

## **Agenda Item No:**

Committee:	Scrutiny Committee for Education and Libraries
Date:	8 March 2005
Title of Report:	Results of the Audit Commission's Annual National Survey: Schools Views of Their LEA 2004
By:	Director of Children's Services, Education and Libraries
Purpose of Report:	To inform the Committee regarding the results of the Audit Commission's 2004 annual national survey of schools views of their LEA

---

**RECOMMENDATION - that the Committee note and discuss the content of the report, and express any views regarding the agreed priorities for improvement they would wish to convey to the senior management team of Education and Libraries Department.**

---

### **1 Financial implications**

1.1 There are no direct financial implications of this report. The costs of addressing the agreed priorities for improvement set out in paragraph 6 below will be met from existing departmental budgets.

### **2 Background information**

2.1 The survey is carried out annually by the Audit Commission and its primary purpose is to gauge schools' views of their local education authority (LEA) services and the support that they provide. The survey results identify areas where schools rate their council highly as well as areas where they think they could improve. It is an important self-evaluation tool and is a key component of inspection evidence.

2.2 The survey looked at five areas: LEA strategy, support for school improvement, facilitating access to services, access/promoting social inclusion and special educational needs (SEN). The school survey was completed by the headteacher, who was encouraged to consult other staff and governors. Schools were asked to rate aspects of the support and advice provided by their LEA on a five-point scale ranging from very good (1) to very poor (5). Satisfactory is at the mid-point (3) of this scale. The survey was completed online through the Audit Commission's website and was open to schools from May to July 2004.

### **3 Overall results and progress made since last year**

3.1 The overall picture is one of significant improvement, with schools' views of East Sussex being more positive in 2004 than 2003 in a majority of the areas surveyed. Overall East Sussex showed statistically significant (greater than 5%) improvement in 87% of the survey questions, with some improvement in 94% of the areas. Schools on average rated East Sussex LEA as at least satisfactory in 87% of the areas surveyed (61 of the 70 questions), compared with an average of 92% of schools nationally.

3.2 The highest rated items (judged by schools to be between good and very good) for East Sussex corresponded closely to those identified nationally: the quality of financial support and advice; the quality of professional personnel advice and casework; and school improvement, in particular, the LEA's support to develop self-management (including self-evaluation) in schools.

3.3 The areas achieving the highest positive changes nationally (4% in both cases) - the rationale behind the school funding formula and the consultation on the planning and review of the council's education budget – were not the most improved areas in East Sussex, but nonetheless improved here by 10% and 4% respectively. The question relating to the effectiveness of the LEA in encouraging schools to work together achieved an average national positive change of 3%, one of the largest. East Sussex achieved a positive change of 12%, four times the national average.

3.4 A number of areas relevant to the LEA's role in school improvement were viewed significantly more positively by schools than in 2003 and featured strongly in the list of areas that in East Sussex improved by more than 15% (refer to Annex 1: Table 1). This demonstrates that schools recognise the improvements in support and challenge that have been made as school improvement measures implemented by CfBT, such as moderated school self review (MSSR), bed in. Schools' perception of the effectiveness of electronic communications between schools and the LEA improved by 17% over 2003, with 92% of schools rating it as satisfactory or better compared with 83% for all schools nationally. This reflects a positive view of developments such as "Ezone", the council's extranet for schools that provides them with easily accessed web-based information and electronic transactions, and the "Virtual School Bag" which distributes circulars and other information to schools electronically.

3.5 East Sussex was in the first (top) quartile for all authorities nationally for 9% of the areas surveyed (see Annex 1: Table 2). This is an improvement on 2003, when East Sussex was in the first quartile for only 1% of the survey questions. East Sussex was at or above the national average for 64% of the surveyed areas, compared with only 21% in 2003.

3.6 East Sussex was in the first quartile for 47% of the questions compared with its statistical neighbours (see Annex 1: Table 3) and scored at or above the average for its statistical neighbours for 73% of the survey questions. However, the Audit Commission advises that the statistical neighbour analyses should be treated with caution as not all of the LEA's statistical neighbours participated (for a list of the statistical neighbours of East Sussex that participated please refer to Annex 2). A comparison with statistical neighbours was not carried out by the Audit Commission on the 2003 results.

#### **4 Areas where the LEA's performance was rated poorly**

4.1 Schools rated East Sussex on average as below satisfactory in 13% of the survey questions (refer to Annex 1: Table 4) which compares favourably with 41% in 2003. The national average result for 2004 was 10%.

4.2 The lowest rated items in East Sussex were in line with those identified nationally: the quality of building maintenance services; the programming and management of building projects; the LEA's effectiveness in developing schools' capacity to meet the needs of pupils with SEN; and support to schools in bidding for external grants. In East Sussex, the quality of the catering service was the most poorly rated area with only 42% of schools rating it as satisfactory or better, compared with 76% of schools nationally.

4.3 Two areas, the quality of the catering service and the quality of professional personnel advice and casework, were rated by schools on average as worse than the previous year, to an extent that the Audit Commission deemed statistically significant (see Annex 1: Table 5).

4.4 Three other areas (the reliability of home to school transport, the quality of payroll services, and the efficiency with which statutory assessments of pupils with SEN are made) were on average rated by schools as worse than the previous year, although none of these declined by an amount greater than 3% and the variations were not considered by the Audit Commission to be statistically significant.

4.5 Schools' views placed East Sussex in the fourth (bottom) quartile against all authorities nationally for 10% of the survey questions: the quality of the catering service; support to schools in bidding for external grants; the LEA's arrangements for disseminating good practice; support for gifted and talented pupils; support for literacy; support for numeracy; and support for 14-19 education (see Annex 1: Table 6). Again, this compares favourably with 49% of questions falling in the bottom quartile in 2003.

4.6 East Sussex was in the fourth quartile compared to its statistical neighbours for 17% of the survey questions (refer to Annex 1: Table 7), although as previously stated the Audit Commission advises that statistical neighbour analyses should be treated with caution.

## **5 Questions for which the responses of primary and secondary schools were different**

5.1 Areas rated as satisfactory or better on average by primary schools but less than satisfactory by secondary schools were: the LEA's arrangements for disseminating good practice; technical support for ICT; facilities management services (cleaning, grounds maintenance and caretaking); the LEA's capacity to facilitate access to high quality services; planning of SEN provision; and the effectiveness of educational psychology support. Areas that were rated as satisfactory or better by secondary schools were rated as at least satisfactory by primary schools.

## **6 Areas identified as priorities for improvement**

6.1 The results of the survey were discussed at Headteachers meetings and reported to the Primary, Secondary and Special Education Strategic Management Boards. The boards were asked to agree the priority areas for improvement, particularly in the light of budgetary pressures on the central department, to inform the development the department's service plan for the financial year 2005/6. The areas agreed as priorities for improvement were:

- The quality of the catering service
- Support to schools in bidding for external grants
- Arrangements for disseminating good practice
- Curriculum and technical support for ICT
- Professional personnel advice and casework
- Support for gifted and talented pupils

6.2 These priority areas have been incorporated into the department's Service Plan for 2005/06 as key service targets and outcomes, supported by performance measures, within the existing budget framework. They will be monitored quarterly through the department's performance management process. Schools have been informed of the results of the survey and the actions planned to address the priority improvement areas through a circular to schools. They will be informed about progress against the targets. It is hoped that if schools can see that the survey leads to action for improvement this will encourage higher response rates to future surveys.

## **7 Response rate**

7.1 The data relates to 8,604 schools in 152 authorities in England and Wales. The East Sussex response rate was 46% overall, 49% for primary schools, 37% for secondary schools and 27% for special schools (3 schools).

7.2 The East Sussex overall response rate compares favourably to an average response rate for all authorities of 39%, and was the third highest response rate of the 27 English counties that took part.

## **8 Future surveys**

8.1 From 2005 the survey will change from a structure based on the Ofsted LEA inspection framework to one that will reflect the joint area review (JAR) of Children's Services. As a result some new questions will be introduced and some old ones will be deleted, but there will remain a fair degree of continuity in the questions from 2004 to 2005.

8.2 The next annual school survey is due to take place in the summer term 2005 (23rd May – 27th June). A series of benchmarked analysis reports will be produced by the Audit Commission specifically for each authority taking part which will be released in mid-September 2005.

DENISE STOKOE

Director of Children's Services, Education and Libraries

Contact Officer: Steve Marsh (Tel No: 01273 481371)

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

## Annex 1

**Table 1: areas that improved by more than 15% on 2003**

Question	Average rating (2004)	Improvement, %
The LEA's support in developing leadership and management skills in schools	Between Satisfactory and Good	23
The LEA's support to develop self-management (including self-evaluation) in schools	Between Good and Very Good	18
The LEA's knowledge and understanding of schools	Between Satisfactory and Good	18
The effectiveness of electronic communication between schools and the LEA	Between Satisfactory and Good	17
The LEA's effectiveness in challenging schools to perform better	Between Satisfactory and Good	17
The effectiveness of the leadership provided by senior officers	Between Satisfactory and Good	16
The effectiveness of the LEA's implementation of its strategic plans for school improvement	Between Satisfactory and Good	15

**Table 2: Areas where East Sussex was in the first (top) quartile compared to other authorities**

Question	Average rating	Schools rating the area as satisfactory or better, %
The LEA's support to schools for using pupil performance data to secure school improvement	Between Satisfactory and Good	98
The LEA's support to develop self-management (including self-evaluation) in schools	Between Good and Very Good	94
The quality of financial support and advice	Between Good and Very Good	93
The effectiveness of the LEA's co-ordination of the admissions process	Between Satisfactory and Good	92
The LEA's support in developing leadership and management skills in schools	Between Satisfactory and Good	91
The effectiveness of the leadership provided by elected members	Between Satisfactory and Good	74

**Table 3: Areas where East Sussex was in the first (top) quartile compared to its statistical neighbour authorities**

Question	Average rating	Schools rating the area as satisfactory or better, %
The LEA's support to schools for using pupil performance data to secure school improvement	Between Satisfactory and Good	98
The LEA's overall capacity to support school improvement	Between Satisfactory and Good	96

**Table 3: Areas where East Sussex was in the first (top) quartile compared to its statistical neighbour authorities [continued]**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Average rating</b>	<b>Schools rating the area as satisfactory or better, %</b>
The LEA's effectiveness in challenging schools to perform better	Between Satisfactory and Good	95
The clarity of the LEA's definition of monitoring, support and intervention	Between Satisfactory and Good	94
The LEA's support to develop self-management (including self-evaluation) in schools	Between Good and Very Good	94
The relevance of the LEA's priorities to schools	Between Satisfactory and Good	93
The LEA's overall capacity to develop and implement strategy	Between Satisfactory and Good	93
The clarity of service specification for services offered by the LEA	Between Satisfactory and Good	93
How well the LEA promotes access to education and social inclusion	Between Satisfactory and Good	93
The effectiveness of electronic communication between schools and the LEA	Between Satisfactory and Good	92
The effectiveness of the LEA's co-ordination of the admissions process	Between Satisfactory and Good	92
The effectiveness of the LEA's support for promoting pupil attendance	Between Satisfactory and Good	92
The effectiveness of the LEA's implementation of its strategic plans for school improvement	Between Satisfactory and Good	91
The LEA's support in developing leadership and management skills in schools	Between Satisfactory and Good	91
The effectiveness of LEA support for health and safety in schools	Between Satisfactory and Good	90
The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for managing information and data	Between Satisfactory and Good	89
The LEA's support to develop the effectiveness of your governing body	Between Satisfactory and Good	88
The effectiveness of LEA support for child welfare and protection	Between Satisfactory and Good	88
The educational rationale behind the school funding formula	Between Satisfactory and Good	87
The LEA's support for the recruitment and retention of teachers	Between Satisfactory and Good	87
The quality of the LEA's SEN strategy	Between Satisfactory and Good	87
The effectiveness of LEA support for combating racism	Between Satisfactory and Good	82
The LEA's planning of SEN provision to meet identified needs	Between Satisfactory and Good	81
The LEA's overall capacity to support special educational needs	Between Satisfactory and Good	81
The effectiveness of the LEA's planning of school places	Between Satisfactory and Good	80

The LEA's support to make schools effective purchasers of traded services, whether from the LEA or from external providers	Between Satisfactory and Good	78
The quality of the facilities management services; cleaning, grounds maintenance and caretaking	Between Satisfactory and Good	78
The effectiveness of learning support	Between Satisfactory and Good	78
The effectiveness of the leadership provided by elected members	Between Satisfactory and Good	74
The LEA's support for early years education	Between Satisfactory and Good	73
The effectiveness of educational psychology support	Between Satisfactory and Good	73
The effectiveness of LEA support for meeting the needs of pupils with English as an additional language	Between Satisfactory and Good	56
The effectiveness of LEA support for meeting the needs of pupils from minority ethnic groups, refugees and Travellers	Between Satisfactory and Good	52

**Table 4: Areas where East Sussex was rated as less than satisfactory**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Average rating</b>	<b>Schools rating the area as poor or very poor, %</b>
The quality of the catering service	Between Poor and Satisfactory	47*
The effectiveness of LEA support to schools in bidding for external grants	Between Poor and Satisfactory	43*
The LEA's effectiveness in developing schools' capacity to meet the needs of pupils with SEN	Between Poor and Satisfactory	32
The quality of programming and management of building projects	Between Poor and Satisfactory	24**
The efficiency with which statutory assessments of pupils with SEN are made	Between Poor and Satisfactory	24*
The effectiveness of the LEA's arrangements for disseminating good practice	Between Poor and Satisfactory	23
The quality of building maintenance services	Between Poor and Satisfactory	22*
The LEA's effectiveness in monitoring the progress of pupils with SEN at schools	Between Poor and Satisfactory	22
The effectiveness of the LEA's support for gifted and talented pupils	Between Poor and Satisfactory	20*

\* *Between 10 and 15% of schools were unable to comment or did not answer the question*

\*\* *25% of schools were unable to comment or did not answer the question*

**Table 5: Areas that were rated on average as worse than in 2003**

Question	Average rating (2004)	Decline, %
The quality of the catering service	Between Poor and Satisfactory	-8
The quality of professional personnel advice and casework	Between Good and Very Good	-6

**Table 6: Areas where East Sussex was in the fourth (bottom) quartile compared to other authorities**

Question	Average rating	Schools rating the area as poor or very poor, %
The quality of the catering service	Between Poor and Satisfactory	47*
The effectiveness of LEA support to schools in bidding for external grants	Between Poor and Satisfactory	43*
The effectiveness of the LEA's arrangements for disseminating good practice	Between Poor and Satisfactory	23
The effectiveness of the LEA's support for gifted and talented pupils	Between Poor and Satisfactory	20*
The LEA's support for literacy	Between Satisfactory and Good	7
The LEA's support for numeracy	Between Satisfactory and Good	5
The LEA's support for 14-19 education	Between Satisfactory and Good	4**

\* Between 10 and 15% of schools were unable to comment or did not answer the question

\*\* 79% of schools were unable to comment or did not answer the question

**Table 7: Areas where East Sussex was in the fourth (bottom) quartile compared to its statistical neighbour authorities**

Question	Average rating	Schools rating the area as poor or very poor, %
The quality of the catering service	Between Poor and Satisfactory	47*
The effectiveness of LEA support to schools in bidding for external grants	Between Poor and Satisfactory	43*
The quality of programming and management of building projects	Between Poor and Satisfactory	24**
The effectiveness of the LEA's arrangements for disseminating good practice	Between Poor and Satisfactory	23
The LEA's effectiveness in encouraging schools to work together	Between Satisfactory and Good	21
The LEA's support for ICT in the curriculum	Between Satisfactory and Good	14
The LEA's management of the procedures for re-admission of excluded pupils	Satisfactory	12**

The quality of payroll services	Between Satisfactory and Good	10
The LEA's support for literacy	Between Satisfactory and Good	7
The LEA's support for numeracy	Between Satisfactory and Good	5
The reliability of home to school transport	Between Satisfactory and Good	3**

*\* Between 10 and 15% of schools were unable to comment or did not answer the question*

*\*\* 25% or more of schools were unable to comment or did not answer the question*

## **Annex 2: Statistical neighbours of East Sussex that took part in the 2004 survey**

Devon  
Somerset  
Leicestershire  
Cornwall  
Worcestershire  
East Riding of Yorkshire  
North Somerset  
Bedfordshire