Context
The Government’s current focus on social inclusion has re-emphasised the importance of how LEAs manage school attendance and exclusion.

Using Data to Inform Strategy
LEAs can make better use of the information available to target prevention and review the services provided for vulnerable pupils.

Working with Schools and Others
LEAs need effective partnerships with schools, social services, neighbouring LEAs, and police and magistrates to provide a comprehensive, seamless service for pupils at risk.

How LEA Services Manage Themselves
LEAs’ education welfare services need to review their resourcing, activities and outcomes to ensure that they provide an effective service.

Ensuring Effective Education for Those Outside School
LEAs need to review the adequacy, cost and outcomes achieved by current provision for excluded pupils and other pupils outside of school.

The Way Forward
Simple changes in the way that LEAs manage data, work with schools, and organise placements in alternative education can achieve swift improvements in the treatment of pupils at risk.
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The Audit Commission does not intend to imply that the young people depicted in the photographs used throughout this report are excluded or truanting from school.

Illustrations: David Eaton
Preface

Over the past decade, the pace of change in education has been swift. The Audit Commission has published reports covering both broad strategic issues, such as the role of the local education authority (LEA), and narrower, more service-specific issues, such as special educational needs or home to school transport. The importance of a joint agency approach to tackle social exclusion among young people has been a theme of other recent Commission work on youth justice and community safety. This report fits within that broader framework but is focused on specific services and considers how LEAs can most effectively manage attendance and exclusion in their locality.

Other recent studies, now brought together in new guidance for schools and LEAs, have looked at the most effective strategies for schools and LEA officers to adopt towards individual pupils with difficulties. The Government has recently reviewed national policy in this area through the Social Exclusion Unit. The Commission considers that it can add most value by examining the everyday work of LEAs, particularly their management of the relevant services and the process of exclusion.

Changes in regulations, guidelines and legislation have occurred during the fieldwork and research and these changes are outlined in the relevant parts of the report. However, the principles of good practice outlined in the report remain the same, even if the roles and responsibilities shift around between the local partners in education.

The Commission would like to thank all the LEAs who participated in the study team’s research as either fieldwork sites or survey respondents, and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Welsh Office, for allowing extensive access to the data held by them on attendance and exclusion. The study team benefited greatly from the advice and guidance offered by its advisory group (Appendix 1), together with the insights of many LEA officers. The Commission is also grateful to all those individuals who commented on drafts of this report. As always, responsibility for the conclusions of the report remains solely with the Commission.

The study team comprised Robert Arrowsmith and Gill Green from the Audit Commission’s Public Services Research Directorate, with additional help from Roger Matthews of District Audit, under the direction of Greg Birdseye.

This report concentrates on the national picture and is largely drawn from two national surveys of all LEAs in England and Wales. It is complemented by an Audit Guide, which helps LEAs’ auditors to work with individual authorities to review their performance and identify areas for improvement. Auditors will be undertaking this work in most English and Welsh LEAs during the year 2000 and this work will hopefully be used by authorities to inform the review of their Behaviour Support Plan.
Context

Absence and exclusion from school are associated with a higher risk of poor educational achievement, limited job prospects and criminal activity. Government targets for unauthorised absence and permanent exclusion provide a renewed challenge to LEAs to promote school attendance, prevent exclusion and provide better quality education for children who are being educated outside of school.
On any one day, just under 400,000 of the 8 million pupils who should be in school are not there. Absence unauthorised by the school (pupils truanting or parents keeping them off without permission) will account for just over 40,000 of these. In the whole school year, over 6 million of the 8 million pupils in England and Wales are likely to have at least 1 authorised absence; over 1 million pupils will have at least 1 unauthorised absence, over 12,000 pupils will be permanently excluded from their schools and over 150,000 will be excluded for a fixed period [EXHIBIT 1].

Authorised absence is where the school has either given approval in advance for a pupil to be away, or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as satisfactory justification of absence. All other absences are unauthorised. Clear examples of authorised absence are illness, religious observance, study leave, fixed-period exclusion, bereavements and public performances. Areas requiring more discerning authorisation include family holidays during term-time and special occasions.

Permanent exclusion results in the removal of a pupil from the roll of a particular school. Fixed-period exclusions can be for any period between 1 and 45 days. The excluded pupil remains a registered pupil at that school and returns to that school at the end of the period of exclusion.

EXHIBIT 1
The scope of annual absence and exclusion
Unauthorised absence and permanent exclusions are small but significant parts of total absence.

* Audit Commission estimate from surveys.

Source: DfEE and Welsh Office absence and exclusion data, 1997/98
The link between persistent absence from school and poor educational attainment is well known (Ref. 1). Whether the reason for absence is non-attendance or exclusion, poor attendees may not achieve their potential at school and hence have less subsequent chance of good employment. Evidence from a previous study carried out by the Commission on young people and crime found that 42 per cent of young people who were sentenced in court had been excluded from school and a further 23 per cent were truanting significantly (Ref. 2) [EXHIBIT 2].

In recent years the Commission has published significant reports on young people and crime (Misspent Youth) (Ref. 2), the education of under 5s (Counting to Five) (Ref. 3) and, more recently, child and adolescent mental health services (Children in Mind) (Ref. 4). All of these reports sought to examine how well current systems addressed the problems of children in need. This study complements those major reports and builds on a previous study on the role of the local education authority (LEA) (Held in Trust) (Ref. 5).

EXHIBIT 2

Young offenders’ absence from school

Almost two-thirds of young offenders who have been sentenced in court have been excluded from school or truant significantly.

Source: Audit Commission survey of 600 young offenders in court
4. Both unauthorised absence and exclusion are behavioural ‘problems’ and are signs that the relationship between the individual pupil and the school has broken down. What distinguishes them is which party makes this explicit. With persistent absence, the pupil, perhaps under family or peer pressure, withdraws from school. With exclusion, the school decides that a pupil’s behaviour is such that they should be withdrawn from school. Both affect different but already at risk groups disproportionately. Both set LEAs similar problems – for example, balancing individual casework against broader work with institutions, and balancing prevention against remedial action. Absence and exclusion also tend to involve the same LEA officers and school pastoral staff. For these reasons, both this report and the new Social Inclusion: Pupil Support guidance from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (Ref. 6) bring together the issues of school attendance and exclusion.

5. In the past two years there have been many substantial initiatives in the area of pupil disaffection, attendance and exclusion – three Social Exclusion Unit reports, the requirement on LEAs to produce behaviour support plans, expansion in the funding for pupil inclusion projects and new DfEE regulations. There have also been wider education initiatives – for example, education development plans and ‘fair funding’, and projects affecting the entirety of local government, such as best value. But whatever the change in priorities, requirements and structures, the functions that need to be carried out effectively to counter, address and remedy pupil disaffection have not altered, and nor has the basic legal framework.

6. **Parents** have prime responsibility for a child’s attendance at school. Under the 1996 Education Act, parents must make sure that their child, if of compulsory school age, receives full-time education either through regular attendance at school or otherwise. **Schools** are responsible for pupils on roll and maintaining registers; they are also the authorisers of absence (or not) and the official excluders of pupils. **LEAs** act as facilitators, prosecutors for some non-attendance and providers of alternative education for some pupils not in school, including those who have been excluded for more than 15 days. They are also responsible for meeting LEA-wide targets for reducing unauthorised absence and permanent exclusion, as set out in their education development plans (EDP), and for reviewing their behaviour support plans (BSP) in the year 2000 [BOX A, overleaf].
This report concentrates on the role and functions of LEAs and how they can best promote school attendance and inclusion, thereby helping some of the most vulnerable children in society. LEAs can determine the framework and set the tone of much that occurs locally. They can lead local partnerships between schools, parents and other key players. There is also a clear government expectation that LEAs act as the co-ordinating local body, with responsibility for using recent increases in funding to make improvements.\textsuperscript{II}

\textbf{Box A}

\textbf{New plans for local education authorities (LEAs)}

\textit{Education development plans}\textsuperscript{I}

LEAs have all submitted EDPs for 1999/2000 to 2001/2 to the Secretary of State. These set out their performance targets and how they propose to support schools so that they achieve these targets. Targets include reducing unauthorised absence and permanent exclusion.

\textit{Behaviour support plans}

LEAs have also submitted BSPs, which set out arrangements for educating children with behavioural difficulties, whether in schools or educated otherwise. They should include the provision of advice and resources to all relevant schools and assistance for pupils with behavioural difficulties to find places at suitable schools. They should also explicitly outline LEA consultation with local partners, stating how the arrangements set out in the plan interact with those made for pupils with special educational needs and how the plan relates to the EDP and other plans drawn up by the authority. All LEAs had to draw up and submit their first BSP by December 1998. Plans are to be revised and resubmitted for December 2000/March 2001.

Source: Audit Commission

\textsuperscript{I} Education strategy plans in Wales.

\textsuperscript{II} Under DfEE proposals, which are currently under consultation, 70 per cent of school inclusion pupil support grants would be devolved to secondary schools. Schools themselves would be responsible for demonstrating continued reductions in truancy and exclusion. However, under this new approach, LEAs would still retain their local co-ordinating function and funding for prevention work in primary schools.
8. There has been much academic work and guidance from the DfEE and Welsh Office (Ref. 6; Refs. 7 and 8) on what works to reduce absence and improve pupil behaviour at schools, with which there is little substantive disagreement. Audit Commission work has therefore stopped at the school gate and not examined what schools are doing, or should be doing, in these areas. The new DfEE circular on social inclusion and pupil support (Ref. 6) offers guidance on precisely these issues. Instead, this report seeks to establish what LEAs are doing in the areas of school attendance and exclusions and to identify good practice.

9. In addition, the Government’s new best value requirements place new duties on local authorities (Ref. 9). Best value is specifically about providing better services in response to people’s needs. Authorities will be required to carry out best value reviews of their functions and refocus their services to ensure that they are addressing the problems in their area effectively while also seeking to achieve continuous improvement in service delivery. Authorities and service managers will need to demonstrate that they have responded to best value by challenging how they deliver their services, consulting their communities to inform their work, comparing their work with other authorities and embracing competition in order to achieve this improvement. As the largest spenders in local government, LEAs in particular will need to consider how they are to carry out best value reviews of their services in order to deliver the ‘continuous improvement’ demanded by the legislation [BOX B, overleaf]. This report will help LEAs to focus their best value reviews on areas of significant importance and where significant improvements could be made.

10. Research was carried out by way of two surveys of all LEAs in England and Wales (one of the education welfare service (EWS) – with an 85 per cent return rate – and one of services for excluded pupils and pupils educated other than at school – with a 70 per cent return). Fieldwork visits were made to eleven LEAs, with a detailed review of the files of permanently excluded pupils in four of these LEAs; a survey was sent to 500 schools in five LEAs, and four visits were made to pupil placement panel meetings.

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This report will help LEAs to focus their best value reviews on areas of significant importance and where significant improvements could be made.

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1 See Audit Commission, Better By Far: Preparing for Best Value, Audit Commission, 1998, for further information. An update on best value and the new requirements for local authorities will be available later in the year.
Four main areas were investigated:

- How well are data being used to inform LEA strategies?
- How effective are LEA services at working with schools and other partners?
- How effectively do LEA services manage themselves?
- How well is the exclusion process managed and subsequent placements for excluded pupils and others educated outside of school evaluated?

These four areas are discussed in turn.

**BOX B**

**Best value: what it means for local authorities**

The Local Government Act 1999 received Royal Assent in July 1999. Its major provisions come into effect in 2000. It specifies that:

- Each council will need to set local targets and identify actions that will ensure that, within five years, it is performing at a level consistent with that currently achieved by the top 25 per cent of councils;

- These targets will need to be published in an annual best value performance plan (BVPP), the first of which must be issued by 31 March 2000. The plan should outline past performance and summarise future action plans and targets;

- Local authorities will also be required to carry out best value reviews of all their functions over a five-year period, beginning in April 2000;

- In reviewing their performance, authorities are required to challenge the way that services are provided and delivered, consult the local community (both service-users and non-users, including local businesses), compare their performance with other authorities and be open to competition in delivering their services to meet user needs; and

- Best value reviews should lead to continuous improvement in service delivery.

Source: Audit Commission
Using Data to Inform Strategy

Certain groups of pupils are known to be more at risk of exclusion and more likely to be non-attendees, yet all too often LEAs do not analyse data to enable them to understand the causes of exclusion or absence, to target prevention effectively, or to review their provision for such pupils.
In its education development plan, each LEA has attendance and exclusion targets that need to be met, along with further requirements designed to help particularly vulnerable groups, such as children looked after. LEAs should use these targets and requirements as the basis for a review of both the current situation in schools and the services provided by the LEA. A thorough knowledge of the LEA’s current situation is an essential first step.

The better informed a strategy, the greater the likelihood that it will be effective. And preventative work is unlikely to succeed unless the authority has information identifying those most at risk. The Commission asked in particular about three areas:

- What data are LEAs collecting about attendance and exclusion and how are they using them?
- Are LEAs using data about ‘pupils at risk’ effectively to prevent exclusion and non-attendance?
- Are LEAs using data effectively for strategic service planning?

The Audit Commission surveys sought to discover what LEAs knew about attendance and exclusions locally. Which pupils were not attending and why? Which pupils were being excluded by schools and why? And what use did LEAs make of the data? Returns showed that, while some LEAs have excellent systems for data collection, data collection and analysis in most – beyond the legally required headline figures of school absence and permanent exclusion – is limited. So, for example, even where an authority knows how many permanent and fixed-period exclusions there have been in a year, it is unlikely to be able to tell whether there are identifiable trends in the special educational need (SEN) level of pupils who have been excluded.

Data collected are not always used. Prior to 1999, schools did not have to provide comprehensive data on fixed-period exclusions to LEAs, but most did. Yet, even though two thirds of LEAs rated the data they received as being 70 per cent accurate or better, and one-third rated them as over 90 per cent accurate, less than half actually used them for further analysis.

12. In its education development plan, each LEA has attendance and exclusion targets that need to be met, along with further requirements designed to help particularly vulnerable groups, such as children looked after. LEAs should use these targets and requirements as the basis for a review of both the current situation in schools and the services provided by the LEA. A thorough knowledge of the LEA’s current situation is an essential first step.

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Introduction

How much do LEAs know?

---

I Children looked after by the local authority are children for whom the local authority is the legal parent. Typically, these children will either live in local authority residential homes, or in foster homes; some may still live with their families.

II Annual authorised and unauthorised absence figures, permanent exclusions and fixed-period exclusions over 15 days in total (over 5 days from September 1998, moving to all fixed-period exclusions from September 1999) are all legally required of schools by LEAs and the DfEE.

III A child has special educational needs if he or she has learning difficulties and needs special help. A child has learning difficulties if he or she finds it much harder to learn than most children of the same age, or if he or she has a disability which makes it difficult to use the normal educational facilities in the area. Emotional and behavioural problems are one kind of learning difficulty.
16. The lack of analysis of fixed-period exclusions is unfortunate. As there are twelve times more fixed-period than permanent exclusions, the larger sample should provide the LEA with a greater chance of identifying trends – for example, about groups of pupils or reasons for exclusion – and targeting preventative work. Studying files in two LEAs showed that over one-quarter of those pupils permanently excluded had had two or more fixed-period exclusions in the preceding year, so a second fixed-period exclusion would be one useful trigger for investigation and possible early intervention.

17. Survey returns also showed that most LEA analysis was of aggregate school-level data rather than groups within the school or individual pupils. School-level analysis is important, given the influence of school-level management on levels of both attendance and exclusion. However, more could be done with the data available. LEAs have access to the attendance data of every pupil within their boundaries; yet, while nearly all LEAs analyse attendance data by individual school, only two-thirds examine them by specific group or individual pupil, and only one-third by the reason for non-attendance [EXHIBIT 3]. Knowing which groups are not attending school and why is necessary in order to target services effectively. Some LEAs are already seeing the benefit of such analysis [BOX C, overleaf].

**EXHIBIT 3**

**LEAs' analysis of attendance data**

LEA analysis of attendance data tends to be at school level rather than at the level of groups or reasons for non-attendance.

**Source:** Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999
Attendance and behaviour problems may be individually based, or may be the result of school policy and management. Without analysis of the data at pupil level and group level in addition to school level, it is difficult for LEAs to identify causes and key problems, adopt appropriate strategies, target resources and persuade their schools of the validity of their approach.

Existing analysis and research demonstrate that attendance and exclusion are particular problems for certain vulnerable groups. The Audit Commission’s surveys confirmed this fact. Among LEAs that could provide us with data, children looked after (CLA) by the authority and those placed at stages 3 and 4 of the SEN code of practice were disproportionately represented among the permanently excluded. Analysis of national DfEE exclusion data already shows that black Afro-Caribbean and African children, and those with statements of SEN, are also over-represented [EXHIBIT 4].

Information about pupils at risk

18. Attendance and behaviour problems may be individually based, or may be the result of school policy and management. Without analysis of the data at pupil level and group level in addition to school level, it is difficult for LEAs to identify causes and key problems, adopt appropriate strategies, target resources and persuade their schools of the validity of their approach.

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The SEN code of practice has five stages and stage 5 is receipt of a statement. Stages 3 and 4 are intermediate stages where the LEA has become involved in supporting and assessing pupils (in addition to the school, which is chiefly responsible for the pupil at stages 1 and 2) and should therefore be aware of the nature of pupils’ needs and difficulties.
Pupils at risk, such as children looked after by the local authority and those with statements of SEN, are over-represented among those permanently excluded. These figures hide an even more alarming picture within individual LEAs. The percentage of excluded pupils with statements can be as much as 25 times greater than their incidence within the pupil population; in no LEA does the percentage of excluded pupils with statements reflect their percentage within the pupil population as a whole. Examination of the numbers of children looked after reveals a similar situation, with this group being more than 30 times more likely to be excluded than other pupils in some LEAs, while, in others, they may be only twice as likely to be excluded [EXHIBIT 5, overleaf].

These groups of children clearly need special attention from LEAs. And as fixed-period exclusions can signal the danger of permanent exclusion, it would be especially useful for any such exclusions that are received by these pupils to be monitored and used as a trigger for action. Unfortunately, this is not a common approach, with less than half of LEAs examining fixed-period exclusions by ethnicity, and less than one-fifth by the SEN stage of the excluded pupil, or by whether the child is looked after by the authority [EXHIBIT 6, overleaf].
EXHIBIT 5
Comparison of the percentage of children looked after by the local authority with the percentage among the permanently excluded
In some LEAs children looked after (CLA) by the authority are 30 times more likely to be excluded than in others.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999

EXHIBIT 6
LEAs' analysis of the permanent and fixed-period exclusion data of vulnerable groups
LEAs' use of fixed-term exclusion data as a warning sign for groups of pupils at risk of permanent exclusion is generally poor.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999
22. Analysing information can highlight gaps in provision for certain groups. In fieldwork LEAs this was most readily apparent for those pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). The permanent exclusion of a large number of pupils with statements for EBD suggests that the general local provision, including school responses, for such pupils is inadequate or insufficient, and that SEN policy and provision, as well as behaviour policy, needs review. LEAs should review the types of pupil who are excluded locally, as well as those placed in pupil referral units (PRUs) or ‘education otherwise’ for reasons other than exclusion. This review will help LEAs to realise if there are particular areas or groups where they should focus attention. LEAs might also want to consider other factors such as whether these pupils are looked after by the local authority, or are known to social services, or mental health services. Analysis of the pupils present in PRUs, and other ‘education otherwise’ provision, is useful as it picks up those whom the current system has failed and can show where improvement may be needed most. Fieldwork uncovered systemic problems in statementing policy, provision for EBD pupils and support provided to schools in one authority [BOX D, overleaf].

\[\text{Data and service provision}\]

\[\text{I} \] ‘Emotional and behavioural difficulties lie on the continuum between behaviour which challenges teachers but is within normal, albeit unacceptable bounds and that which is indicative of serious mental illness. The distinction between normal but stressed behaviour, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and behaviour arising from mental illness is important because each needs to be treated differently’ (Circular 9/94, DHLAC[94]0 - The Education of Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties).

\[\text{II} \] Pupil referral units are small units for educating pupils other than at mainstream or special schools, but they are still legally a type of school and subject to Ofsted inspection. The nature and purpose of PRUs can differ widely, from those that take pupils for long-term placements after permanent exclusion, to those that aim for a quick turnaround in pupils’ behaviour and a return to mainstream schools, preferably before permanent exclusion has occurred, to a mixture between the two with an outreach function to schools. Pupils in PRUs tend to be those for whom the mainstream system is either deemed unsuitable, or for those with whom the system cannot cope. On average, pupils attend half-time.

\[\text{III} \] ‘Education otherwise’ is a catch-all term for the education of pupils other than at school. Each LEA has a duty to make arrangements to provide suitable education for school-age children who by reason of illness, exclusion or otherwise may not receive suitable education for any period. This category includes, among other types of provision, pupil referral units, home and hospital tuition and group tuition.
BOX D

The relationship between permanent exclusion and an LEA’s EBD and SEN service

One LEA visited during fieldwork had a chronic lack of special school places for pupils with EBD, both inside the LEA and also within the region. This shortage resulted in a low number of statements for EBD, as the LEA sought to discourage statements that would precipitate expensive, distant out-borough placements; and a large number of pupils with EBD, either with or without statements, who were excluded by mainstream schools that were unable to cope, and then placed long-term in PRUs.

As part of its first behaviour support plan, the LEA decided to:

- build an EBD special school;
- change the way that its PRUs operated from long-term placements to shorter term rehabilitation with a stronger emphasis on reintegration;
- set up an integrated behaviour and attendance support team with an outreach capacity in schools; and
- establish two in-school units for EBD pupils in mainstream schools.

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork
Conclusion

23. Information about attendance and exclusions is plentiful, but the data that exist are currently being underused. This is an issue of growing importance as more central government money (up to £500 million from the Standards Fund for pupil inclusion projects over the next three years) is given to LEAs and schools to tackle the problem. Data can be used to unlock many complex issues within the LEA. They can help to analyse the nature of problems in different schools or different areas within the LEA; target resources accurately, and help resist the pull towards individual casework. All LEAs should consider whether they could improve their use of data [BOX E]. They can use the results to inform the review of their behaviour support plans in the year 2000.

24. Better use of information is only part of the story. Data analysis may unlock important issues and inform intelligent strategy formulation, but unless it is also used to influence the work of LEA services and, where necessary, to change the actions of others, its impact will be limited. Of equal, if not greater, importance is how effective and efficient the LEAs’ services are – especially how well they work with schools and other partners. These issues are discussed in the next two chapters.

Grants from the Standards Fund enable the Secretary of State to target a range of activities within local authority expenditure on education. Grants are paid by the DfEE to LEAs, which devolve large sums on to schools. Grants are normally paid at the rate of 50 per cent, with the remaining 50 per cent being matched funding from the LEA. The Standards Fund grants are intended to support government priorities; the largest part currently offered is for school improvement, but a substantial portion, currently one-tenth, is for ‘pupil inclusion’ (support for truancy and exclusion initiatives). The projected rise in funding for ‘pupil inclusion’ initiatives is £500 million over the next three years – a tenfold increase.

BOX E

Checklist for LEAs on data use

LEAs need to ask themselves:

• Do we know which schools we need to concentrate on and whether this is changing year on year?
• Do we know which groups of children are causing concern and whether this is changing year on year?
• Are we monitoring particular groups that are known to be vulnerable, both to help them and to give us ‘warning’ signs when policies are not working?
• Do we know which individual pupils we need to concentrate on?
• Are we monitoring the pupils who are being educated other than at school? Do they come from particular groups? Do they have similar needs and problems? Is there a gap in the services that we provide?
• Are we feeding these data back to our services, our schools and other local authority services and agencies in a constructive manner?
Working with Schools and Others

To achieve the improvements required, LEAs must work effectively with schools and other partners. Effective working means that LEAs must balance their work on individual pupils’ cases with greater support for school management of attendance and exclusion and the forging of effective partnerships with social services, neighbouring LEAs, police, magistrates and others.
25. Rates of attendance and behaviour patterns are influenced by many inter-related factors, which can broadly be divided into those relating to individual children, their family and social background; those relating to the way that the school or other institution that they attend is managed; and those relating to the accessibility and appropriateness of the curriculum that they are offered and to the standard of the teaching that they receive [EXHIBIT 7]. The LEA can influence all three areas – but by itself it controls none.

26. Most disaffected pupils initially attend school, so the relationship between LEA services and schools is fundamental. The greater the ability of schools to cope with problems themselves, the lesser the strain on the LEA’s services. So building this capacity in schools is an important aspect of any LEA’s job. However, many of the problems that cause a pupil to truant or behave badly lie outside of school and education. This makes effective working with a wide range of partner agencies crucial.

EXHIBIT 7

Improving attendance and exclusion rates in school

LEA support services are but one factor influencing attendance and exclusion. While they can influence all the primary factors, they do not control any of them.

Source: Audit Commission
The principal subject of the next two chapters is the education welfare service (EWS), both because the surveys provide good comparative data about the EWS and because the variation between LEAs in which services provide behaviour support or work with permanently excluded pupils and other pupils educated other than at school makes direct comparison difficult. However, many of the general comments on relationships with schools and other partners apply to services for children at risk of exclusion as much as for those with poor attendance.

EWSs affect individual and family circumstances by their pupil casework and by the effectiveness of their links to social services, health and other agencies that can work with whole families. They also affect curriculum and teaching through their relationship with the advisory service and schools’ management; and institutional management through their support for schools, their links with the advisory service and through their own service strategy.

This chapter focuses on how EWSs work with their local partners, principally with:

- schools; and
- other partner agencies, such as other local authority services, other local and health authorities, and partners in law.

Working with schools

Schools will normally be the place that any problems will first come to the attention of education professionals. Work with schools is the most important single function that EWSs perform, and ranges from working with individual pupils to addressing school management issues and/or effecting school policy change. Work in this area will always be driven by the needs of individual pupils and work with such pupils will constitute the core function of any EWS. However, there will also always be a need for broader-based strategic work. To work well in this area, EWSs should:

- evaluate and identify the needs of schools – and decide which schools and needs to target; and
- develop methods of effecting change.

1 Behaviour support services (BSSs) support pupils who behave in ways which make them difficult to teach in mainstream schools unless extra support is available. BSSs can vary enormously in scope and size between LEAs. Some LEAs have no such service, others may just have an outreach function from their pupil referral unit (PRU); in others it may cover the entire area and include aspects of special educational needs (SEN) services, education psychologists, exclusion procedures and education otherwise.
Evaluating and identifying the needs of schools

Certain factors correlate with poorer attendance. This is especially true of deprivation (as measured by the proportion of pupils that is eligible for free school meals), pupil turnover and in some cases ethnic composition. However, non-attendance rates in schools sharing similar levels of deprivation and a similar ethnic composition can vary fivefold.

Research for the DfEE has indicated that the reason for this disparity in performance in schools with seemingly similar intakes is most likely to be the respective schools’ management of attendance. Changing the ways that schools manage attendance will change their attendance rates. LEAs therefore ought to identify which schools have unexpectedly high levels of absence, try to understand why and target them. To fulfil its role and compare performance, an EWS needs to have an intimate knowledge of all its schools; the broad similarities between schools; and any individual unique circumstances that may help to explain differences and suggest future strategies for improvement. There is also much that schools of a similar intake can learn from each other, and the sharing of such knowledge is a further valuable role for the EWS.

Children of income support claimants are entitled to free school meals. Not all parents declare their child’s eligibility.

Pupils from particular ethnic groups – for example, with Indian sub-continent heritage – may take long visits to the country of parental origin, substantially increasing absence figures in their schools, although this is not always necessarily the case.

EXHIBIT 8
The relationship between non-attendance and deprivation
Deprivation is one of the defining factors of absence, but does not guarantee a high level.

Note: School A and School B have the same percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, yet the non-attendance rate in school B is 5 times that of school A. Percentage non-attendance is the sum of unauthorised and authorised absence in each school expressed as a percentage of the total possible attendance. The ethnic breakdown of the two schools is very similar.

Source: DfEE Form 7 and absence data
LEAs can have a far greater effect on attendance and exclusion rates by promoting improvements in schools’ management of absence and behaviour than by individual casework with pupils.

Effecting change

33. Schools with pupils with specific social characteristics may benefit from different approaches. For example, schools with large numbers of pupils who make extended visits to their parents’ country of origin may need more effective community liaison to reinforce the importance of education, and practical arrangements between the LEA, school and parents to reduce any disruption to the pupils’ schooling. Schools in deprived areas with high levels of unauthorised absence may benefit from a mentoring programme or a link to colleges, and a more practical work-based curriculum. Schools where there are high levels of genuine illness may, for example, be in asthma blackspots and may benefit from extra health support. It may even be the case that an array of different approaches needs to be tried in any one school. Such first-hand knowledge can be used to provide a more rounded picture than that presented by simple data analysis alone, and give the EWS a sound base from which to take the next step and seek to effect change and improvement in schools’ performance.

34. Previous research and evaluation for the DfEE confirms that LEAs can have a far greater effect on attendance and exclusion rates by promoting improvements in schools’ management of absence and behaviour than by individual casework with pupils (Ref. 9). Seventy per cent of those LEAs surveyed by the Commission identified management of attendance by some schools as an area of concern. The survey considered three things that an LEA’s EWS needs to do well to improve the management of attendance by schools:

- setting a framework;
- liaising with the LEA’s advisory service; and
- supporting school development and improvement.

Setting a framework

35. Specific problems identified by LEAs are all ones where consistent advice and guidance are likely to be useful to schools [EXHIBIT 9]. In the Commission’s separate survey of 500 schools, these issues (aside from school management) were also selected, which indicates that schools are likely to respond favourably to initiatives by LEAs in these areas. Policies and community liaison on issues such as condoned absence and extended holidays are most likely to be effective if agreed and pursued at an LEA level. But while over 90 per cent of LEAs had identified attendance as a priority for improvement and 80 per cent had a strategy for achieving this, 30 per cent had not yet provided guidance and advice to their schools.
EXHIBIT 9

Attendance issues of concern to LEAs

The key causes of concern are around policy issues and how schools decide whether to authorise absence.

* ‘Parentally condoned absence’ is absence that is unauthorised by the school, of which the parent is aware, does not disapprove and may have instigated.

** ‘Post-registration truancy’ occurs when a pupil is present for daily registration but is then absent for subsequent lessons without school authorisation.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999
Liaising with the LEA advisory and inspection service

Most schools see the LEA’s advisory and inspection service (AIS) as being the LEA service which has most effect on school policy and teaching, and the main LEA service promoting school improvement. If attendance is an issue in a school, both the AIS and the EWS need to tackle the problem; the two services should complement each other. This co-operation does not seem to happen everywhere: one-third of EWSs had no formal links for exchanging information with their own AIS [EXHIBIT 10].

Given the correlation between educational achievement and attendance, and the critical effect that an appropriate curriculum and good teaching can have on attendance, especially with older secondary pupils, the EWS and the AIS should work together to identify schools in need, consider the reasons for problems and discuss and co-ordinate appropriate support. For example, EWS staff cannot influence curricular planning but AIS staff can, and often the curriculum offered may be a key cause of disaffection and low attendance in a secondary school; where this is the case, the AIS needs to be involved, as extra EWS casework alone will have little impact.

1 Absence percentages are 50 per cent higher in secondary schools than in primary schools and unauthorised absence is two times greater.

EXHIBIT 10
Links between an LEA’s education welfare service and advisory information service

Only just over half of EWSs have the links with their AIS necessary for effective joint working.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999
Supporting school development and improvement

38. Many EWSs do give data advice, and policy and procedure support, to schools on the question of attendance, but this practice is not universal and there is rarely a ready alternative source of advice on attendance for schools [EXHIBIT 11]. While it is probable that all EWSs give advice on policy in an ad-hoc way during discussions of individual cases and referrals, nearly half of EWSs did not perceive themselves as giving any such assistance to their schools.

39. The survey suggested several possible reasons for the patchy provision by EWSs of advice on data analysis, policy development and procedures. One cause may be that EWS staff themselves spend most of their time on casework. Estimates provided for the survey showed that work with schools on policy typically took up only 1 per cent of frontline staff time and only 5 per cent of managerial time.

40. A further reason for the absence of advice on analysing attendance data might be the low level of IT training among EWS staff – 30 per cent of LEAs had not trained all their staff in even the main computerised attendance system in their schools and only 5 per cent were trained in all the locally used systems [EXHIBIT 12, overleaf]. Lack of such training will hamper staff in their casework and monitoring role, reduce flexibility in deployment and limit individuals' ability to promote effective data analysis in their schools. With increasing computerisation of registration records, especially in secondary schools (where most of the serious absence occurs), there is a major IT training need for EWSs if they are to realise the full benefits of computerisation for both themselves and for their schools.

EXHIBIT 11

Education welfare authorities’ advice to schools on data analysis, policy development and procedures

The advice and support that EWSs provide to schools in this area are patchy and not seen as one of their key functions.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999
Many LEAs are failing to train their EWS staff properly in the IT systems used by their schools.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999

**Working with other partners**

41. While schools are the principal partners for EWSs and BSSs, both these services also need to work closely with other local authority services and agencies, especially for particular pupils. The aim must be to make the support given to individual pupils by the LEA and others as comprehensive, seamless and effective as possible.

42. Problems of absence or behaviour can often be caused by circumstances outside the school, and pupils may also be resident in a different local authority from the one in which they are educated. Partnerships need to work on at least two levels: LEAs need effective co-operation at senior levels (resulting in joint projects such as shared budgets, joint meetings/panels, joint databases), and good liaison at school/individual frontline officer level – enabling swift referral to other agencies where necessary. Some of the key local agencies involved include:

- social services, including youth offending teams;
- child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS);
- neighbouring LEAs’ EWSs and BSSs/education services; and
- police and magistrates [EXHIBIT 13].
LEAs’ partners in the area of attendance and exclusions

For effective service provision to individual pupils, it is necessary for the LEA to cultivate many partnerships.

Note: This is not a comprehensive list of all external services and agencies with whom an LEA will be involved. It includes only those other persons and bodies which were focuses of the Commission’s surveys.

Source: Audit Commission
Social services

Government initiatives under ‘Quality Protects’ (‘Children First’ in Wales) require local authority departments to co-ordinate and develop systems to protect the most vulnerable and at risk children within the local authority [BOX F]. Commission research, chiefly carried out in the six months after the launch of ‘Quality Protects’, found that three-quarters of LEAs have some kind of ‘special arrangement’ with their social services department for excluded pupils, and many LEAs are extending and developing these as part of their ‘Quality Protects’ agenda for improving services for looked-after children. However, data exchange and analysis to help prevent problems from developing, or from developing further, are less common [EXHIBIT 14].

‘Quality Protects’ and ‘Children First’ are government initiatives chiefly aimed at social services and designed to improve the standard of service provided by local authorities to vulnerable children. The initiatives emphasise protection, quality of care and improving life chances. The route to achievement lies in better regulation of services, a new performance framework with specific performance measures and targets, explicit standards of conduct and specified qualifications for the workforce, improved partnerships with other agencies and more efficient delivery of services.

BOX F

‘Quality Protects’

‘Quality Protects’ brings together the priorities in children’s services, as set out in White Papers and elsewhere. It spells out eight national objectives:

• stable attachment to carers;
• protection from significant harm;
• maximum life chances for children in need;
• maximum life chances for children who are looked after;
• social and economic inclusion of young people leaving care;
• meeting the assessed social needs of children with a disability;
• effective referral, assessment and service delivery processes; and
• planning and service delivery to ensure best value, with responses appropriate to individual need and choice.

All these objectives have implications for LEAs, specifically a substantial overhaul of the partnership between most if not all education and social service departments, particularly the co-ordination between social service and education databases. EDP targets for the educational achievement of children looked after, which must be met by 2001, add an urgency for LEAs.
EXHIBIT 14

LEA support and monitoring of children looked after

LEA special arrangements with social services need to be matched by preventative action.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999

There is still a long way to go before reality can match up to the aims of ‘Quality Protects’. But simple operational improvements could make a difference and help to realise these goals. For example, where LEAs had panels for deciding on future placements for children who have been excluded, or are at risk, or out of school for other reasons, staff from social services departments were regular attendees on only half of these, even in LEAs with large numbers of excluded children looked after (CLA). Only one in six LEAs regularly checked on the numbers of looked-after children who had been temporarily excluded [EXHIBIT 14], and few regularly checked these databases against child protection registers or other social service databases. In fieldwork LEAs, it was also not always clear who was monitoring the attendance of children looked-after attending out-borough or private (usually special) schools, or who was responsible locally for getting children in residential homes into school.

Child and adolescent mental health services

For some pupils – or their parents – behaviour and/or attendance difficulties are linked to health problems, including mental health difficulties. Local health authorities are responsible for the provision of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), but services available locally vary widely. A recent Commission report, Children in Mind (Ref. 4), has shown that the resources devoted per child to such services vary by a factor of at least seven to one, while the type of service offered, including the mix of specialisms, the referral routes and the waiting times for appointments, also differ hugely, even between teams in the same health trust. This inconsistency makes it almost impossible to...
make specific suggestions about how LEAs should be developing their partnerships with health, especially as inter-agency work by CAMHS trusts is infrequent. However, the report highlights the importance of working well with CAMHS for both school attendance and exclusions [BOX G].

46. The Commission’s CAMHS study emphasises the importance of understanding the possible mental health links for pupils who may be behaving poorly or not attending, and highlights the need for a more co-ordinated service. It recommends that health authorities should commission in conjunction with local authorities and take into account children’s service plans, behaviour support plans and ‘Quality Protects’ objectives. In some cases this process is already under way – some bids to the pupil inclusion category of the Standards Fund were submitted jointly by health authorities and LEAs.

[BOX G]

Key findings for LEAs from the Audit Commission’s study of child and adolescent mental health

- The risk factors for children who develop mental health problems are similar to some of those that put a child at particular risk of exclusion or poor attendance.

- Disruptive, anti-social or aggressive behaviour was one of the four most common problems exhibited by children with mental health problems – and most children had more than one problem. The possibility of a health problem being a reason for a child’s difficulties may not always be realised by schools. LEAs may be able to promote better understanding through work with the school health service, clear guidelines for referral from schools to health professionals, training for selected staff in schools such as special educational need co-ordinators (SENCOs) and individual casework.

- Most children with mental health problems attend mainstream, not special, schools – so there are important questions about liaison and understanding between health professionals and mainstream teachers.

- Referral routes vary; direct referrals from education and social services professionals were accepted in only 14 per cent of health trusts. While there are different reasons for not accepting such referrals, many areas urgently need greater clarity and equity and should develop clear protocols that identify the ‘when, which and how’ of referrals – a process that would benefit LEAs in particular.

Source: Audit Commission (Ref. 4)
Potential holes in the system open up, so that pupils who are seen as ‘someone else’s responsibility’ are at risk of falling through the net.

**Neighbouring LEAs**

47. In the matter of attendance and exclusions, responsibility for individual pupils rests with the LEA where the pupil lives, not with the LEA within which he or she attends school. Where the pupil’s ‘home’ LEA and ‘school’ LEA are different, relationships with neighbouring LEAs obviously matter, since the first point of contact for a school that is concerned about an absent pupil will be the education welfare officer (EWO) who is attached to the school that the pupil attends. However, in spite of their obvious importance, relationships with neighbouring LEAs present a patchy picture. Just under half of LEAs claim to have comprehensive arrangements with EWSs of neighbouring LEAs; but 10 per cent have no special arrangements to follow pupils across LEA boundaries. Fieldwork and school surveys suggest that this tends to be an acute, but very localised problem; in one LEA where this problem was not an overall priority for all schools, half of the secondary schools still rated it one of their top concerns.

48. There is a similar picture of localised concern over cross-boundary exclusions. In only 12 per cent of the LEAs surveyed were more than 20 per cent of excluded pupils being excluded from schools in neighbouring LEAs. However, this is a major problem for those 12 per cent of LEAs, as prior to the actual formal exclusion they often would have been unaware of problems and would not therefore have been able to work with, or influence, the excluding schools, or the individual pupils and their families. In addition, where excluded pupils reside in another LEA’s area, the excluding school and its LEA have less financial incentive to work to prevent the exclusion. Once excluded, these pupils’ education is the financial responsibility of their home LEAs, so for the excluding schools and their LEAs, prevention is not necessarily more cost effective than exclusion.

49. In both these cases, constructive discussions and agreements with neighbouring LEAs matter; and these should be held at senior level. Otherwise, potential holes in the system open up, so that pupils who are seen as ‘someone else’s responsibility’ are at risk of falling through the net. In attendance terms, pupils may get de-registered and not be followed up, or may effectively de-register themselves through persistent non-attendance, and drop out of education altogether. Poorly behaved pupils may also be less likely to receive early support from the LEA to prevent exclusion, and if excluded may not be picked up and placed in alternative education quickly.

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1 Another important group that falls largely outside of the scope of the study is that of ‘missing pupils’. Even in non-urban LEAs, where the population is often more static and LEA boundaries cover wider areas, there is a limited problem of parental de-registration of pupils and subsequent non-registration for long periods of time. The problem of ‘missing pupils’ surfaced during interviews with school headteachers because of their professed difficulty in passing on academic records of de-registered pupils to any future school which the pupil attends. The very status of these pupils as ‘missing’ makes the problem difficult to quantify without the unique pupil number system. However, it is still worrying.
Two-thirds of LEAs have no standing arrangements for discussions with local magistrates, who may not be up to date with their general policies and reasons for taking the prosecution option.

Police and magistrates

50. A significant proportion of young people who commit crime are also serious absentees from school. This has been noted in the new provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and has made effective liaison with the police of increasing importance to LEAs. A separate Audit Commission report, Safety in Numbers, discusses community safety (Ref. 11). Good practice examples of a wide range of initiatives, including some links to truancy sweeps, can be found on the Community Safety website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/comsafe.

51. A related and important issue for EWSs is their relationship with magistrates. While most EWSs have a policy on the use of courts and measure the outcomes of cases, the strategic next step can be missing – targeting the use of court at particular groups, and regularly communicating and discussing their policy and case outcomes with local magistrates [EXHIBIT 15]. Prosecuting parents in a magistrate’s court is the LEA’s ultimate sanction. Many officers (and headteachers) express frustration at what they see as ineffective court decisions. Yet two-thirds of LEAs have no standing arrangements for discussions with local magistrates, who may not be up to date with their general policies and reasons for taking the prosecution option. Representatives from the EWSs should try and take advantage of meetings, particularly Youth Justice Board conferences, to discuss such matters with magistrates. Absence of discussions may delay the resolution of cases and allow misunderstandings to develop.

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The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 gave police forces the right to pick up truants and place them in a location to be agreed with the local authority. Other provisions under the Act include child curfew orders and parenting orders that require the parent – after successful prosecution for non-attendance of their child – to work with the LEA or a member of the youth offending team to address the issue of their child’s school attendance.

The Social Inclusion, Pupil Support guidelines (10/99) issued in July 1999 (Ref. 6) state that: ‘LEAs should make sure local magistrates are aware of truancy problems including problems with parentally condoned unjustified absence.’
EXHIBIT 15

Education welfare services’ monitoring and targeting of prosecutions for non-attendance

Most LEAs have a policy on court use and monitor effectiveness, but they do not target court work at particular groups.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999
Conclusion

52. An LEA’s work with other agencies and partners is important, but the key partnership that needs to work well is that between an LEA and its schools. It is the quality of this relationship that will enable LEAs to meet their targets and have the greatest effect on the largest number of pupils. However, to achieve maximum effect, services, including EWSs, need to focus on higher level practices and issues, such as strategy, policy and procedures, and data.

53. Many EWSs still concentrate almost entirely on individual casework. While this area is important, the LEA as a whole, including both the EWS and the AIS, must raise the profile of good attendance policy and procedures in schools. They also need to encourage schools to improve in analysing their own data and in seeking to address their own problems (with the expert assistance of the EWS); and caution schools that the EWS and AIS will challenge those that appear to be under-performing. To work this way, EWSs need to be more highly trained in the use of IT systems in schools, and develop better relationships with their AIS. They also need to step back from casework and see themselves as expert policy/procedure advisers and analysts. Some EWSs are already achieving this – for example, through school audits, attendance support work and appropriate training courses. All LEAs should review the way that their EWSs and AISs work together and examine whether the LEA as a whole is providing the best assistance possible to its schools.

54. To provide effective services for vulnerable groups with often complex problems, such as excluded children or those who are not attending school, LEA services also need to work effectively with a wide range of other partners outside the education service. With the current emphasis on ‘joined-up government’ and initiatives such as ‘Quality Protects’, which target particular groups that require support from more than one authority service, LEAs are undoubtedly already trying to address these issues. However, while the Commission’s fieldwork showed that progress is being made, both fieldwork and surveys also suggested that this is a difficult area to manage effectively and that many LEAs still have to make substantial improvements. LEAs need to ask themselves how good their high-level relationships are and how well these translate into action on the ground [BOX H].

55. The future challenge for EWSs is to link individual casework to effective policy and strategy, and liaise with a wide range of other parties concerned in its implementation. The danger is that casework will dominate, leaving policies in a vacuum that is removed from both frontline staff and schools, and which therefore has only a peripheral effect on what actually occurs.
Checklist for LEAs on partnership working with schools and other agencies

LEAs can help schools to improve by:

- establishing a clear framework for attendance and behaviour, with clear guidelines for both the classification of absence and the respective responsibilities of schools and LEA services;
- pursuing a clear strategy which is understood by schools and LEA frontline staff;
- directing extra LEA resources where they are most needed;
- making explicit links between attendance, attainment and school improvement;
- providing advice and training on policy and procedures;
- providing appropriate local data comparisons and training/advice on how to use them;
- providing external checks on the effectiveness of school procedures;
- sharing good practice locally; and
- challenging under-performing schools

To improve the way that they work with social services and other agencies, LEAs need:

- clear and speedy arrangements for joint funding, where necessary;
- joint involvement in panels which cross service boundaries to consider pupils with serious problems;
- shared databases and agreements on information-sharing;
- clear agreements, which are known to schools, on referral routes to more specialist support from other partners;
- jointly published material for schools and other ‘frontline’ groups such as foster carers, making a clear allocation of responsibilities between schools and the different services;
- regular joint meetings/casework at both frontline level and senior officer level; and
- joint training to increase common understanding.
How LEA Services Manage Themselves

In the light of new challenges and demands, education welfare services (EWSs) need to review their focus, funding, staffing and tasks. EWSs also need to examine their effectiveness, both by comparing their different activities and approaches internally, and by contrasting their overall attendance rates with those of other EWSs in similar LEAs.
Introduction

56. Working well with partners is one aspect of an effective service. The Commission also looked at other aspects of internal service management in EWSs across England and Wales, from the funding of services to the nature of the functions fulfilled and the quality of self-reviews. Findings are summarised under two categories:

- staffing and demands; and
- monitoring and outcomes.

Staffing and demands

57. EWSs’ resources need broadly to match the demands on the service: that is, the needs of local pupils and schools, and the range of tasks that a service is asked to fulfil. Evidence showed that EWSs varied by a factor of four in terms of resources invested per 10,000 pupils, whether expressed as expenditure or as full-time staff equivalents - the latter approach helps to offset the effect of higher average salaries in the South East. However, the potential demands on services also vary, both because of local absence rates and because of the range of work carried out. If the number of half-day absences is used as a proxy for local need, the variation of staffing across services is not huge, but there are still some LEAs, particularly in some recently created unitary authorities, where staff levels on this indicator are relatively low [EXHIBIT 16].

EXHIBIT 16
The relationship between absence rates and the number of education welfare officers per 10,000 pupils

There is a relationship between staffing and demand, as expressed in half-day absences per pupil, but with significant variation between LEAs that face similar levels of demand.

Note: This exhibit excludes London boroughs.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England (1999), and DfEE absence data

EXHIBIT 16
EWOs per 10,000 pupils

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4 - HOW LEA SERVICES MANAGE THEMSELVES
LEAs with relatively low staffing and high absence ratios (relative to levels of deprivation) may need to consider increasing resources. Equally, those with higher staffing levels and/or costs but still with high absence ratios should be concerned and examine the efficiency, effectiveness and practices of their service. The relative performance of EWSs is discussed further below under ‘monitoring and outcomes’.

59. If relative deprivation and number of absences is one source of demand on LEAs’ services, another is the range of tasks that individual services within the LEA are expected to fulfil. Naturally, most EWSs concentrate on attendance – some almost exclusively – but others spend relatively more staff time on other jobs. Most carry out a wider range of jobs than one would necessarily suppose. For instance, some EWSs may take an important wider role on individual pupil welfare issues, such as post-exclusion provision, or have a higher locally generated workload in areas such as child employment and entertainment licensing [EXHIBIT 17]. In some LEAs, functions such as work with excluded pupils or pupils with special educational needs (SEN) or behaviour problems can constitute up to one-quarter of all referrals received by the EWS. It is not uncommon for EWSs to fill holes left by other LEA- or local authority-provided services. Given almost daily contact with schools and pupils, and the social work qualifications possessed by a large proportion of EWS staff, there is a natural tendency in EWSs to meet demands not met by local authority social services. Where local factors mean that such demands cannot be reduced by LEA policy, their impact on an EWS’s workload needs to be acknowledged; elsewhere, LEAs may wish to consider staff specialisation or refocusing of the service on attendance work.

Auditors will assist LEAs in locating their position on this scale, if requested.
EXHIBIT 17
Typical referral patterns to education welfare services

While attendance is the core function for most EWSs, they can also carry out a wide range of other tasks.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999

Monitoring and outcomes

60. All EWSs need to look at how they perform, especially in the run up to best value reviews. There are two broad measures of effectiveness that an EWS can apply to itself: internal and external. Internally, an EWS can measure the comparative effectiveness of different approaches and actions in improving the attendance of pupils. Externally, the EWS can compare its own performance against that of other EWSs in similar LEAs in terms of overall attendance rates.

61. Measuring and monitoring internal service effectiveness is vital. An EWS needs to know which actions work best and in which circumstances. Which actions are popular with partners? And can the service concentrate resources on those areas? Only half of all LEAs were regularly surveying their schools, monitoring case outcomes or using outcome data to target work [EXHIBIT 18, overleaf]. One-third of EWSs also do not report regularly to their local authorities’ education committees. Without such reports to committee, elected members cannot carry out their monitoring and scrutiny functions, or provide additional impetus for the EWS to review its own effectiveness.
### The nature of LEA service monitoring and management

Less than half of LEAs are monitoring case outcomes or the satisfaction of schools with their EWS.

Source: Audit Commission survey of LEAs in England and Wales and survey of 500 schools in five LEAs (1999)

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- LEAs with agreed referral criteria
- Schools believe the referral system
- LEA analyses EWS caseloads
- LEA analyses referrals
- LEA conducts school satisfaction surveys
- LEA analyses case outcomes

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Outcomes are always the hardest part of a service to measure. However, for EWSs, LEAs can compare their pupil absence rates with those of other LEAs, both absolutely and by comparing their rates with a theoretical 'expected' rate given their overall level of deprivation. In addition, LEAs should consider the trend of their performance – are they improving year on year, or not? While deprivation is not the only factor influencing attendance rates, there is a clear correlation between deprivation and levels of absence, and plotting the relationship between the two provides a useful indication of relative overall performance at LEA level. If an LEA finds itself above the line, its absence rates are higher than would be expected given their level of deprivation and the LEA may need to reconsider the focus and activities of its EWS [EXHIBIT 19].

### The relationship between primary school deprivation and non-attendance in LEAs

There is a strong relationship at LEA level between deprivation and absence rates.

Note: Percentage total absence is the sum of unauthorised and authorised absence in all primary schools expressed as a percentage of total possible attendance.

Source: DfEE Form 7 data and absence data

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#### Overall primary school free school meal entitlement in LEA

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42
63. LEAs have permanent exclusion and unauthorised attendance targets agreed in their EDPs. These are high-profile commitments that the LEA must fulfil. Schools are their most vital partner in this endeavour, although effective work with other partners will also assist LEAs greatly in their achievement. LEAs also now have a duty to review all their services to demonstrate that they offer best value. Such service reviews require a broad examination of the internal effectiveness of current activities and policies, and the development of suitable local standards and targets. It is only through this process that the LEA will know whether it is suitably equipped both to meet the current challenge of the targets agreed with the DfEE, and future challenges [BOX I].

64. The previous two chapters have concentrated on attendance services. How LEAs manage the exclusion process is also critical. It is a good test of effective service management and the relationships between LEAs and all their other partners in the local education system. It often requires swift referral to other parts of the LEA and the involvement of other services and agencies. Most importantly, permanent exclusions are a test of the quality of the relationship between LEAs and their schools. All facets of the process, from the initial exclusion to the eventual placement, require effective co-operation between an LEA and its schools. Management of the exclusion process, and the means by which LEAs provide education for those outside school, are discussed in the next chapter.

**BOX I**

**Checklist for LEA members and service managers on EWS performance**

- What resources are we putting in compared with other LEAs?
- Are we happy with the current focus of our EWS? Is it sufficiently focused on attendance?
- Is our EWS monitoring the effectiveness of current work – and changing priorities/activities accordingly?
- How good is our attendance rate at primary and secondary level, especially given our pupils’ relative level of deprivation?
- Is our rate improving? (especially important if we are not in the top quartile for similar LEAs). If not, why not? And what specific actions are we taking to improve it?
Ensuring Effective Education for Those Outside School

Some children will always be unable to cope with mainstream schooling. The permanently excluded are a high-profile, small minority of these pupils. Following changes in government regulations, LEAs should extend their review of the speed, type, cost and outcomes of placements for permanently excluded pupils to cover all those who are educated outside school.
Introduction

Permanently excluded pupils represent a fraction of 1 per cent of the overall school-age population, but they are a group in need of substantial, and swift, intervention. From September 2002, they are also pupils for whom LEAs must ensure the provision of full-time education after 15 days of exclusion. Permanently excluded pupils are also a small minority of those children educated outside school. In the light of new DfEE guidance, which requires the measurement of the outcomes of all those educated by the authority outside school, LEAs also need to consider the effectiveness of placements for these pupils. This is considered in detail at the end of the chapter.

LEAs are working to reduce permanent exclusions and to keep pupils within mainstream schooling, but they still need effective procedures for those who are excluded. Once a pupil is outside school, LEAs need to consider:

- how to minimise the time that pupils spend outside education; and
- how to provide effective alternative placements for those pupils, in both the short and the long term.

A speedy return to education matters greatly. Time spent out of education may deepen disaffection and lead to pupils falling further behind in their attainment, making their reintegration still harder. A pupil out of education is at greater risk of involvement in anti-social behaviour and petty crime. And the longer pupils are out of mainstream school, the greater the cost of alternatives to the LEA. It is also possible that parents can become less willing to work with others if there are long delays and they receive little help.

Cost considerations will increasingly constrain LEA decisions on where to place excluded pupils. All full-time alternatives are currently more expensive than funding a place in a mainstream school. To counterbalance these cost pressures, LEAs need a comprehensive knowledge of the outcomes from different placements in order to build up an accurate picture of their effectiveness. Increasingly, more costly placements or courses will have to be justified by the outcomes that they achieve.

The Commission’s survey of LEAs was conducted during the spring of 1999 and reflects the situation and the system at that time. There have been substantial changes in the exclusion process and LEA responsibilities since then [BOX J, overleaf]. However, the findings and the underlying principles remain valid, even if different bodies are now performing tasks and overseeing different parts of the process.

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1 In England in 1997/98, permanently excluded pupils constituted 0.17 per cent of the pupil population. In Wales the figure was 0.1 per cent.
Changes to the exclusion process and LEA responsibility for pupils who are excluded from school

Changes to the exclusion process

- LEA powers to overturn or confirm a school’s decision to exclude have been removed. Sole responsibility in considering whether to uphold or overturn the decision to exclude now lies with the school governing body.

- Every governing body has to establish a discipline committee to discharge its function in reviewing exclusions. Following the notification of an exclusion of over 15 days, the discipline committee should meet no earlier than the sixth school day and no later than the 15th school day. For fixed-period exclusions of between 6 and 15 days, the meeting has to be held between 6 and 30 school days after notification.

- LEAs can now exert influence through the presence of their officers at discipline committees, who can make representations about exclusions.

- The duty to inform parents of the discipline committee’s decision and its reasons (and the parents’ rights to appeal against the decision within 15 school days) lies with the committee itself. Parents should be informed either immediately or within one school day of the hearing.

- In the event of a parental appeal, LEAs must still set up an independent appeals panel of three to five members. But its composition has changed: at least one member must have experience of education in the area and one must be a lay-person without a background in education management or provision. Members must NOT be elected members or employees of either the LEA or the governing body concerned, or have ever had any connections with either.

Changes in LEA responsibilities towards pupils excluded from school

- LEAs must ensure that, where possible, pupils are quickly re-integrated into mainstream schools.

- LEAs have a new duty to ensure that all pupils who are excluded for more than 15 days receive suitable full-time education (required from September 2002).

Source: Audit Commission
Minimising time outside education

70. The exclusion process can seem quite complicated, but in essence it has three phases: the official process – the time from exclusion by the headteacher to confirmation of the exclusion by the LEA\(^\text{I}\) and the subsequent official removal of the pupil from the school roll;\(^\text{II}\) arrangements made for placing the pupil in alternative education; and making the alternative placement work.

71. The quickest method of returning a pupil to education is for the LEA to persuade the school to rescind its decision to exclude. In LEAs surveyed, this happened in about 10 per cent of cases. In the past, the point where the decision was most likely to be overturned was when the governing body of the school considered the case \([\text{EXHIBIT 20}]\). This suggests two questions for LEAs: are they investing enough effort in the training of governors in exclusions and behaviour policies? And are they exerting influence early enough and in the right places? The new exclusions system gives LEAs the right to attend and make representations to governing body discipline committees. LEAs also still retain the ability to influence governors through training in the appropriate use of exclusion and in their role when reviewing exclusions.

\(\text{I}\) Confirmation must come from the governing body’s disciplinary committee, under new regulations that have taken effect from September 1999.

\(\text{II}\) Subject to the results of the appeal committee if a parent appeals.

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**EXHIBIT 20**

**How exclusions can be overturned**

Influencing governors and their deliberations are likely to be LEAs’ most effective actions.

- **SCHOOL EXCLUDES**: 1%
- **HEAD RECONSIDERS**: 6%
- **GOVERNORS CONFIRM/OVERTURN**: 3%
- **LEA CONFIRMS/OVERTURNS**: 2%
- **PARENTS APPEAL**: 2%

Notes: The ‘governors confirm/overturn’ stage is now represented by the discipline committee and, since September 1999, the ‘LEA confirms/overturns’ has no longer been part of the process. While the number of decisions reversed in the exhibit total 12 per cent, this still constitutes only 10 per cent of the total number of permanent exclusions, as at each stage the percentage reversed is a percentage of the smaller number of cases that have reached that stage in the process.

Source: Audit Commission survey of LEAs in England and Wales, 1999
72. In the 90 per cent of cases in which exclusion is not overturned, pupils eventually move off the school roll and LEAs and parents have to find alternative education. The best LEAs will be prepared and will have used the elapsed time in the official process to start to prepare for the return of the student to education. However, not all do so.

73. Detailed analysis carried out in four LEAs shows how management of the process can make a major difference to the speed of an excluded pupil’s return to education. In the four LEAs reviewed, the average time taken from exclusion by the headteacher to placement in at least part-time education ranged from two thirds of a school term to half a school year. This masks an even greater difference in the length of time taken to place excluded pupils from the time they are taken off roll – a period that can vary from less than one school week to eleven school weeks [EXHIBIT 21]. So what are the better LEAs doing to speed up the process?

EXHIBIT 21
Variation in the average length of time taken by LEAs to return excluded pupils to education
Some LEAs take over ten times longer than others to place excluded pupils in part-time education.

Source: Audit Commission examination of the files of all pupils permanently excluded in 1997/98 in four LEAs in England and Wales
10 per cent of LEAs did not contact parents until the exclusion was finally confirmed, beyond informing them by letter of their legal rights.

**What are the better LEAs doing?**

74. Research for this report revealed four areas of best practice which can lead to earlier alternative education provision:
- early parental contact;
- active time management;
- clear placement preferences and assistance; and
- tracking and clear responsibility for pupils.

**Early parental contact**

75. Contact with both the pupil and parent is essential. Parents, together with the LEA, make decisions on their child’s behalf and can either greatly shorten or extend the time spent out of education. Parental decisions can greatly increase the time that their child spends out of education: appealing against decisions that are unlikely to be changed, selecting schools for their child that are full and resistant to placement, and then going through further admission appeals. There are many opportunities for contacting parents in person, engaging them constructively, building up trust and explaining the official process so that they can make an informed choice rather than just react to the decisions of others. Most LEAs contact parents at an early opportunity, typically before the governors meet to discuss the exclusion. However, 10 per cent of LEAs did not contact parents until the exclusion was finally confirmed, beyond informing them by letter of their legal rights.

**Time management**

76. Under the exclusion regulations there are periods following each key decision when appeals by the various parties involved may be made. More effective LEAs use these ‘gaps’ to plan for the next stage; for example, by obtaining detailed education and social records from the excluding school to help prepare new placement.

77. Successfully placing excluded pupils is not easy; but it is helpful both to begin the process as early as possible and to make sure that the eventual placement is as suitable as possible. Gathering detailed educational and social records either at the point of exclusion, or at the point when governors confirm it, is one way of using the time delays in the system more effectively. It also buys the LEA time to consider needs and arbitrate placement, while simultaneously decreasing the length of time that the pupil is out of education. Some LEAs request records of educational achievement at a very early stage, even at the point of exclusion by the headteacher. Unfortunately, others wait until much later in the process, sometimes until the period for parental appeal is over. [EXHIBIT 22, overleaf]. This prevarication ‘loses’ on average seven school weeks. Some LEAs fail to request full records at all and leave it to the next institution where the pupil is registered. Such late gathering of all relevant data hinders preparations and may lead to the inappropriate placement of a pupil, either in an interim part-time setting or in their eventual full-time placement.
EXHIBIT 22

When do LEAs gather detailed educational records of permanently excluded pupils from excluding schools?

Most LEAs do not gather detailed academic records of excluded pupils at the earliest point possible.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999

78. The new pupil support regulations (Ref. 6) advise all LEAs to obtain such records by the time of the governors' meeting. Those LEAs that, for whatever reason, used to wait, need to ensure that they make effective use of the information that they should now be obtaining at an earlier stage in the process.

Placement preferences and assistance

79. A clear idea about where pupils of different ages should be placed helps the LEA to speed up the placement process. Most LEAs have clear policies on preferred outcomes for excluded pupils, depending on their age. For pupils aged 14 and below, return to a school, either mainstream or special, is always preferred. For pupils aged between 14 and 16, over three-quarters of LEAs felt that an alternative to a return to school might be needed; in the four LEAs examined in detail, only one-fifth of excluded pupils aged 15 and 16 returned to education that was provided solely by a mainstream school. However, choices offered by LEAs appear to be driven more by history and availability than by policy or strategy. The new regulations (Ref. 6) place a greater emphasis on return to school; some LEAs, which have previously assumed that few pupils over 14 return to school, may therefore need to develop better supported school-return packages.
Having preferred options for placements is not sufficient. More effective LEAs also drive the placement through and have an active approach to securing the new provision. While parents have first choice about where to place their child following exclusion, they are not necessarily equipped with the knowledge or skills to find a place quickly. They may, for instance, face resistance from headteachers who are reluctant to accept a permanently excluded pupil on their roll. LEAs can greatly help parents place children in new mainstream schools, but almost one in three LEAs still leave most or all parents to place their child back in school with little or no support [EXHIBIT 23].

One-quarter of LEAs surveyed have special arrangements with their schools, enabling excluded pupils to enter schools other than those with unfilled places in the relevant year group. In some cases, these agreements are a response to an absence of available secondary places. Elsewhere, all schools agree to ensure that under-subscribed schools do not receive all the permanently excluded pupils in that area. As with much else that is ‘good practice’ for LEAs, this kind of agreement cannot be imposed but is dependent on their relationships with local schools.

EXHIBIT 23
LEAs’ leaving parents to find a new school place for their excluded child

Nearly 30 per cent of LEAs give no significant support to parents’ efforts to place their child back in education.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999
Tracking and clear responsibility: a ‘champion for the pupil’

Even in the best LEAs, there will still be gaps or delays in the system. But by analysing files and tracking the movement of individual pupils, LEAs can pin down problems. Examination of exclusion case files in one fieldwork authority showed that many pupils spent a long period in part-time education [EXHIBIT 24], and this reflects a trend found in other LEAs. Too often, excluded pupils cease to be a priority once they are placed in part-time education. Continuous tracking of the progress of individual pupils through the system is therefore important. Complex cases that are not amenable to the normal local placement pathways have a habit of drifting onwards without resolution (Exhibit 24 - the pupil highlighted is still receiving no education over six months after the initial exclusion). And many individual cases are complex and may require close liaison and shared decision-making with partner agencies such as social services. So regular reviews of all cases between the point of exclusion and final, full-time placement are vital.

EXHIBIT 24

The length of time taken to place excluded pupils in one authority

Some pupils spend lengthy periods in part-time education and others can get lost in the system.

Note: With the exception of the pupil highlighted, all pupils had re-entered full-time education or reached the school-leaving date.

Source: Audit Commission analysis of the files of permanently excluded pupils in one fieldwork authority
Yet, despite the fact that many LEAs in the Commission’s survey claimed to track and review all excluded pupils, individual pupils still wait for long periods before receiving alternative education. As well as tracking, there needs to be a clear allocation of responsibility, with a named officer driving the process for individual pupils at all stages. Many LEAs have sought to address this need, and resolve the problem of finding suitable places, through the creation of pupil placement panels (see paragraph 93; Box K). But panels work only if they embody the twin principles of clear individual responsibility and regular review.

Three-quarters of LEAs claimed to know the whereabouts of all their pupils who were being educated other than at school. However, checks in fieldwork LEAs and the general difficulty of collecting data in this area suggest that this confidence may be misplaced. Only 25 per cent of LEAs reviewed all those on their ‘out-of-school’ database every month and, even in these LEAs, the databases were not comprehensive. LEAs tend to collect data on groups of particular interest to them, rather than using the system as a safety net to prevent pupils disappearing into administrative holes. Few databases cover all those pupils who are out of school.

Under the new pupil support regulations (Ref. 6), which apply from September 1999, arrangements for the future placement of excluded pupils must be made either by a named LEA officer or a reintegration panel (which could be a pupil placement panel).

From September 1999, the DfEE will collect national data on the educational achievement of children who are being educated out of school. LEAs will have to set up systems to gather this data. However, this will still not include some pupils – such as long term truants or pupils with patterns of poor attendance – whom LEAs may wish to track.
Managing the official exclusion process from the point at which the headteacher excludes to the point where the pupil is finally removed from the school roll is only a small part of the LEA’s task. LEAs may have speedily secured the initial placement of the pupil in at least part-time education, but for most excluded pupils this is only the beginning.

**Placement and cost**

Finding a place for an excluded pupil should not be the end of the process. LEAs also need to know how much the provision costs, and whether it is effective. Currently, most alternative education is, at least initially, part-time. For the majority of pupils, the first types of education that they receive from an LEA after they have been excluded is a place in a pupil referral unit (PRU) or home tuition – the most expensive options in terms of cost per pupil hour [EXHIBIT 25].

Even with additional money from the Standards Fund, most LEAs will not be able to afford to provide full-time home tuition for all pupils excluded for more than 15 days. In a typical LEA, the entire home tuition budget would be swallowed up by 20 pupils within 20 weeks. To meet the demands of the new regulations, the vast majority of those excluded will have to pass more quickly from home tuition into other, more cost-effective types of provision.

The problem is made more acute by the fact that most LEAs are currently unaware how much alternative options cost. LEAs often switch money within a global budget and use staff flexibly - for example, by placing home tutors in schools to support pupils when there are few excluded pupils and then withdrawing them to work in excluded pupils’ homes or PRUs when exclusions increase. While flexibility is useful, LEAs need to have a clear idea of the comparative cost of alternatives, both to inform their judgement on the cost effectiveness of these alternatives and to enable them to project accurate costings of future strategies. It is also imperative that LEAs examine the current pattern of their provision and costs in the light of the new requirement to provide full-time education to all excluded pupils from September 2002 [EXHIBIT 26].
EXHIBIT 25
The cost of different types of educational provision
Home tuition costs at least ten times more per hour than mainstream schooling.

EXHIBIT 26
Costs of full-time provision in different types of educational provision
LEAs currently rely too much on low levels of high-cost provision for permanently excluded pupils.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales (1999), and fieldwork
Six months after the end of the academic year in which they were excluded ... nearly one-third of pupils were still in home tuition or PRUs, and less than half had been reintegrated back into school or placed on a college

89. Providing alternative education for pupils whose fixed-period exclusions exceed 15 days, but who are still on the school roll, may need to be organised differently from that for those pupils who have been permanently excluded from their current school. Under the new DfEE social inclusion pupil support circulars (Ref. 6) and assuming that the current DfEE proposals on school inclusion pupil support funding are adopted, alternative education provision and funding for excluded pupils will change substantially. For fixed-period exclusions of under 15 days, the school will set and mark work as before. However, for fixed-period exclusions of more than 15 days, schools will plan the education and LEAs will ensure that it is suitable and full-time. Local agreements on funding will be arrived at between LEAs and schools, normally with a contribution from the excluding school’s Pupil Retention Grant (PRG). For permanently excluded pupils, the LEA will provide education and fund it with deductions from the excluding school’s delegated budget in accordance with the Money Following Pupil Regulations (M FPR). Deductions from the excluding school’s PRG will also be made by the LEA, although the amount to be deducted has yet to be specified. Any additional funding for the education provided will have to come from the LEA itself.

Long-term placement

90. In the short term, most pupils are given home or group tuition, or placed in a PRU. But it is also important to know where all the same pupils are in the longer term. Only two-thirds of LEAs knew where all their previously excluded pupils were six months after the end of the academic year in which they were excluded. In those LEAs, nearly one-third of pupils were still in home tuition or PRUs, and less than half had been reintegrated back into school or placed in a college [EXHIBIT 27], in spite of the fact that in all cases these were the stated preferred long-term options for excluded pupils.

91. The large number of pupils still in home tuition at least six months after initial exclusion, and the extended use of PRUs, suggest that both are being used by many LEAs as long-term holding centres for pupils whom they are unable to place back into the education mainstream. In spite of the long-term nature of these placements, the education provided is still part-time for most pupils. Pupils typically receive five hours a week or less of home tuition and twelve hours or less in a PRU. Rationalisation of existing ‘education otherwise’ provision in order to use staff and premises more effectively may allow more hours at no extra cost in some LEAs. But, in most cases, even if local numbers of exclusions fall, the number reintegrated back into school, or placed in packages of work experience and college courses, will need to increase if LEAs are going to be able to finance the new requirement of full-time education for excluded pupils from September 2002.
**EXHIBIT 27**

**Longer-term placements for permanently excluded pupils**

Six months after the end of the academic year in which they were excluded, nearly one-third of pupils are still in high-cost, part-time provision.

* Pupils are no longer the LEA’s responsibility either because they have ceased to be of school age or because they are now resident in a different LEA from the one in which they were excluded.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999

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92. The great variation in the nature and quality of provision for those educated outside of schools, combined with the vulnerable nature of such pupils, suggests a role for an external body with oversight of the entire area. The provision of ‘education otherwise’ is included in the current joint reviews of LEAs that are being carried out by Ofsted (ESTYN in Wales) and the Audit Commission. But there is no equivalent to the detailed review of the quality of teaching and management provided by an Ofsted inspection of a school, except for PRUs, which Ofsted does inspect. Given Ofsted’s current expertise and its new involvement in developing an inspection methodology for colleges of further education – where many courses for Year 11 pupils are based - one possibility would be for its remit to be extended to cover all forms of education otherwise provided or purchased by local LEAs.

**Finding a place**

93. LEAs are increasingly using pupil placement panels to place excluded pupils. Half of LEAs now have such panels. Placement panels are not a solution in themselves, but they can help an LEA and its schools to understand each other’s problems and achieve schools’ agreement to the placement of excluded pupils. They can also improve the chances of a suitable placement, as long as they are able to consider a range of options. Pupil placement panels absorb significant amounts of senior officer and headteacher time, and can add another loop to the system and further delay placement, so it is important that they are used to their optimum potential [BOX K, overleaf].
Making mainstream placement work

94. With the cost of full-time education alternatives and the coming change in regulations, there is a clear financial advantage for LEAs to return more pupils to full-time mainstream education. This largely means placing pupils in either mainstream schools or in college, or in a mixture of the two. It also means making such placements work. There is little point in placing pupils in institutions where they fail to attend or from which they are swiftly excluded again.

Placement in school

95. Getting pupils back into mainstream schooling is the preferred option for all LEAs for all pupils up to the age of 14, and will also be appropriate for some aged over 14. The eventual success or failure of a placement back into school may depend on the support provided by both the school and the LEA to help to reintegrate pupils. The vast majority of LEAs do provide support of some sort, from planning the transfer, providing additional staff time, or even offering financial incentives or support, but the actual extent of such support varies considerably.

BOX K

Good practice in pupil placement panels

Key features of successful placement panels observed or discussed were:

- The presence of key players – for example, a headteacher (preferably on some form of rotation, and possibly sitting as chairperson), senior representative from the LEA, relevant service heads (EWS, behaviour support service (BSS), education psychology), head of education otherwise, head of any EBD special school and a representative from social services;
- a comprehensive and up-to-date database of all those pupils out of school;
- regular meetings (at least monthly);
- clear criteria for referral and closure of cases, with responsibility for all those not closed being allocated to specific panel members, and cases then being brought back to the next meeting;
- clarity on links to SEN placements, especially when placing excluded pupils;
- some budget flexibility to permit the creation of individual packages;
- panel also responsible for other pupils at risk who are not excluded but are also not attending school; and
- open reporting of decisions to all concerned parts of the local education system.

Source: Audit Commission
LEAs should be measuring the effectiveness of their current support. They should discuss other options, such as giving double the normal pupil funding to schools that accept a previously excluded pupil – to persuade schools to accept such pupils and enable the school to purchase extra support for their reintegration – or perhaps organise part school and part college-based packages. In cost and outcome terms, options involving placements in schools may be more effective than alternative education.

Placement in colleges

For a significant percentage of excluded pupils aged 14 to 16, alternative college-based courses are already common and may be the most effective full-time option. However, college placements are not a panacea to all the problems of the 14–16 age group and should not be used to mask difficulties with the school curriculum for this group. Instead, such difficulties should be recognised and addressed at school level with the help of the advisory and inspection service (AIS).

College courses are also not always as cheap as they appear. They are often difficult to cost accurately, as courses may be subsidised by the colleges themselves; and while adding one pupil to an existing course is relatively cheap, creating a new group is less so. There may also be further hidden subsidies, such as pastoral support for college placements provided by the LEA from within their BSS or PRU budgets. Such pastoral support is important, as without it courses can easily fail, but it should be recognised as a cost of the college course.

Nor are college courses automatically more effective than a return to mainstream school. Mutual misunderstanding about the needs of the pupils and what colleges can feasibly provide can undermine the value of courses. College lecturers are not all trained in teaching this group of pupils, and the less structured environment of a college is one where some pupils may flourish but others can easily get lost. Successful college courses and placements require close co-operation between the college and the LEA, a lot of goodwill on both sides and possibly specially trained staff.
How effective are alternative placements?

100. In a situation where the data about excluded pupils’ whereabouts and the relative costs of types of provision are often missing, it is not surprising that not all LEAs have a clear idea of what a successful outcome is for an excluded pupil, and few regularly measure against those standards. But having a model of successful outcomes, and measuring progress against it, is the only method of estimating the success or otherwise of the current placement policies and the effectiveness of alternative provision.

101. As a bare minimum, the attendance of excluded pupils in new settings, including in new mainstream or special schools, needs to be measured. From fieldwork it quickly became apparent that excluded pupils who were placed in a new school or college place did not always subsequently attend, and that absence was not always as keenly followed up as it might be. LEAs should also track academic achievement and behaviour, using the pupil’s standards on arrival as a baseline measure. There should be regular reviews – for example, at three-, six- and then twelve-monthly intervals – until the point at which they leave full-time education (the requirement in the new DfEE Social Inclusion: Pupil Support regulations (Ref. 6). for individual reintegration plans could provide a useful vehicle for this monitoring). Without measuring progress over time, it is impossible for LEAs to know how effective their actions are or whether particular options are cost effective. Currently, such comparisons are rarely done and money spent on alternative education may well be being wasted [EXHIBIT 28].

EXHIBIT 28
Basic outcome data for two courses in one LEA

How much of the money spent on alternative education for those permanently excluded is wasted?

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork
While this chapter has focused on permanently excluded pupils, it is not only excluded pupils who are outside the education mainstream whose outcomes and progress need to be tracked. Other pupils outside the education mainstream for reasons other than exclusion are as vulnerable to long-term disaffection, or of the results of inadequate or insufficient teaching, as those who are permanently excluded. They are also considerably more numerous. One LEA visited during fieldwork had set up an initiative that took referrals from within the whole LEA for pupils who had dropped out, or were in danger of dropping out, of education between the ages of 14 and 16. Permanently excluded pupils constituted only 10 per cent of the pupils referred, monitored and worked with. A similar percentage was reported by some LEAs in comments appended to their surveys. One group that can easily lose out in their education is pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers. In LEAs that could provide figures, there are usually more girls in this category than there are girls who are permanently excluded [EXHIBIT 29].

EXHIBIT 29

**Pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers out of school compared with those permanently excluded**

More secondary schoolgirls are out of school because of pregnancy than because they have been permanently excluded.

Note: The figures include only those pregnant schoolgirls who are receiving special provision and not those who are still in school, and therefore understate the number of pregnant schoolgirls in an LEA.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999
More effective tracking and support across the Year 11/Year 12 divide could reduce the need for later work and may reduce the danger of teenagers dropping out of education altogether.

103. Given the focus of the new guidelines on providing full-time alternative education to pupils who are excluded for more than 15 days from September 2002, LEAs may be tempted to remove resources from those educated out of school for reasons other than exclusion, in order to provide full-time education for the excluded. LEAs should resist such a shift in resources, and instead use the introduction of the new guidelines as a trigger to review the provision for all pupils educated other than at school. Currently, ‘education otherwise’ provision for pupils aged 15 and 16 – including excluded pupils – is often perfunctory, with the pupils’ subsequent attendance, engagement and achievement not of great concern. This relative neglect is shown most starkly where excluded pupils in years 10 and 11 refuse or ignore the offers of new placements and slip out of the education system entirely; but there are also many other groups of pupils who are often not in school where LEA support can diminish the closer pupils get to school-leaving age. The Government has signalled in new regulations that the educational achievement of such ‘at risk’ groups is a matter of concern, and that LEAs should monitor their performance. It is only through such outcome measurement that LEAs can demonstrate the value of their services.

104. These disaffected 16 year olds are often those whom the New Start/Youth Access initiative [BOX 1] is trying to re-engage in learning, and, when they turn 18, may eventually be the focus of New Deal initiatives [BOX 1]. More effective tracking and support across the Year 11/Year 12 divide could reduce the need for later work and may reduce the danger of teenagers dropping out of education altogether.

105. The Connexions initiative [BOX 1] is an explicit acknowledgement that many pupils are already lost to education before the age of 16 and more still are lost immediately after officially leaving. While the service will be newly created, with the government proposing to contract with bodies locally to provide it, LEAs will need to work with, and provide information for, the service. This will require new and better information systems in most LEAs. Currently, even for a relatively discrete group such as schoolgirl mothers, the type of information needed is not yet collected by most LEAs [EXHIBIT 30, overleaf].

106. With or without help from this new agency, LEAs need to improve their information systems to track more effectively these pupils’ future progress and educational outcomes. Without such measures, it is impossible to gauge the effectiveness and value for money of current decisions taken on provision and placement, or any impact made by the LEA on these groups of pupils at risk.
**New government initiatives targeted at disaffected pupils/youths**

**New Start (Youth Access in Wales)**

New Start is a central government-sponsored initiative to identify innovative ways of tackling disaffection among 14–17 year olds. The initiative spans both compulsory schooling and post-16 learning and tries to bring together existing local partnership projects in this area while developing new approaches and joint working. To date, £4 million has funded the creation of 60 pilot projects. The first phase of 17 pilot projects (which began in Autumn 1997 and ended in Summer 1999) focused on pupils between the ages of 14 and 16; the second batch of 43 (which began in Autumn 1998 and will end in spring/summer 2000) focuses on 16–17 year olds. Overall, New Start aims to encourage a strategic local framework for tackling youth disaffection. Youth Access is the equivalent programme in Wales - it currently differs by retaining a broader focus on 14-17 year olds.

**New Deal**

The New Deal for 18–24 year olds is a nationwide central government ‘welfare-to-work’ initiative, funded by the windfall tax on privatised utilities. It is a two-phase approach to finding work for young people who have been unemployed for over six months. In the first phase – the Gateway of the New Deal, which can last up to four months – intensive counselling, advice, guidance and help with basic skills is provided. For those who are still unemployed at the end of this period, four further options are offered: supported employment for six months (subsidised at £60 a week); six months’ work in the voluntary sector (paid at the rate of jobseekers’ allowance, with a further £400 grant on top); work for six months on the Environment Task Force (on the same terms as above); and, for those lacking qualifications at S/NVQ Level 2, full-time education or training for up to 12 months while still in receipt of jobseekers’ allowance and other benefits.

**Connexions**

The Learning to Succeed White Paper (Ref. 12) proposes a strategy, called ‘Connexions’, with the intention of making sure that more young people stay in education until they are 19. The key method of meeting this challenge is to provide consistent and co-ordinated support for all young people between the ages of 13 and 19 as and when they need it. To this end, the paper proposes the creation of a new service to improve the coherence of what is currently provided through the careers service, other specialist agencies and local authority youth and education welfare services.

Source: Audit Commission
How much do LEAs know about schoolgirl mothers?

Less than half of LEAs keep basic information about schoolgirl mothers and only one-quarter know what happens to them after they leave school.

Note: Since careers services became free-standing agencies, LEAs are not responsible for such tracking. However, to measure the effectiveness of the input from their services, LEAs need such long-term achievement data.

Source: Audit Commission survey of all LEAs in England and Wales, 1999

Conclusion

There are substantial delays in the exclusion process that affect many pupils in most LEAs. The variation in the time taken to place pupils in different LEAs suggests that there is much scope for improvement. Good practice in managing the exclusion process may mean LEAs doing more than the legally required minimum in order to more successfully meet new requirements. LEAs are not fully responsible for pupils until the exclusion has been finally confirmed. Therefore, their involvement with the pupil up until that point, with the exception of either confirming or overturning the original decision, has sometimes been minimal.\(^1\) The better LEAs take ownership of the problem of exclusion early and work to a speedy resolution: making personal contact with parents and trying to build a working relationship; assessing the needs of the pupil early on in the process and facilitating the eventual placement of the pupil. All of these actions can shorten by weeks the time that children spend outside education and make it more likely that the new legal requirement can be met. LEAs need to ask themselves whether they are doing everything possible to return excluded pupils swiftly and appropriately to education (BOX M).

\(^1\) This will change with the requirement to work with headteachers on providing education after 15 days’ exclusion.
The key danger is that pupils can get lost in the system if there is no single person responsible for driving their case through. Any part of the system where the lines of responsibility are unclear or where a referral transfers responsibility from one officer or department/agency to another is a potential pitfall. Good pupil placement panels and/or tracking the progress of pupils through from the point of confirmed exclusion to their eventual full-time placement can help to prevent this outcome. Placement panels can also help to address the main new challenge facing LEAs following the change in regulations: the need to provide full-time education for excluded pupils. The current pattern of provision for excluded pupils is not financially sustainable under current levels of funding. LEAs need to find ways of moving pupils more quickly from part-time to full-time education and place more excluded pupils back into mainstream education, whether it be school or college. Anything else will be too expensive for most LEAs. LEAs must also evaluate the comparative costs of current placements and measure and review their effectiveness. They must also review the position of all their pupils who are outside mainstream education, not just those who are permanently excluded.

**BOX M**

Checklist for LEAs in managing the exclusion process and monitoring all pupils educated other than at school

**LEAs need to:**

- exert influence early – train governors; adopt fully understood and followed local procedures; send staff to governors’ exclusion meetings;
- get full relevant details on individual pupils as soon as possible and start planning alternatives early. Contact parents early and work with them;
- track all cases and review them regularly, including those who also need reviews of SEN placements or joint decisions on placements with social services;
- ensure that a named individual is responsible for pursuing each pupil’s case until suitable alternative education is found;
- adopt agreed key measures of ‘successful outcomes’ that can be compared across and applied to all alternatives (for example: attendance rates or improvements to baseline achievement levels). Build on the minimum required under the new regulations;
- adopt agreed, specific additional outcomes with specialist providers (for example, achievements against appropriate agreed standards – GCSE, NVQ, social skills);
- identify broad cost comparisons for all alternative provision used;
- check that ‘hidden’ costs, such as subsidies from other LEA budgets, are included where appropriate;
- agree longer term tracking, if possible, with post-16 providers – Careers Service, New Start, the new ‘Connexions’ service; and
- review cost and effectiveness data regularly with partners.
The Way Forward

Realising the necessary improvements in school attendance and inclusion, and raising the quality of education provided to those children out of school, will not be easy tasks for most LEAs. LEAs will need to use the challenges and targets that they currently face as a springboard for a detailed, wide-ranging review of: their use of data; their focus on work with schools; their management of the exclusion process; and the quality, costs and outcomes of the education that they provide for children outside school.
There is a long-established correlation between the absence of pupils from school and poor academic achievement – and subsequently poorer quality jobs, if any – and a greater likelihood of criminal activity. In the last decade such issues have been overshadowed by the emphasis on educational standards, delegation of funds and responsibilities to schools, and league tables. Recently, more emphasis has been placed on social inclusion. This has led to a greater focus on school attendance and exclusion, with a large increase in central government funding for this area and new circulars issued by the DfEE. Many of the new initiatives essentially seek to build on what the best LEAs are already doing, with the emphasis firmly on outcomes rather than on requiring only that correct procedures be followed.

For some LEAs, the changes required are significant and include a change in approach or mindset. They may need to become more proactive and do more than the legally required minimum in order to achieve their new targets. In addition, there are also many relatively straightforward administrative changes that may be needed in how LEAs manage data, monitor services, run the exclusion process, and organise placements in alternative education, which can yield relatively swift improvements. These changes should also be seen as part of an LEA’s wider response to best value.

Changes in practice can lead to improvements that ultimately save both the LEA and society a great deal of cost and trouble. For example, simple tracking of the progress of individuals and the costs of alternatives can show whether LEAs are getting best value from their provision and can help these pupils to access the support networks available from Careers Companies, New Start and other post-16 agencies. Without such tracking, there is a danger that already disadvantaged pupils will fall between agencies, making failure for the individual more likely and increasing potential costs to the LEA and to society as a whole.

The focus of this report has been the LEA itself, but the critical success factor for LEAs will be their ability to act as agents of change and to support and promote improvement and excellence in their partners at school level. Better LEAs already recognise that changing the way that a school manages attendance or behaviour has a wider and greater effect than work with individual pupils, and they seek to balance reactive casework with support for whole school management and procedures.

To make this shift from reactive casework, LEAs need to know where the problems are, what their causes are, and the effectiveness and cost of any actions taken by the LEA. Currently, too few LEAs know the answers to these questions. Changes in government regulations from September 1999 require LEAs to collect more data on those at risk from exclusion, those excluded and those who are being educated out of school. The challenge for most LEAs is to use the new data to best effect to improve management and co-ordination of the EWS, BSS, SEN and education otherwise services.
School attendance and exclusions are both issues on which LEAs are expected to take a leading role. While most of the practices encouraged in the new DfEE guidance are already evident in the better LEAs, this study shows that many LEAs still need to make significant changes. However, the inability of most LEAs to measure satisfactorily all current costs and outcomes masks the fact that some have already made great strides in a very challenging area.
LEAs should make more effective use of data by:

1. systematically analysing attendance and exclusion data at group and pupil level, in addition to school level
2. collecting and analysing data on fixed period exclusions to monitor and, where necessary, target prevention at vulnerable groups
3. examining the characteristics of permanently excluded pupils and others being educated by the LEA outside school, to inform strategic reviews of provision

LEAs should support school level work by:

4. providing a framework and strategic direction for both improving attendance and preventing exclusion in their area
5. recognising the importance of effective links with the advisory and inspection service in improving school attendance
6. placing greater emphasis on working with school management on their policies, procedures and use of data, as well as doing individual casework with pupils
7. encouraging and assisting schools to improve their management of attendance and exclusions by both providing expert advice and challenging under-performance

Work with other services, agencies and local authorities could be improved if LEAs establish:

8. high level agreements on shared budgets for residential placements
9. clarity on roles and responsibilities when dealing, for example, with a looked after child who is not attending school
10. shared databases and perspectives among local front-line staff
11. clear referral routes, with LEA services acting as gateways to other services and agencies for schools, parents and pupils

LEAs should enhance education welfare service management by:

12. reviewing the focus, funding and comparative demands on their EWS
13. monitoring service effectiveness at case, group, school and LEA level and using that information to inform future service planning
In order to ensure good quality education for all children outside school, LEAs should:

14. proactively manage the exclusion process

15. have a ‘champion’ within the LEA for each pupil out of school to track their progress from the point they are out of school to their placement back in full-time education

16. focus on all pupils outside school who are not receiving an effective education, not just those on permanently excluded

17. monitor the effectiveness of school reintegration packages

18. monitor the costs and outcomes of placements for all those outside mainstream schooling, including checks on what happens to these pupils after they reach the age of 16

19. quality assure all forms of education not subject to external inspection

20. forge close links and share information with those agencies and schemes providing assistance for disaffected young people after the age of 16
Appendix 1

The Audit Commission is grateful to all those managers and staff, including those in schools, who helped the study team on site visits, and to all members of the advisory group.

Site visits

Visited during research, but for varying lengths of time:

Camden
Darlington
Flintshire
Kirklees
Merton
North Tyneside
Nottingham
Oxfordshire
Richmond upon Thames
Wakefield
Walsall
Warwickshire

The study also drew on the findings of inspections of LEAs carried out by the Commission jointly with Ofsted; and of Social Services Departments carried out jointly with the Social Services Inspectorate.

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