEAs are increasingly contemplating outsourcing.
- 221.** Those LEAs that came early to delegation have had relatively little to do. Their confidence, often borne of some years of successful trading, in seeking schools' honest views of services are in contrast to the scramble and avoidance of criticism often in evidence from those who left it late, have had to face delegation with insufficient preparation and have shied away from giving schools genuine choice.

- 222.** The best LEAs ensure that management services are closely integrated in order to support schools. Small schools, particularly, do not wish to spend time playing in the marketplace with a multiplicity of suppliers, especially if they are all from one organisation. The need for integration is particularly important between personnel, finance and the advisory service, which need to work together to support schools that are having to restructure or are causing concern.
- 223.** When some services are contracted out, or alternative suppliers are offered, this integration requires more effort. Development of brokering and clienting skills becomes important if the LEA is to offer easy-to-access, well-integrated outsourced services to schools. Well-constructed partnering arrangements that recognise the interdependence of the LEA, schools and suppliers are needed rather than crude take-it-or-leave-it purchasing. In most LEAs such skills are not yet well-developed, and the concept of offering advice about alternative suppliers to schools is not always accepted.
- 224.** The findings of the re-inspection of Hackney in early 1999 demonstrates that leaving schools to explore an undeveloped marketplace without support or brokering is a recipe for chaos that distracts most headteachers from the task of educating children.
- 225.** Authorities have taken different routes to managing delegated support services, as shown by the following examples, all of which were proving successful at the time of inspection.

Best practice

Warwickshire

- 226.** Warwickshire's services are all in-house, but it has taken quality management seriously: Warwickshire education services provides a range of support services to schools that are fully delegated, have a strong customer focus, and compete with other suppliers. The services are highly regarded by schools in most of them a very well managed. Each service works closely with others in the unit and beyond, sharing information and offering proactive support to schools.

Lincolnshire

- 227.** Lincolnshire has entered a major partnering arrangement with a private sector provider: since April 2000, the majority of the Council's management support functions, including finance, personnel, property and ICT support for schools, have been provided by a private sector company. Rather than responding to a conventional specification, companies were invited to propose changes that would achieve the Council's aims of lower costs, improved efficiency and enhanced services. The successful company is committed to much-needed capital investment in ICT systems at no cost to the Council as well as significant revenue savings. The company will also be investing in a major business centre in Lincoln where most of the 750 staff that have transferred out of Council employment will work.

North Somerset

- 228.** North Somerset, which received a pilot inspection in 1997, had adopted an "account representative" style of presenting services to schools. It maintained a small "Schools Liaison and Support Team" whose role was significant in evaluating performance. The team visited all schools regularly to offer information and seek feedback on the performance of LEA services. It had conducted a number of evaluative reports which were fed back to the relevant service manager and the departmental management team.

Personnel services

- 229.** Personnel continues to be the most highly regarded service by schools, as measured by the school survey, and is generally performed well in the estimation of inspectors. Without support in personnel, headteachers can become embroiled in difficult personnel casework problems and may fall foul of contractual and legal issues. In the very few authorities where it was not well done, schools were having significant problems in consequence and were being distracted from their main task.

Financial services

- 230.** LEA financial services are, in the main, well-regarded by schools, and travelling bursar schemes are generally popular with primary schools when offered. Primary schools, particularly, value on-site support with budget-setting and with reconciliation of accounts. In most LEAs this is well done, and

provides a valued part of the eyes and ears of the education department. An increasing number of LEAs rightly use their finance and personnel staff alongside advisers in identifying and helping to support schools causing concern.

ICT

- 231.** The inspections cover the period of the introduction of NGfL. Although LEAs are making great strides, many have struggled to get the infrastructure in place fast enough to satisfy schools' expectations. Good LEAs are breaking down the distinction between curriculum and administrative ICT in favour of a common infrastructure and an integrated strategy for managing information flows.
- 232.** Electronic information flow between schools and the LEA received one of the lowest ratings on the school survey in 2000. Comments reveal that this, in most cases, resulted from a lack of service rather than a poor quality one, and is perhaps an indicator of raised expectations on the part of schools. Even those making good progress with communications infrastructure have mostly not yet fully exploited the technology for the transfer of data between the LEA and schools, and in the better management of information flows. However, they are well placed to do so, and the new requirement to analyse and track pupil results using a unique pupil identifier will make progress essential.

- 233.** A number of reports have pointed to a potential conflict between the responsibility of LEAs to serve schools, pupils and parents, and their obligations to their own employees. Where LEAs themselves provide services, a tendency to consider the interests of providers before those of users may be hard to avoid. More frequently, difficulties are encountered in turning around a failing service where it is provided by permanent employees of the Council. Radical and rapid changes in personnel are, for excellent reasons, not always possible.
- 234.** The Best Value requirements should ensure that LEAs face this inevitable conflict regularly, and resolve it in the public interest. Best Value reviews are subject to inspection and, where they lack the essential ingredients of challenge and competition, inspectors will say so. There is no requirement on presumption in favour either of the public or the private sector, merely a duty of objectivity, and a rigorous examination of who is best equipped to provide a service, at the lowest cost. This report has pointed to great variability in the quality of LEA work. Where a service is intractably failing, or simply not meeting the needs, to consider whether someone else might do better is a rational course of action, and one which many LEAs have already taken.
- 235.** This is not to advance “outsourcing” as a panacea. Firstly, a distinction needs to be made between services, such as finance or personnel, provided in direct support for schools, and the strategic functions of the LEA, such as the provision of school places. Secondly, a number of respondents to the earlier draft version of this report pointed out that the private sector has no extensive track record in the provision of public education. We accept this, but we also think that such a track record can be acquired and, in some cases, is already being acquired, partly as a result of government interventions in under-performing LEAs.
- 236.** In June, the Select Committee on Education and Employment produced a report, *The Role of Private Sector Organisations in Public Education*, which commented:
- “We agree that a pragmatic approach to raising education standards is necessary. Long-term under-performance in the education sector cannot be ignored. Where more traditional approaches have not raised standards, or produced success, we should make use of expertise wherever it is found in the public, private or voluntary sectors.”
- 237.** It would be hard to argue against this, except in so far as it is surely too limiting. To confine the role of the private sector to the remediation of failure does no justice to the work of LEAs for whom public-private partnership is a strategy for building on success. We also take the view that the complexity of the LEA role is now so great as almost certainly to require a repertoire of strategies for securing expert, cost-effective services.
- 238.** The performance of LEA functions is already reliant on the efficient operation of a mixed market. A growth in that market cannot be ruled out if Best Value is to have its intended, and much-needed impact on LEA performance management. Any performance check, to be properly rigorous, should allow for the possibility that responsibility for performing a given function might be transferred elsewhere. LEAs therefore need:
- to submit themselves to market disciplines; and
 - to be customer-focused.
- That would entail rigour in:
- determining whether a service should be delivered at all;
 - ensuring that services are offered at the right price;

- examining whether they can be offered at a better price;
 - making clear to customers what they can expect;
 - dealing with queries and complaints;
 - informing schools about other providers;
 - forecasting needs and planning to meet them; and
 - managing the performance of staff so as to secure continuous improvement.
- 239.** The “four Cs”, the Best Value principles (see paragraph 29), are applicable to any organisation. LEAs are not businesses, but they can benefit from market disciplines and should be businesslike. The test of whether LEAs are committed to Best Value is not whether they graft its principles on to existing practice, but whether they use them to change, and improve, existing practice.
- 240. Our first recommendation is that LEAs’ approach to Best Value should be appropriately objective. They should consider whether, in their particular circumstances, they are best-placed to provide, as distinct from secure, services in support of schools.**
- 241.** With regard to school improvement, our inspections this year showed a welcome increase in the extent to which LEAs were prepared to target the work they undertake in discharge of their duties under the SSFA on the schools most in need. LEAs have a good record in dealing with schools in special measures, but need to recognise the cost of preventing failure in other weak schools. Given the increasing sophistication of the performance data available on schools, and the multiplicity of LEA contacts with schools, visits undertaken purely for monitoring purposes should be comparatively rare.
- 242. Our second recommendation is therefore that the increasing differentiation found in the approach of LEAs to school improvement should be maintained and extended.**
- This would require:
- that monitoring of schools involve visiting only where demonstrably necessary;
 - that visiting be concentrated for the most part on schools causing concern, and that its purpose should always be to effect improvement, not merely to gather information and not to inspect; and
 - that visits should make better use of the data available, that they should be better planned, not be confined to one day, and, where necessary, regarded as part of a planned series designed to bring about lasting improvement.
- 243.** However, if LEAs are successfully to exercise their functions with a view to promoting high standards in schools, the centrality of the standards agenda needs to be reflected in the management structure of the whole authority and of the LEA. We are unconvinced by structures which place directors of education in a third tier of management. Moreover, the key liaison between LEA and schools seems to us to be effected by personnel who, too often, have neither the status nor the capacity to ensure that the schools’ needs are fully reflected in the way the LEA exercises the full range of its functions, or targets its resources.
- 244. Our third recommendation is that the management structures of LEAs should reflect the central importance of school improvement.** This might entail:
- directors of education working directly to chief executives;
 - officers responsible for school improvement having overall direction, as a management board subject to the director, of the full range of services relevant to school improvement; and
 - such officers being few in number, highly paid and fully qualified to advise on school management. (The retention of large advisory services should be wholly dependent on schools’ readiness to purchase the services offered.)
- 245.** It does not seem probable that effective intervention in schools can be mounted by other than highly qualified, well-trained, expert personnel. LEA performance management systems are not always adequate to guarantee the quality of work that is required, nor can LEAs afford lengthy training for advisers or officers. We therefore believe that this is an issue for government.

- 246. Our fourth recommendation is that there should be a national framework of competencies and of training for LEA officers, advisers and inspectors engaged in school improvement.**
- 247.** LEAs have not been assisted in their school improvement work by apparently conflicting judgements of their EDPs. Approval by the Secretary of State has not indemnified them against criticism by OFSTED. The approval process concentrated on the audit of needs, the priorities set and the outline of the school improvement programme. The detail of the activities and actions to be taken, however, were set out in Appendix 3 of the EDP, which was not part of the statutory approval process. There is, therefore, no real contradiction. On the other hand, there can be no point in one part of government approving a plan which another subsequently declares not to have been feasible in the first place.
- 248. Our fifth recommendation is that OFSTED should be asked to evaluate the feasibility of the EDP at the time of statutory approval, and its view communicated to the LEA.**
- 249.** The most successful aspects of school improvement currently are the NLS and the NNS. The least successful is provision for ICT. Again and again, LEAs have shown that they can be an effective conduit for central initiatives. Conceiving, then disseminating, well-considered strategies is not their strength. ICT planning in most LEAs focuses on equipment, installation, maintenance and the development of teachers' skills, but necessary distinctions are not made between:
- personal skills as users;
 - skills in using ICT for management;
 - pedagogic skills for teaching ICT or other subjects using ICT; and
 - skills in using ICT for curriculum design.
- 250. Our sixth recommendation is that consideration be given to developing the national ICT strategy, to increase greatly the focus on raising standards, both in ICT itself and across the curriculum through ICT use.**
- 251.** LEAs make great efforts to support governors, and often do so well, but governors often expressed dependency on LEAs, and many senior officers were acutely aware of schools' inability to recruit the governors they need. Again, this seems to us to be a national issue.
- 252. Our seventh recommendation is that ways of providing sufficient and effective governors to all schools be explored at the national level.**
- 253.** Not the least of the difficulties LEAs experience arises from the mobility of modern populations. LEAs cannot, to any appreciable extent, control the two most important variables: the movement of pupils and the movement of teachers. The recruitment of teachers to the most difficult schools and the most challenging areas, notably inner London, is an issue beyond the scope of this paper. However, it would be unfair not to note the problem it presents for many LEAs. It is, moreover, abundantly clear that the current topographical pattern of LAs matched no observable demographic, economic or cultural reality. In the large conurbations, LA boundaries are scarcely observable. Little in the short term can be done about this, but we believe that government can, and should, do more to palliate its effects. We believe:
- **that in relation to a number of issues associated with access to education and SEN (the social inclusion issues), thought should be given to action on a regional basis;**
- and
- **urgent national attention should be given to introducing a common database for transferring pupil-related information between LEAs, between phases of education and between different departments of LAs.**

Appendix: Measuring the LEA effect

Introduction

- 254.** The inspections of LEA do not, so far, support the common sense assumption that there is a direct relationship between the quality of LEAs as judged by HMI and the Audit Commission and the standards, effectiveness or rates of improvement of schools. In this paper this assumed direct relationship between the work of the LEA and the standards and performance of schools is referred to as “the LEA effect”. This analysis represents an initial attempt to identify the existence and extent of “the LEA effect”.
- 255.** Evidence is now available of 75 LEA inspections, which represents about half the number of LEAs in England. Inspection judgements are recorded in a numerical form on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 7 (very poor). These judgements and the criteria for making them, are known to LEAs. These numerical judgements are used in conjunction with numerical judgements from school inspection and performance data to attempt to identify and measure “the LEA effect”.

Methodology

- 256.** The numerical judgements for LEA inspections are compared in this paper with various aspects of school standards and numerical judgements for school inspections. The analysis represents an initial attempt to identify the extent to which:
- there is a link between the overall quality of the LEA and the overall standards and rates of improvement of LEA schools in Key Stage 2 and at GCSE examinations;
 - the “LEA effect” is greater in primary than secondary schools – or vice versa;
 - the “LEA effect” has reduced the gap in standards between the most and least successful schools; and
 - the “LEA effect” is measurable for specific aspects of school provision notably school management, literacy, numeracy, attendance and SEN.
- 257.** A valid analysis of the “LEA effect” must take into account other factors, which may have an effect on school standards. In this analysis only one other factor has been taken into account. The proxy indicator of free school meals has been used to take into account any inverse relationship between educational disadvantage and school standards. Other factors which could be taken into account include the size of the LEA, the Council’s priorities, funding and finance.
- 258.** The analysis also assumes that the numerical inspection judgements are consistent, reliable and valid. Unlike the inspection of schools, where the number of schools inspected makes variation in judgements insignificant, the smaller number of LEAs entails the risk that “rogue” judgements may have a disproportionate influence.
- 259.** Potential links to demonstrate the “LEA effect” are made between LEAs and schools at three different levels. In addition some comparisons are made using the averages for all schools in the LEA. Others base the comparisons on scores for individual schools.
- 260.** LEAs are compared using numerical judgements at the following three levels:
- an overall grade on the effectiveness of LEA work;
 - composite grades on particular aspects (in this analysis school improvement support and special educational need are used); and
 - individual numerical judgements on specific aspects of support.

Support for literacy, numeracy, school management, attendance and leadership of services for school improvement are used in this analysis. However, in total 45 individual indicators are available.

- 261.** Schools are compared using the following indicators:
- data on pupil performance;
 - composite school inspection grades for school management; and
 - specific indicators such as attendance and SEN.
- 262.** Data at different levels of specificity and aggregation enable comparisons at different levels of generality. Overall judgements represent aggregated judgements or indicators containing several different components. Specific judgements or indicators refer to a judgement or indicator, which represents a single aspect. General relationships identify “the LEA effect” over a wide number of LEA functions whereas specific comparisons, on the other hand, relate to the close relationship between an aspect of LEA support and the corresponding aspect of school standards.
- 263.** It seems reasonable to expect that the more specific the focus, the clearer the relationship should be, and the more easily identifiable the effect of the LEA. That is, the relationship between, for example, the quality of the LEA support for literacy and the standards achieved in literacy should be easier to detect than that between the LEA’s work in general and overall outcomes.

Overall findings

- 264.** The evidence does not support the assumption that the quality of LEA support drives up standards in schools generally. There is no direct relationship between the overall effectiveness of the LEA and school standards at Key Stage 2 and GCSE.
- 265.** There is, however, some evidence of an “LEA effect” on some specific aspects of the schools’ work. A discernible relationship tends to exist when specific aspects of support are compared with corollary outcomes in schools. Even then, the relationship is not consistent and is only apparent when LEA support is graded very good or where schools have made improvement from a low baseline.
- 266.** Key Stage 2 literacy and numeracy results are rising faster in schools with lower attainment in LEAs where support has been judged good than in LEAs where it has been judged unsatisfactory. However, this relationship does not obtain in schools with average or above results. There is no similar relationship at GCSE. Schools’ rate of improvement shows no direct relationship with the effectiveness of LEA support to school improvement.
- 267.** Primary and secondary schools with high rates of free school meals are judged to have better attendance in LEAs where support for attendance is judged good than in LEAs where support is judged unsatisfactory. No similar relationship exists between the effectiveness of LEA support and attendance in schools with average or low rates of free school meals. A similar relationship exists between schools and LEA support for SEN, although this is much more marked in secondary schools.
- 268.** LEAs which provide good support for school management are less likely to have a high percentage of schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management than in LEAs providing unsatisfactory support. However, this relationship is not consistent. The percentages of schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management still show significant, and in secondary schools extreme, variations between LEAs providing support of similar quality.
- 269.** The quality of leadership of services to support school improvement is related to higher standards only in LEAs where it is judged very good. Attainment at Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics and GCSE average points score in all other LEAs shows no relationship with the quality of the leadership of services to support school improvement.
- 270.** The relationship between LEA support and schools standards is much less powerful than the inverse relationship, which exists between disadvantage and school standards. The work of LEAs appears to do little to counteract this negative effect. Disadvantage continues to have a pervasive impact on school standards irrespective of the quality of LEAs. Standards in schools in LEAs judged very good or good are still mostly lower than national averages although one or two LEAs have standards in one subject or at

one Key Stage which are at or higher than national averages. Standards in schools are lower than the national averages in every LEAs judged poor.

- 271.** LEA support has no more impact in primary schools than in secondary schools. The statistical comparisons between the effectiveness of the LEA and school standards do not differ significantly between primary and secondary schools.
- 272.** LEAs, irrespective of their quality are not narrowing the gap between schools with high and low standards in their area. The gap at Key Stage 2 in literacy in effective LEAs is marginally smaller than in other LEAs. Further testing is required to determine whether this is significant.

Conclusions

- 273.** The relationships between the effectiveness of LEA support and school standards are not consistent or very clear. The analysis shows that there is little or no overall statistical relationship. Even when a specific aspect of support is linked to the closely related school outcome, a consistent relationship is not clearly apparent. The tenuous and inconsistent relationships between the quality of support provided by the LEA and school standards, when compared with the pervasive effect of disadvantage on school standards, highlight the flimsiness of any link.
- 274.** Such relationship as exists is complex. It requires a more varied and comprehensive statistical analysis than has been possible for this enquiry. A research study would investigate the issues more thoroughly.

Index of analysis included in this report

LEA level	School level	Level of aggregation of school data	Generality of relationship between LEA/school and specificity of indicators
1. Overall numerical judgement for the quality of the LEA	Percentage of pupils attaining Level 4 in English at KS2 in 1999	Average for all LEA schools	General relationship. Unspecific judgements and indicators
2. Overall numerical judgement for the quality of the LEA	Percentage of pupils attaining Level 4 in mathematics at KS2 in 1999	Average for all LEA schools	General relationship. Unspecific judgements and indicators
3. Overall judgement for the quality of the LEA	Percentages of pupils gaining five or more GCSE subjects at grades A*–C and pupils' average points score	Average for schools in LEA area	General relationship. Unspecific judgements and indicators
4. Numerical judgement for the quality of literacy support	Improvement in percentages of pupils gaining level 4 or above in English test 1996–9	At the school level – schools in LEAs in top and bottom 25 per cent of effectiveness are compared	Very specific relationship. Very specific indicators and judgements
5. Numerical judgement for the quality of numeracy support	Improvement in percentages of pupils gaining Level 4 or above in mathematics test 1996–9	At the school level. Schools in LEAs in top and bottom 25 per cent of effectiveness are compared	Very specific relationship. Very specific indicators and judgements
6. Composite judgement for the quality of support for school improvement	Improvement in the average points score and percentages of pupils gaining five or more passes at GCSE with grades A*–C	At the school level. Schools in LEAs in the top or bottom 25 per cent of effectiveness are compared	General relationship. Unspecific judgements and indicators
7. Numerical judgement for the quality of literacy support	The range of KS2 English test results using standard deviation	The standard deviation in average points scores for English are compared for 1996–9 in LEAs where the effectiveness of literacy support is graded 2, 4, 6	Specific comparison. Very specific indicators and judgements
8. Numerical judgement for the quality of support for school management	Composite school inspection judgement for the percentage of schools requiring some or significant improvement for school management	Percentages derived for management of all schools in the LEA as judged in last inspection	Specific comparison. Specific judgements and aggregated indicators
9. Composite judgement for the strategy and support for SEN	Schools judged good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory for SEN	Percentages derived at the school level	Specific comparison. Specific indicator and aggregated judgement
10. Numerical judgement for quality of support for attendance	Schools judged good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory for attendance	Percentages derived at the school level	Very specific comparison. Specific indicators and judgements

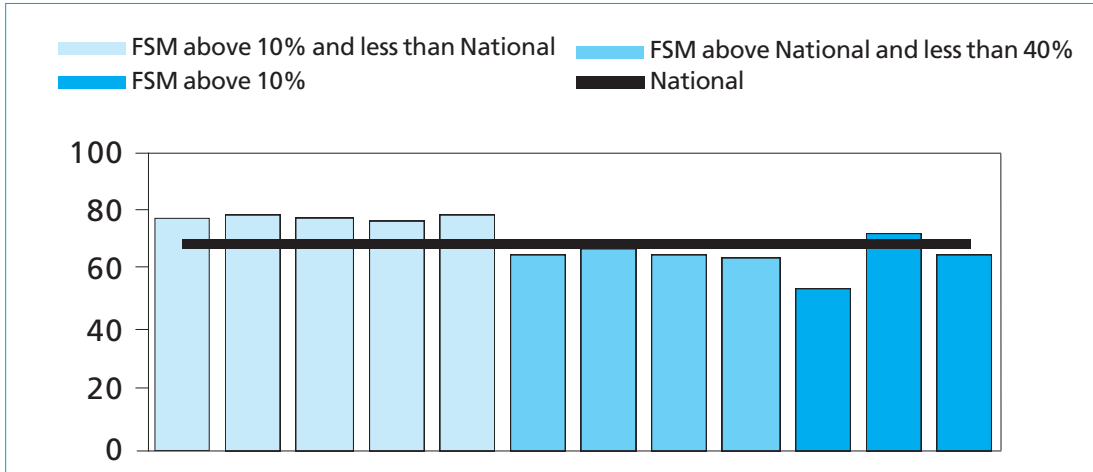
Analyses 1–3

The LEA effect on school standards in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2.

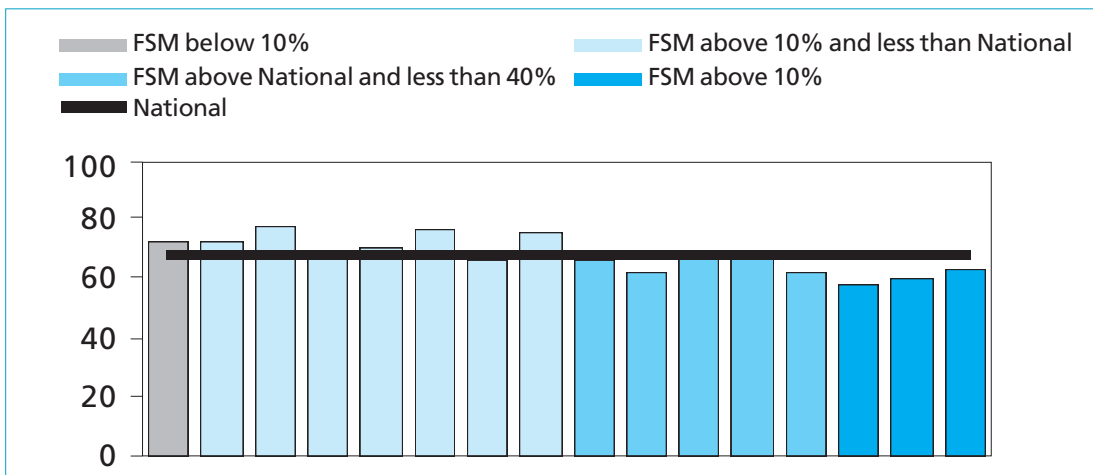
The LEA effect on school standards at GCSE – average points score and five or more passes at grades A*–C at GCSE.

- 275.** Key Stage 2 test results in English and mathematics and at GCSE, the average points score and percentage of pupils attaining five or more passes at grades A*–C in 1999 are compared with the overall quality of LEAs at grade 2, 4, 6. The analysis reflects LEAs with differing percentages of pupils entitled to free school meals in four groups – under ten per cent; between 11 per cent and at the national average, over the national average but 40 per cent; over 41 per cent.
- High levels of disadvantage do not determine LEA failure. Nevertheless, LEAs where overall quality is judged unsatisfactory have higher rates of free school meals than the national average. LEAs judged good overall vary significantly in the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals. However, the LEAs graded unsatisfactory have consistently higher than the national average rates of free school meals.
 - Even the best LEAs do not consistently overcome the impact of disadvantage on attainment at Key Stage 2 and GCSE. The pattern of attainment in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 and at GCSE in LEAs with higher than average rates of free school meals does not differ significantly between the best-run LEAs and the worst. Only one LEA judged very good overall and with very high rates of free school meals attains results at Key Stage 2 which are marginally higher than the national averages. Most LEAs which are judged good or satisfactory and which have higher percentages of pupils entitled to free school meals than the national averages still achieve results which are lower than the national average. A few attain at or marginally above the national average. All LEAs judged unsatisfactory attain below national averages.
 - Well-run LEAs do help to ensure results which are consistently higher than national averages when there is no significant impact of disadvantage on standards. Attainment is consistently better than national averages in better LEAs which have lower than national average rates of free school meals. Although sample size is small, there is less variability and range in standards in LEAs judged good than in those which are satisfactory.
 - There is little perceptible difference in the extent to which the LEA effects school standards at Key Stage 2 or at GCSE.

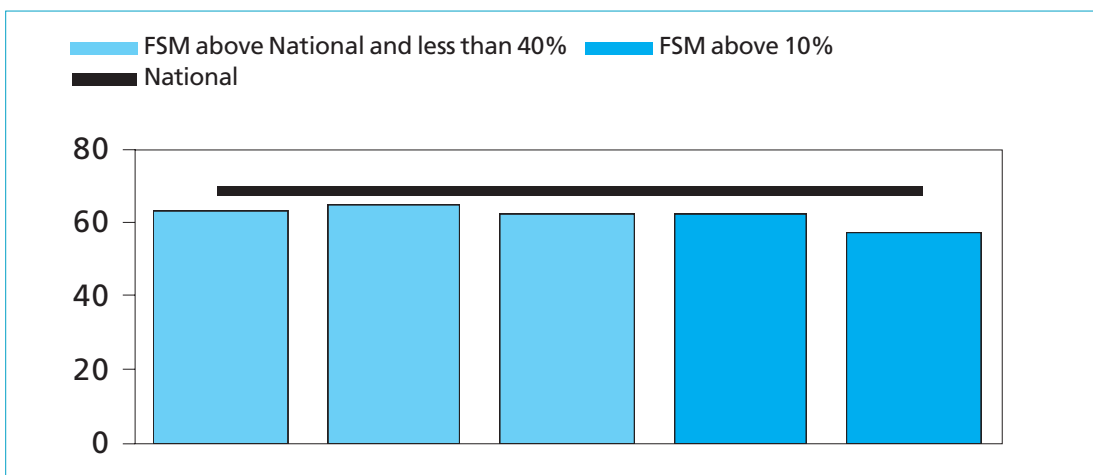
Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 at KS2 in National Curriculum tests in English in LEAs scoring 2 for overall grade



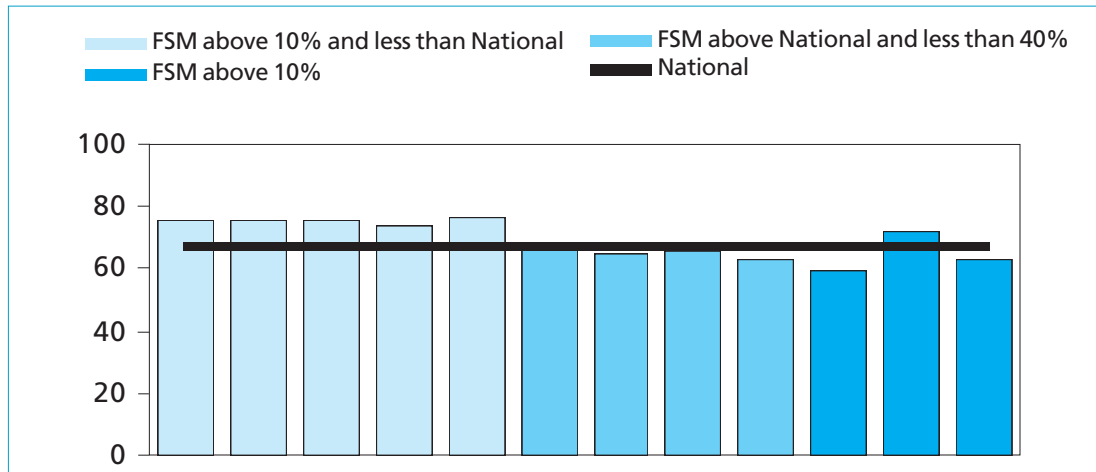
Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 at KS2 in National Curriculum tests in English in LEAs scoring 4 for overall grade



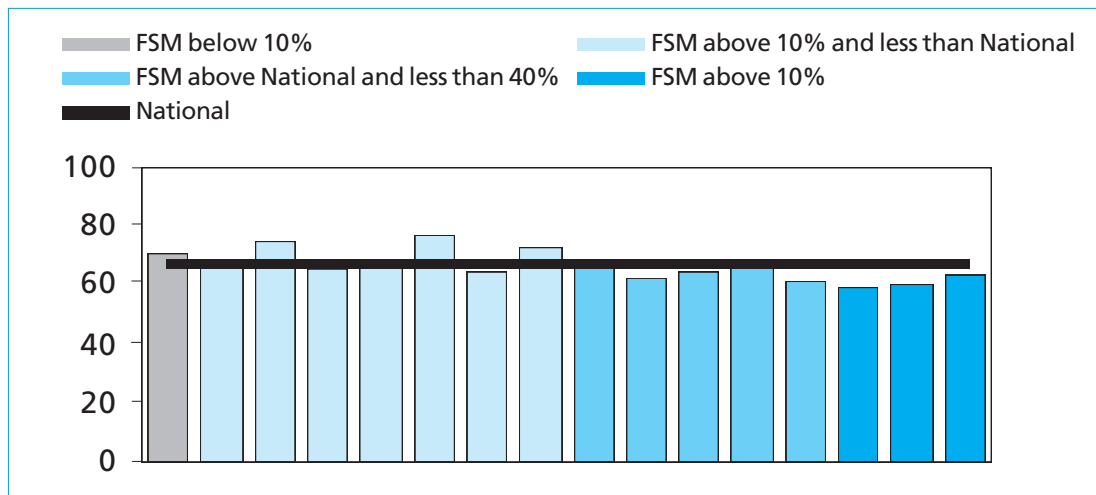
Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 at KS2 in National Curriculum tests in English in LEAs scoring 6 for overall grade



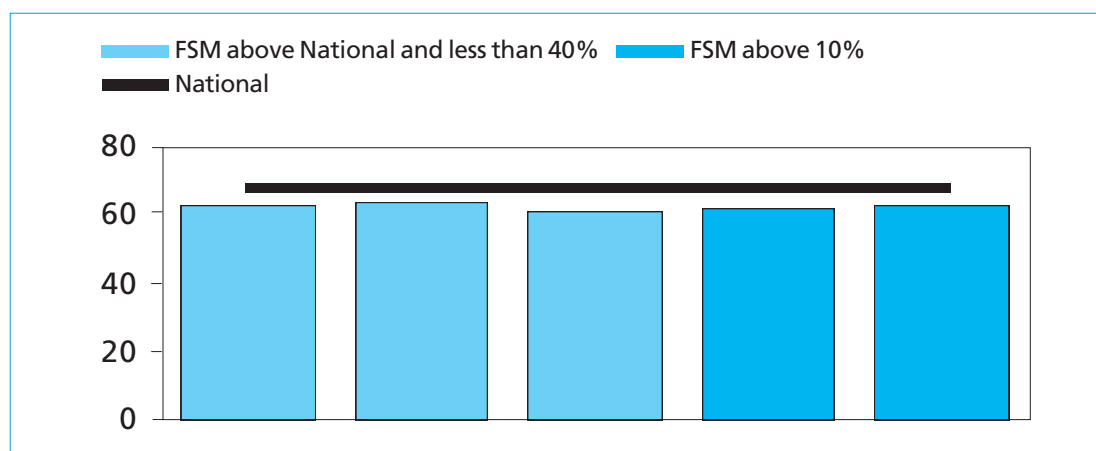
Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 at KS2 in National Curriculum tests in mathematics in LEAs scoring 2 for overall grade



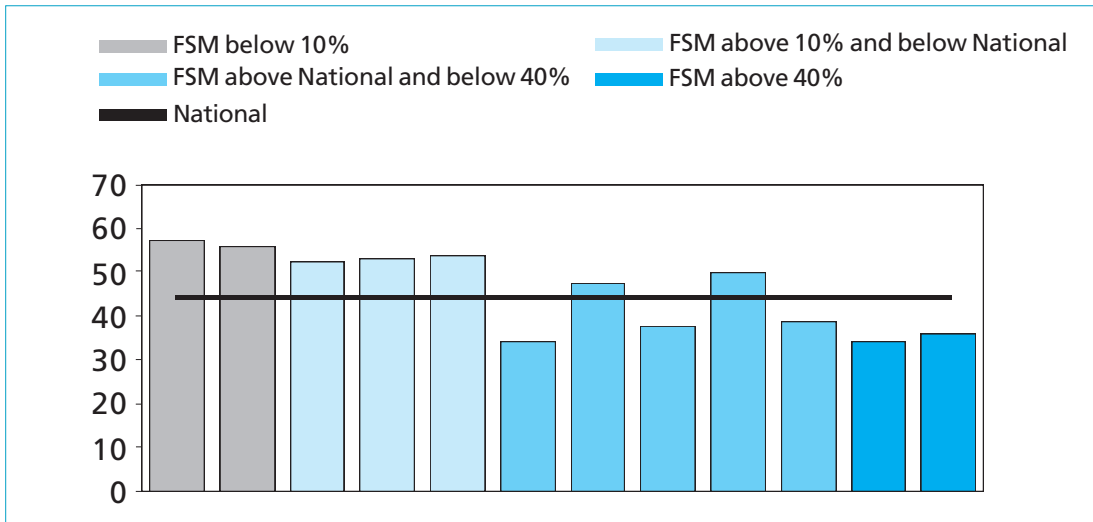
Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 at KS2 in National Curriculum tests in mathematics in LEAs scoring 4 for overall grade



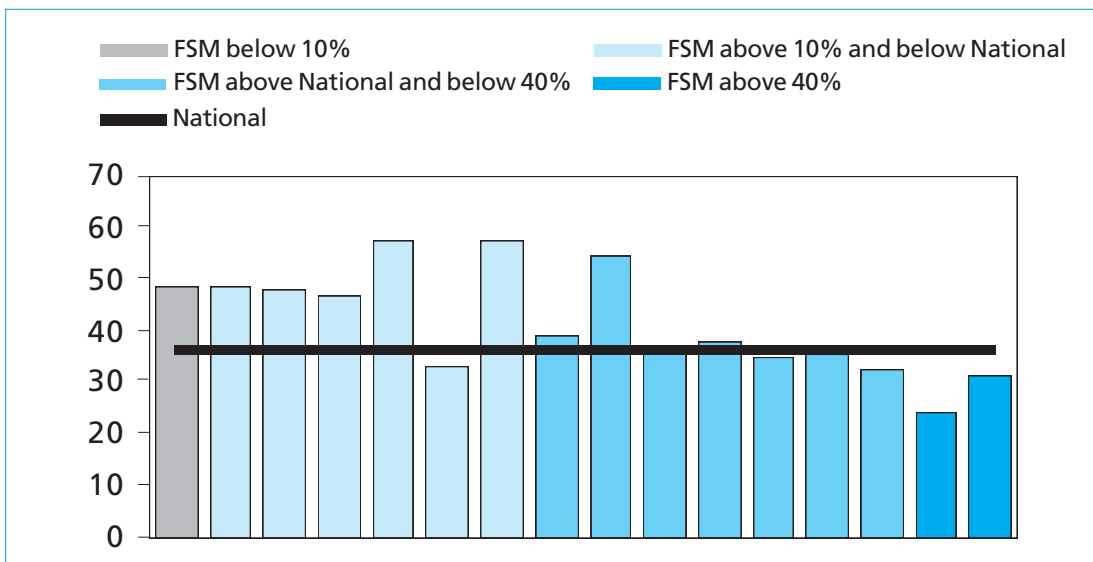
Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 at KS2 in National Curriculum tests in mathematics in LEAs scoring 6 for overall grade



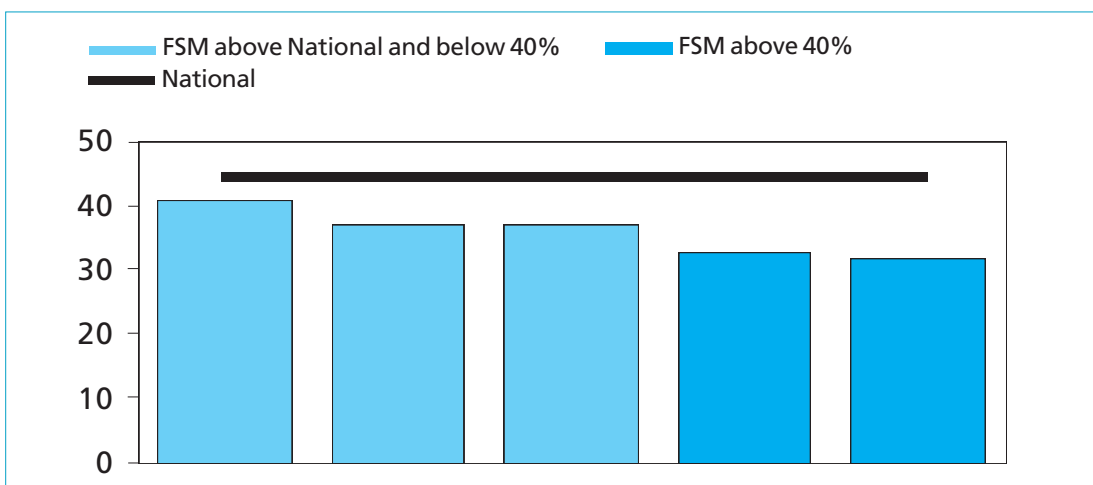
Percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*–C passes at GCSE for LEAs graded 2 overall



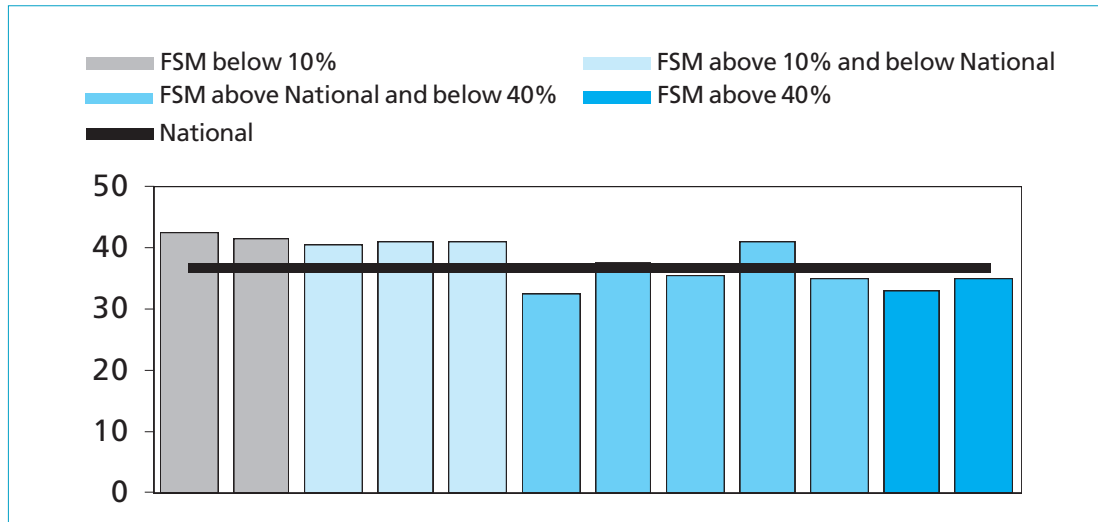
Percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*–C passes at GCSE for LEAs graded 4 overall



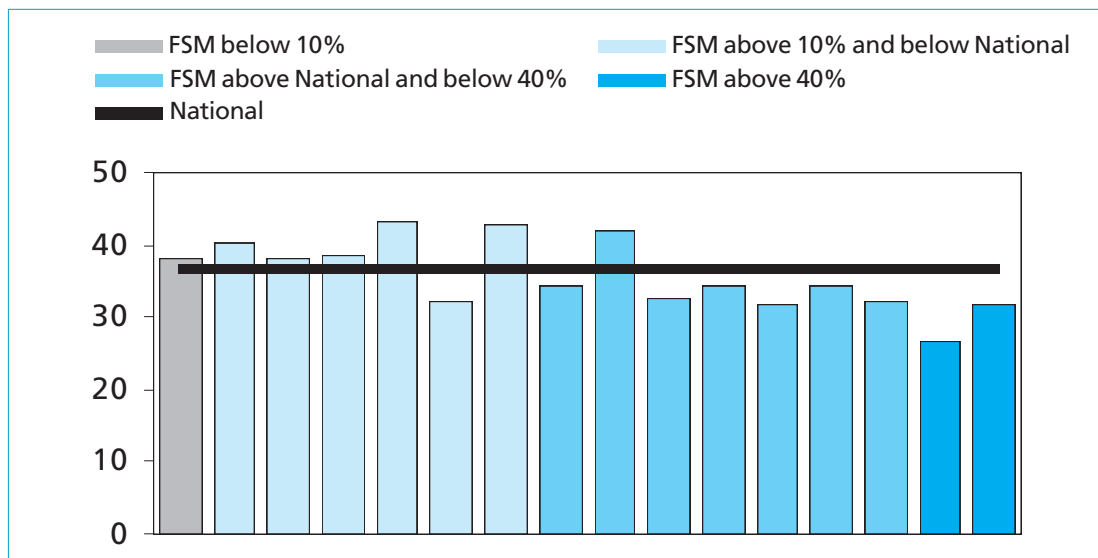
Percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*–C passes at GCSE for LEAs graded 6 overall



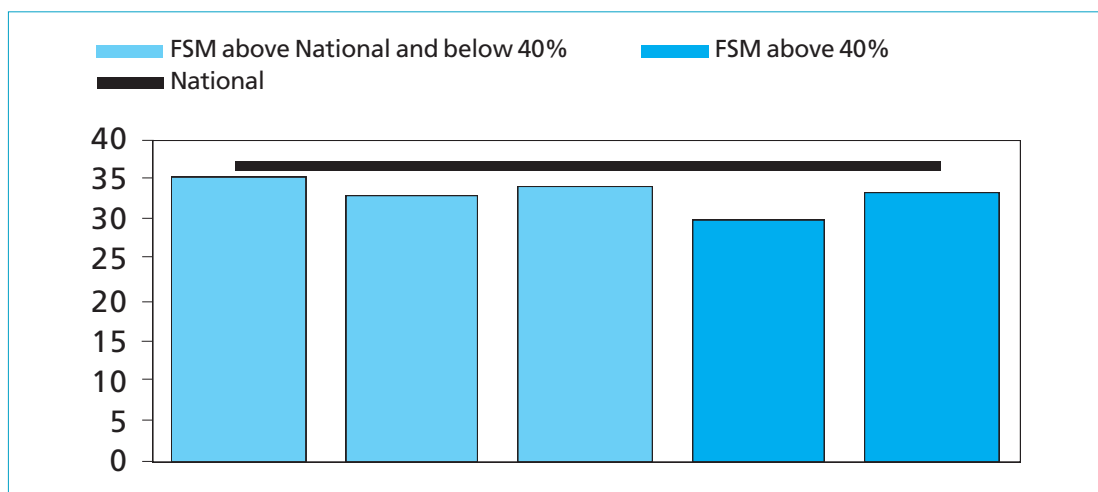
GCSE average point scores for LEAs graded 2 overall



GCSE average point scores for LEAs graded 4 overall



GCSE average point scores for LEAs graded 6 overall



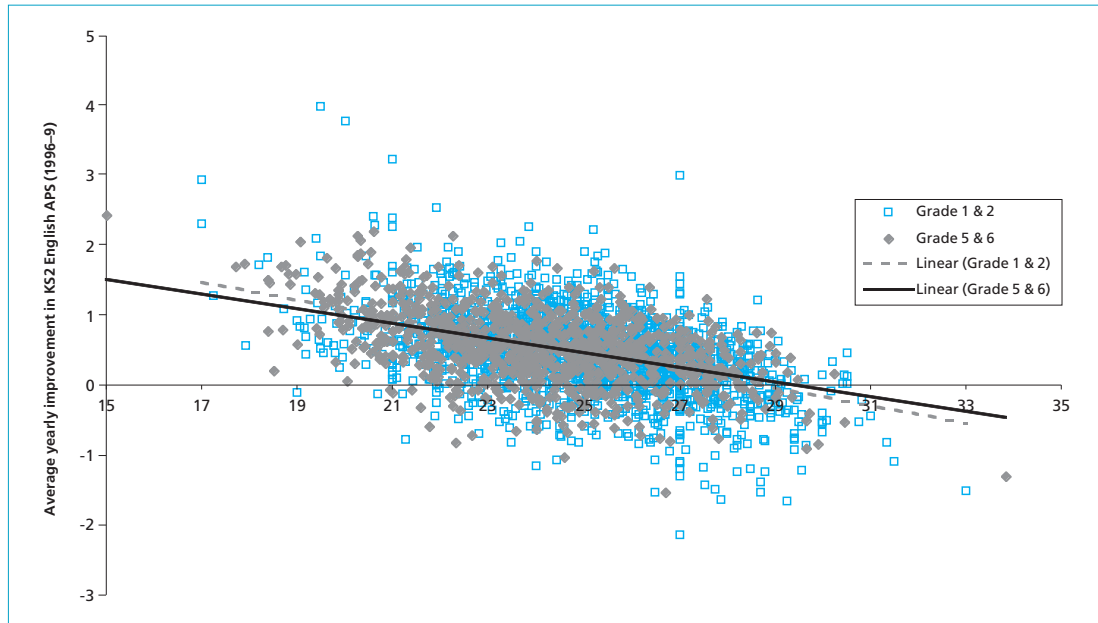
Analyses 4–6

Differences in the rates of improvement in attainment in literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 2 between 1996 and 1999 in LEAs judged to provide very good (grades 1 and 2) and poor (grades 5–7) support for literacy and numeracy.

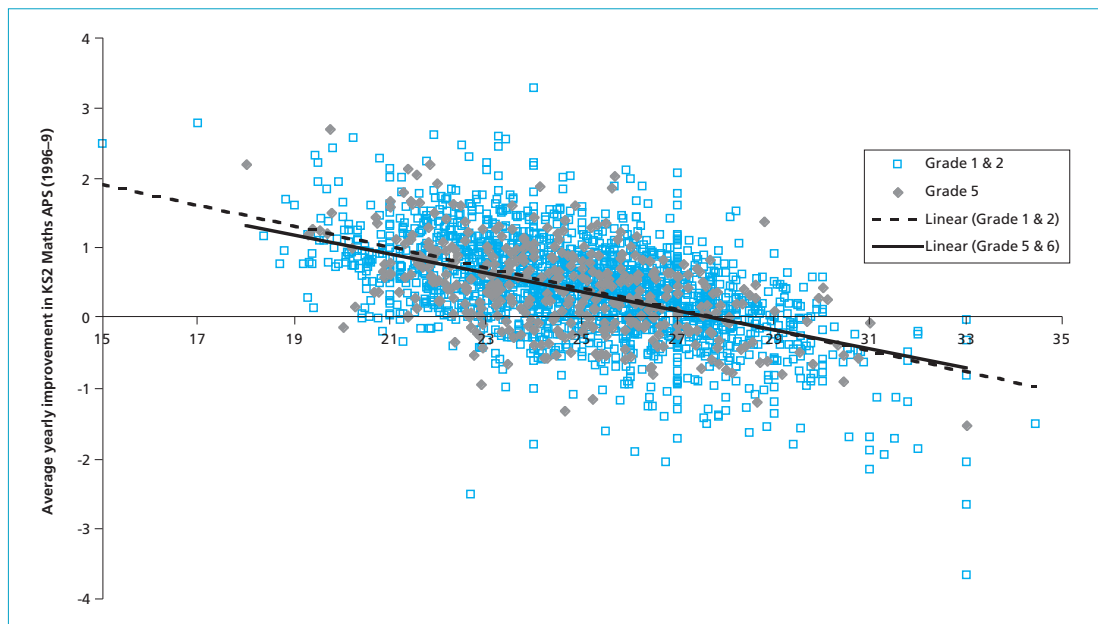
Differences in the rates of improvement in attainment at GCSE average points score and five or more passes at GCSE with grades A*–C in LEAs where school improvement support (composite grade) is judged good (top 25 per cent of LEAs inspected) or unsatisfactory (bottom 25 per cent of LEAs inspected).

276. ● Schools where attainment in literacy or numeracy were low in 1996 (average points score about 23 and below) are making faster progress in LEAs where support for literacy and numeracy have been judged good or very good than in LEAs where support was judged unsatisfactory or poor.
- This effect is not maintained where schools were achieving well (better than an average points score of 23) in 1996.
 - A similar analysis shows differences in rates of improvement in GCSE average points score and for the percentage of pupils who pass five or more A*–C grades when compared with the composite grade for the effectiveness of LEA support to school management. Rates of improvement in schools in LEAs where school management support is judged good were compared with schools in LEAs which are judged unsatisfactory. While most, but not all schools are making improvements, no different pattern exists between schools in LEAs where school improvement support has been judged good or from those judged unsatisfactory.

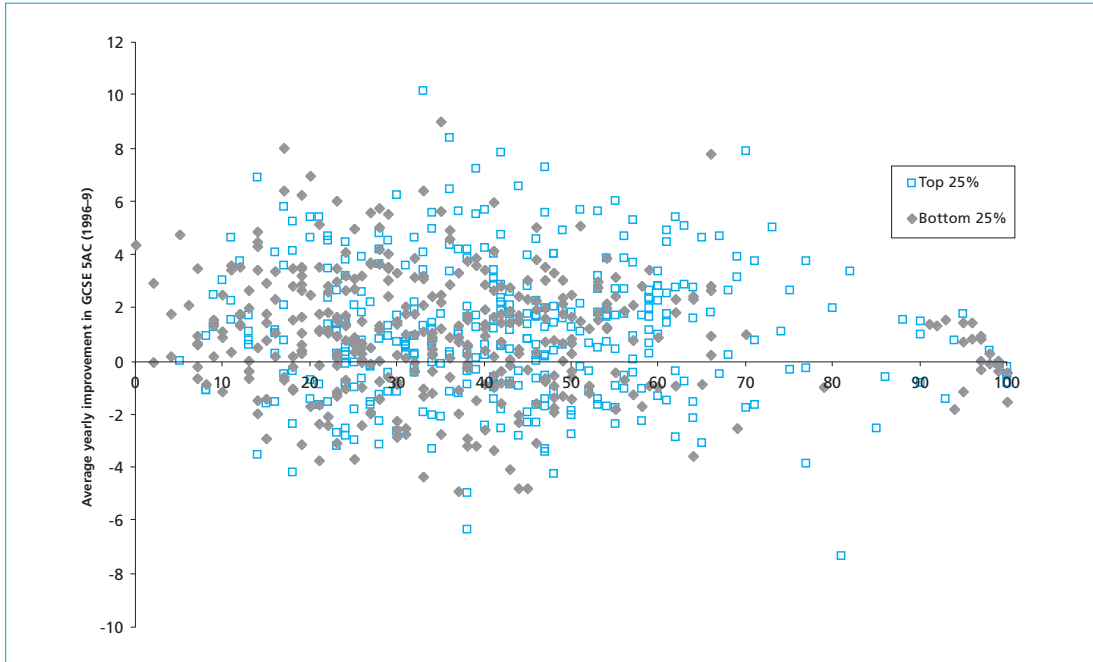
Improvement in KS2 English average points score 1996–9 in schools comparing LEAs in which support to improve standards in literacy is graded good (Grade 1–2) and unsatisfactory (Grade 5–6)



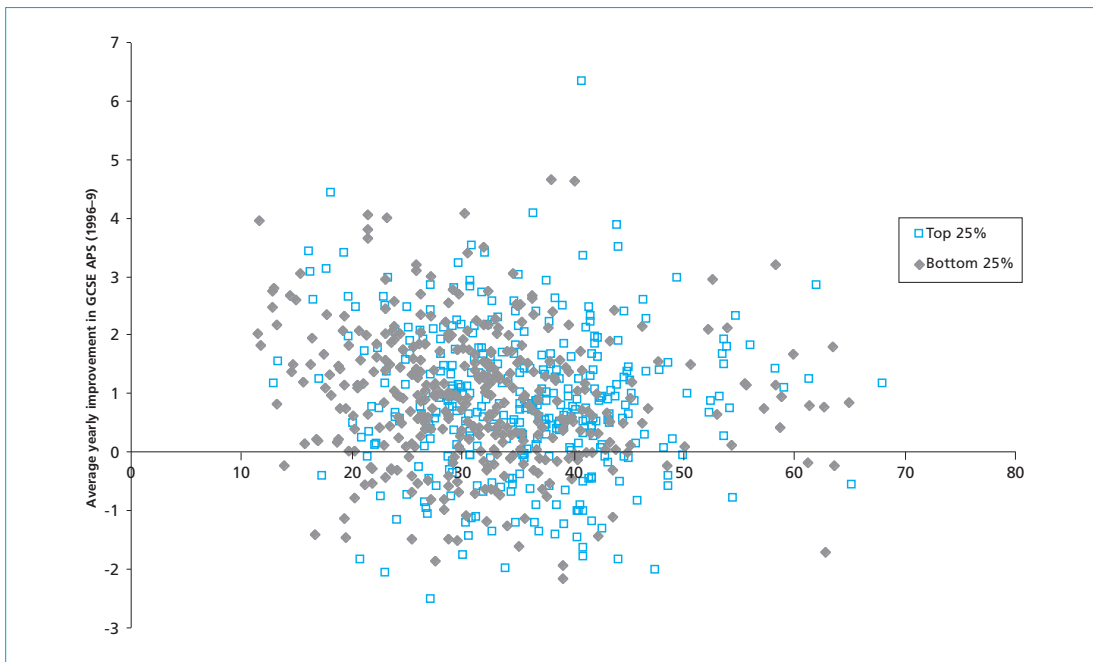
Improvement in KS2 mathematics average points score 1996–9 in schools comparing LEAs in which support to improve standards in mathematics is graded good (Grade 1–2) and unsatisfactory (Grade 5–6)



Improvement in percentage of pupils achieving five or more passes at GCSE grades A–C in LEAs graded in the top or bottom 25% for support for school improvement



Improvement in pupils' average points scores in schools in LEAs graded in the top or bottom 25% for support for school improvement

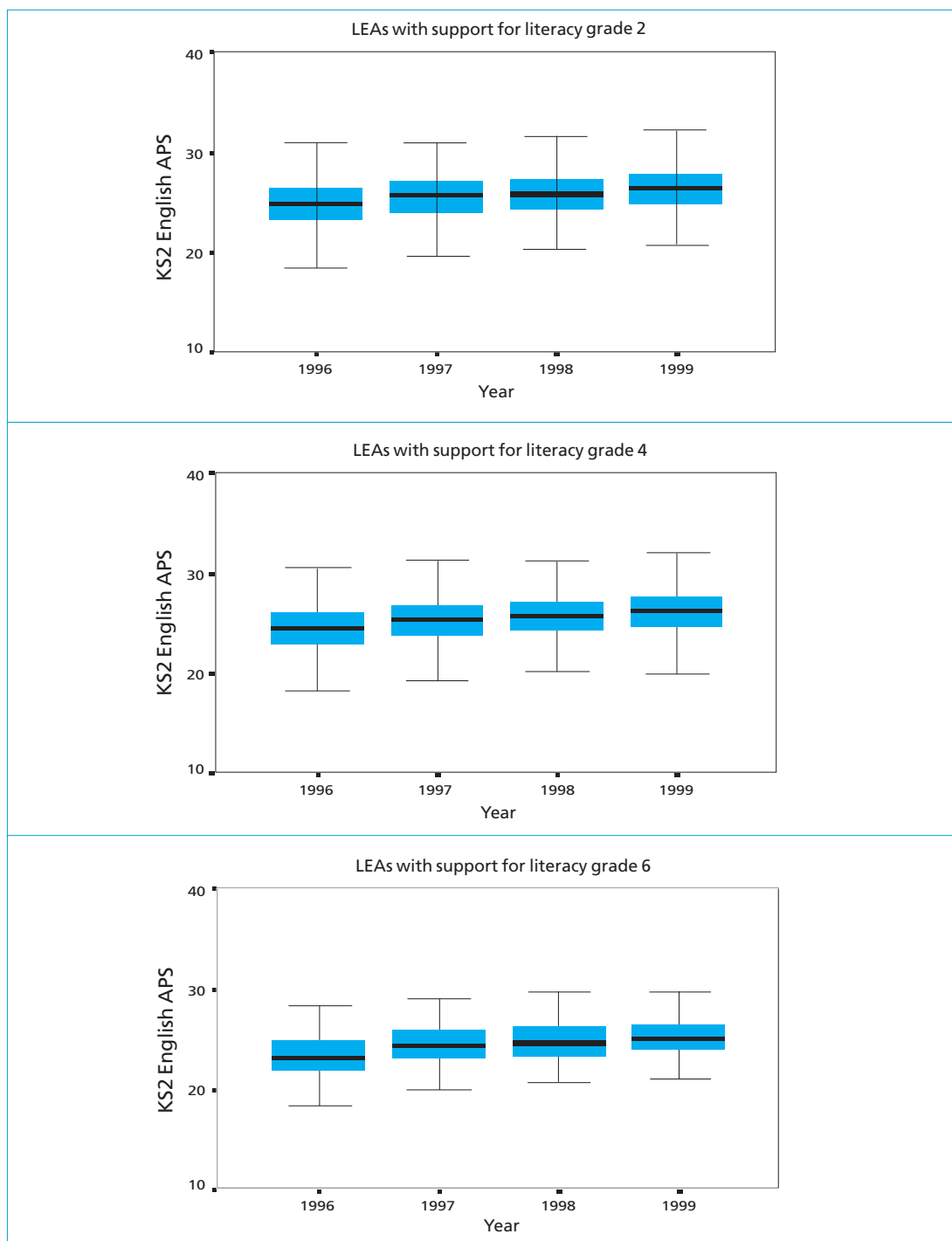


Analysis 7

Literacy scores are compared for Key Stage 2 Literacy assessments between 1996 and 1999 for schools in LEAs where literacy support has been judged good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory.

277. Standards of literacy are rising overall. The standard deviation has reduced only slightly in LEAs overall between 1996 and 1999 and is marginally less in LEAs where support for literacy has been judged good. However overall, LEAs, irrespective of the effectiveness of support for literacy have not been markedly successful in significantly reducing the variation in standards of literacy at Key Stage 2 between schools in the LEA area.

The range of KS2 English average points scores compared in LEAs where literacy support has been judged good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory



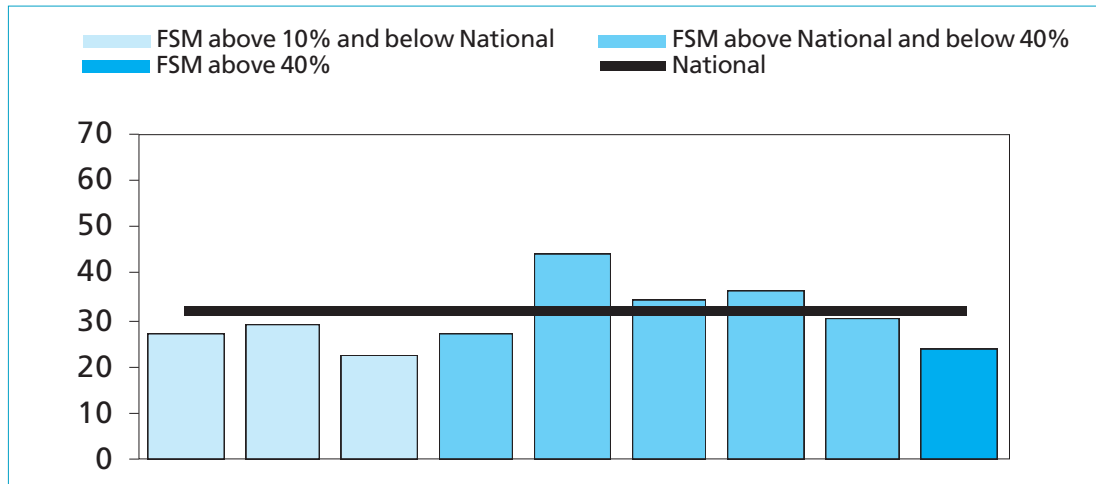
Analysis 8

The percentage of primary and secondary schools in their most recent inspection which require some significant improvement is compared with the judgement for LEA support to school management in LEAs where support is judged good (grade 2), satisfactory (grade 4) and unsatisfactory (grade 6). This analysis also reflects the differences in the incidence of free school meals.

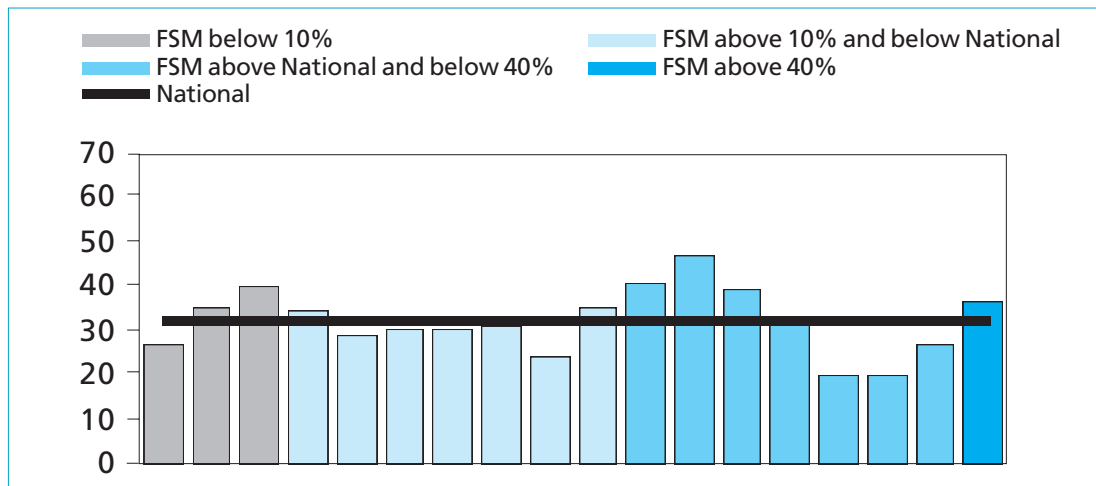
- 278.
- Grades for LEA support to school management do not show such a clear relationship with rates of free school meals as has been the case with overall effectiveness of the LEA.
 - There is some direct relationship between the effectiveness of LEA support for school management and the percentages of schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management. LEAs providing good support are less likely to have a high percentage of schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management than in LEAs providing unsatisfactory support.
 - The relationship is not consistent in all LEAs and the percentages of schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management show significant variations between LEAs providing support to school management of a similar level of effectiveness. This variation in secondary schools is extreme.

	Primary	Secondary
LEA support for management judged good	Percentages of schools are below the national averages for schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management in 6 out of 9 LEAs	Percentages of schools are below the national averages for schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management in 6 out of 9 LEAs
LEA support for school management judged satisfactory	Percentages of schools are below or at the national averages for schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management in 11 out of 18 LEAs	Percentages of schools are below the national averages for schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management in 13 out of 18 LEAs
LEA support for school management judged unsatisfactory	Percentages of schools are below or at the national averages for schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management in 3 out of 9 LEAs	Percentages of schools are below the national averages for schools requiring some or significant improvement in school management in 7 out of 9 LEAs

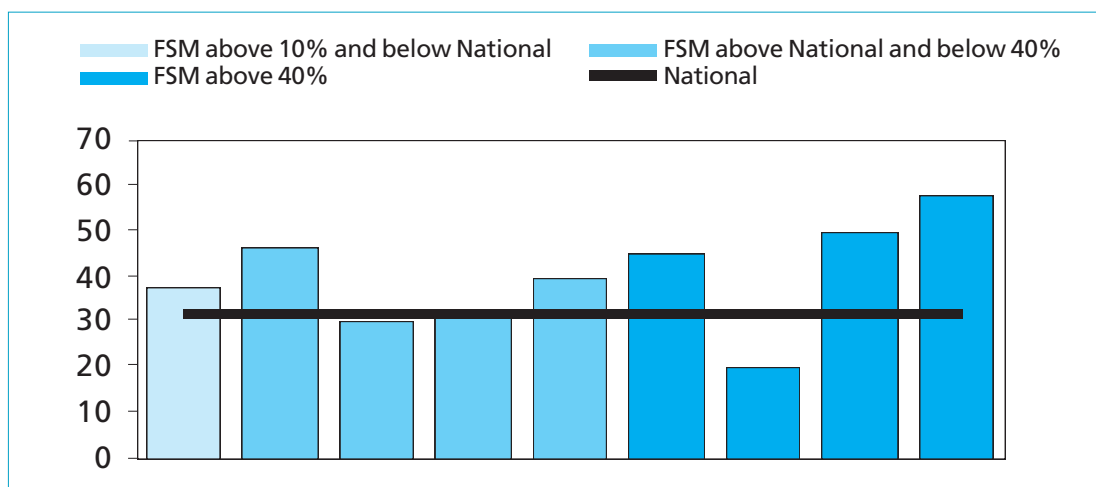
Percentage of primary schools judged by OFSTED inspection as requiring improvement in management and efficiency in LEAs scoring 2 for support to school management



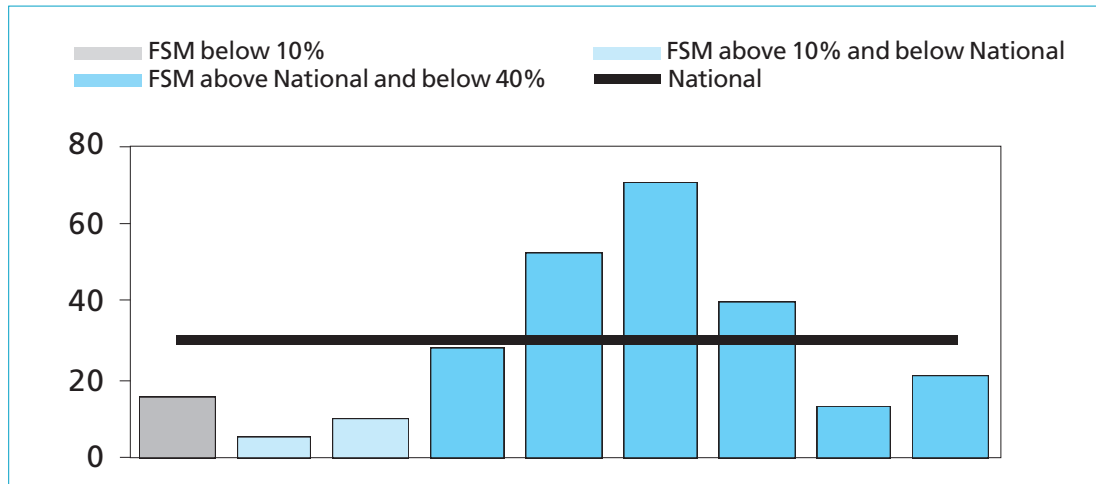
Percentage of primary schools judged by OFSTED inspection as requiring improvement in management and efficiency in LEAs scoring 4 for support to school management



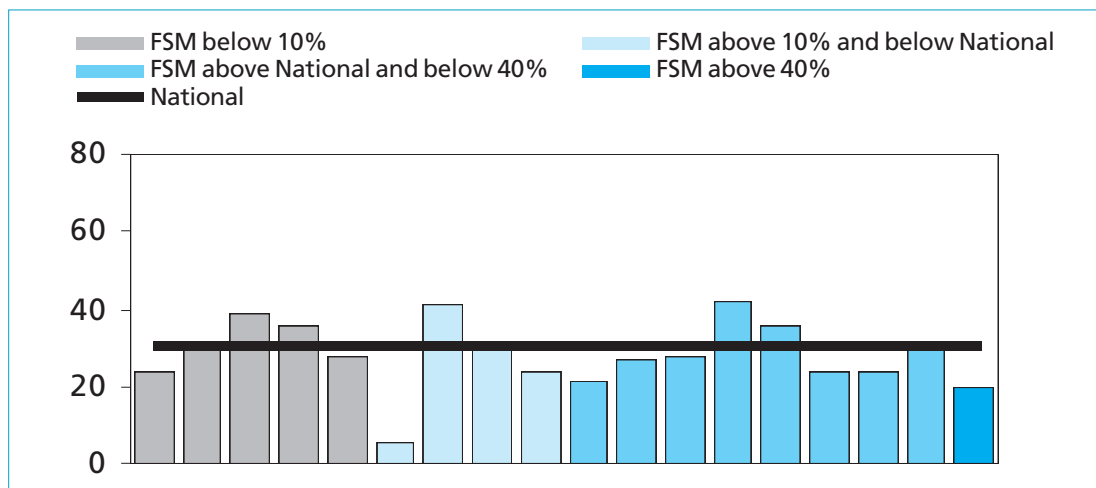
Percentage of primary schools judged by OFSTED inspection as requiring improvement in management and efficiency in LEAs scoring 6 for support to school management



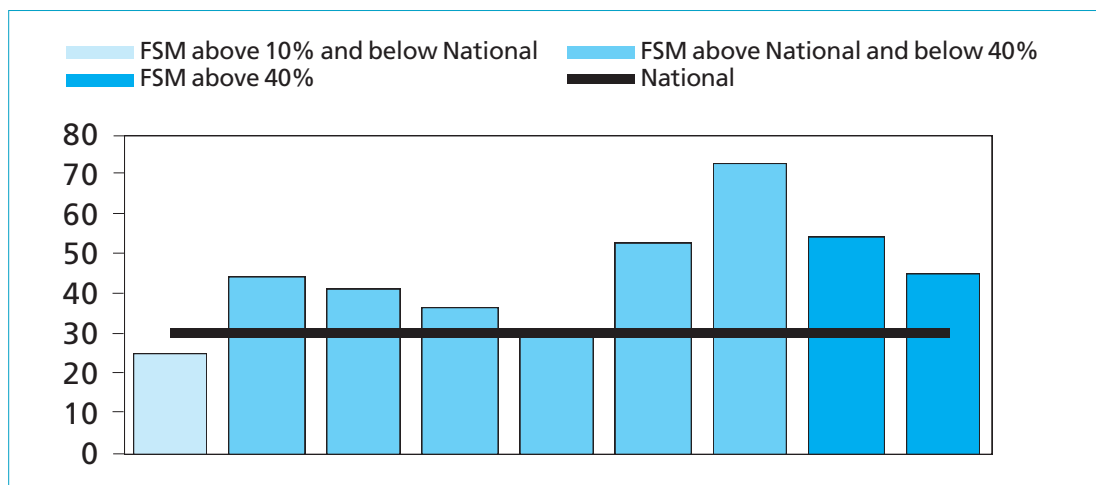
Percentage of secondary schools judged by OFSTED inspection as requiring improvement in management and efficiency in LEAs scoring 2 for support to school management



Percentage of secondary schools judged by OFSTED inspection as requiring improvement in management and efficiency in LEAs scoring 4 for support to school management



Percentage of secondary schools judged by OFSTED inspection as requiring improvement in management and efficiency in LEAs scoring 6 for support to school management



Analysis 9

Special educational needs in schools, as measured through the school's last inspection judgement is compared in LEAs where support for the composite grade for strategy and support for special educational needs is judged good (top 25 per cent of LEAs inspected) and unsatisfactory (bottom 25 per cent of LEAs inspected). The analysis allocated schools to the four broad bands according to the percentages of pupils entitled to free school meals.

- 279.**
- SEN in primary schools shows very little relationship with the effectiveness of LEA strategy and support for SEN. Schools with high rates of free school meals make more effective provision in LEAs where support for SEN is judged good.
 - The relationship, however, is marked in secondary schools. The percentage of secondary schools making good provision for SEN is significantly higher in LEAs where strategy and provision for SEN are effective than in LEAs where strategy and provision are unsatisfactory.

Primary schools

LEAs with top 25% SEN composite inspection grade compared with percentage of schools judged by OFSTED inspection as good, satisfactory or poor for SEN

	FSM Band			
5.2.3 Grade	1	2	3	4
Good	68%	65%	61%	68%
Satisfactory	28%	32%	31%	30%
Poor	4%	4%	9%	2%

LEAs with bottom 25% SEN composite inspection grade compared with percentage of schools judged by OFSTED inspection as good, satisfactory or poor for SEN

	FSM Band			
5.2.3 Grade	1	2	3	4
Good	65%	65%	63%	55%
Satisfactory	32%	30%	32%	34%
Poor	2%	6%	4%	11%

Secondary schools

LEAs with top 25% SEN composite inspection grade compared with percentage of schools judged by OFSTED inspection as good, satisfactory or poor for SEN

	FSM Band			
4.3 Grade	1	2	3	4
Good	56%	43%	55%	50%
Satisfactory	33%	49%	30%	42%
Poor	11%	8%	15%	8%

LEAs with bottom 25% SEN composite inspection grade compared with percentage of schools judged by OFSTED inspection as good, satisfactory or poor for SEN

	FSM Band			
4.3 Grade	1	2	3	4
Good	42%	47%	26%	35%
Satisfactory	47%	37%	42%	42%
Poor	11%	16%	32%	23%

Analysis 10

Attendance in schools, as measured through the school's last inspection judgement was compared in LEAs where support for attendance is judged good (numerical judgement 1 and 2) and unsatisfactory (numerical judgement 6 and 7). The analysis allocated schools to the four broad bands according to the percentages of pupils entitled to free school meals.

- 280.** ● There is very little difference in the percentage distribution of primary schools with average or low rates of free school meals where attendance is judged good, satisfactory or poor irrespective of the quality of the support provided by the LEA. However, the percentage of schools with above average free school meals where attendance is judged poor in the most recent school inspection is lower in LEAs which provide good support. Secondary schools show a similar pattern although there is an inexplicable inverse relationship between school attendance and the quality of LEA support for schools where the percentage of free school meals is below average.

Primary schools

LEAs in which support for attendance has been judged good compared with the percentage of schools judged by OFSTED inspection as good, satisfactory or poor for attendance

	FSM Band			
4.3 Grade	1	2	3	4
Good	79%	51%	20%	2%
Satisfactory	20%	49%	69%	57%
Poor	1%	0%	11%	40%

LEAs in which support for attendance has been judged unsatisfactory compared with the percentage of schools judged by OFSTED inspection as good, satisfactory or poor for attendance

	FSM Band			
4.3 Grade	1	2	3	4
Good	79%	45%	11%	6%
Satisfactory	21%	50%	68%	39%
Poor	0%	5%	22%	55%

Secondary schools

LEAs in which support for attendance has been judged good compared with the percentage of schools judged by OFSTED inspection as good, satisfactory or poor for attendance

	FSM Band			
4.3 Grade	1	2	3	4
Good	69%	28%	22%	8%
Satisfactory	28%	47%	56%	17%
Poor	3%	26%	22%	75%

LEAs in which support for attendance has been judged unsatisfactory compared with the percentage of schools judged by OFSTED inspection as good, satisfactory or poor for attendance

	FSM Band			
4.3 Grade	1	2	3	4
Good	100%	60%	9%	0%
Satisfactory	0%	30%	32%	19%
Poor	0%	10%	59%	81%

