



Office for Standards  
in Education

# Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zones: management and impact

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## Introduction

1. This report evaluates the management and effect of two major programmes, Excellence in Cities (EiC) and Education Action Zones (EAZ), introduced by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), to improve educational achievement and promote social inclusion in disadvantaged areas.
2. In its report *Access and Achievement in Urban Education*, published in 1993, Ofsted drew attention to the disturbing fact that, while standards were rising in the nation's schools, the gap between the average performance and that of pupils in areas of social disadvantage was growing wider. Deprivation and disadvantage were closely associated with low standards, low aspirations and social isolation. It was clear that pupils in urban schools serving disadvantaged communities were not benefiting from the current educational reforms.
3. The persistent problem of low achievement and the growing problem of social exclusion were identified in the 1997 White Paper *Excellence in Schools* as the key areas that education policy needed to tackle effectively. The new initiatives, Education Action Zones and Excellence in Cities, were developed to do just this, and to complement existing and newer strategies for school improvement. These included the national strategies for literacy and numeracy in primary schools, the development of specialist schools, action to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance, and changes to school inspection.
4. In its report *Improving City Schools*, published in 2000, Ofsted focused on a sample of schools in deprived urban areas whose performance indicators were better than those of schools in similar circumstances, and looked in detail at the factors which were responsible for their success. It was clear that such success was due to the high quality of teaching, self-critical and progressive management, and intelligent use of school data, together with respect and support for pupils and their parents, and an understanding of the provision required to meet their needs.
5. The report showed how, despite the disadvantages facing these schools, much could be done with hard work and dedication to raise standards and aspirations. However, while celebrating and exemplifying the achievements of these schools, the report concluded that many schools were still not improving, and that the need for action at the school, local and national level remained.
6. One of the issues was the extent to which schools could make use of a variety of additional funding to enable them to include young people more fully, by meeting their needs both for academic challenge and personal support more suitably. There were hopes that the work of EAZ and EiC partnerships, and the additional funding they provided, would tackle the problems of social exclusion and underachievement effectively.

7. This report assesses the effect of the programmes over a two-year period, concentrating on the main activities they have funded. It is based on the evidence of examination data and other performance indicators from all the schools to benefit from the first round of EiC and EAZ funding, and on the findings of inspectors who visited a representative sample of these schools, often more than once. It also draws on Ofsted school inspections, some of them specially enhanced to cover aspects of the programmes in detail, and on inspections of local education authorities (LEAs) involved in the EiC programme and inspections of individual EAZs.
8. The report has four aims:
  - to identify the extent to which these national initiatives have contributed to the improvement in the performance of schools serving disadvantaged areas
  - to evaluate how specific activities within these national initiatives have improved targeted pupils' achievement and the extent to which these specific activities have made a difference to those pupils who are disadvantaged or overlooked
  - to consider the development over time of these specific activities and their contribution to and effect on the school overall
  - to identify the features of successful management of these initiatives at school and LEA level.

## Main findings

- Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zone programmes are making an important difference to schools in disadvantaged areas. They are providing pupils with a broader range of opportunities and helping to raise their aspirations, confidence and self-esteem.
- The programmes are helping schools and teachers to meet the needs of disaffected and vulnerable pupils more effectively. The number of exclusions is being reduced and attendance is improving at a faster rate in the schools benefiting from this funding than in the nation as a whole.
- The effect of the programmes on achievement is more variable. Overall, it is strongest in primary schools, where the standards of English and mathematics among 7 and 11 year olds are rising at a faster rate than in all schools nationally. Both programmes are having a positive influence on the GCSE results of lower-attaining pupils in secondary schools, but a wide gap still remains between the attainment of pupils in these schools and the national average.
- The EiC programme is having a greater effect than the EAZ programme on standards in secondary schools, particularly at Key Stage 3 where pupils' achievements often remain very low and give cause for continuing concern.
- Trends in overall performance mask the rapid improvements made in some schools and the disappointing progress, or decline, of others.

## Excellence in Cities

- The EiC programme has strengthened co-operation between schools and local education authorities (LEAs). Its planning, funding and structures are simpler than that of EAZs and its emphasis on making provision directly for pupils is straightforward to interpret.
- Most LEAs have encouraged partnerships and supported the introduction of the programme appropriately, but the introduction of the EiC strategy is not a panacea for improving the work of LEAs.
- The main strands of the EiC programme match the needs of schools well. Secondary schools have generally used the funding productively and adapted their provision successfully to suit their pupils. The introduction of the EiC primary expansion is showing promise. Schools are committed to and positive about the programme as a whole.
- The most successful and popular of the EiC strands is learning mentors. The creation of these posts has been greatly welcomed and has enabled the majority of schools to enhance the quality of support they offer to disaffected, underachieving or vulnerable pupils.



- Secondary schools are developing their provision for gifted and talented pupils well to increase challenge and enrich the learning opportunities for higher-attaining pupils. In primary schools the programme is beginning to have an effect on the culture of some schools, but in others uncertainty, misunderstanding or reservations about the initiative are inhibiting the effect of the strand. The focus on talented pupils is less well-developed in most schools. The key issue in both phases is how to improve what is done for higher-attaining pupils in ordinary lessons.
- Most learning support units in secondary schools are successful in promoting inclusion, tackling disaffection, improving behaviour and reducing exclusions, but around a quarter of them do not do enough to help pupils learn more effectively. EiC partnerships have not been effective in supporting the implementation of learning support units in primary schools, although they have a positive effect on those schools and pupils where they exist.

## Education Action Zones

- Most of the EAZs in the first round of inspections had a limited initial effect on school improvement. This was due to over-ambitious programmes of activities that did not always focus specifically or radically enough on the challenges faced by schools in their areas. The management of zones has subsequently improved.
- EAZs have helped to develop co-operation and the sharing of good ideas between schools. There have been some very productive links with the business community. Their effect has been stronger in tackling disaffection and promoting inclusion than in raising standards of achievement, especially in secondary schools.

## School management

- Both funding programmes have the greatest effect in those schools where leadership and management are very good. The successful implementation of the funding programmes depends a great deal on the quality of school leadership. Attention to the implications for school management was lacking in both programmes at their inception, although more has emerged as the programmes have developed.

## Background to the programmes

9. Earlier reports identified a pressing need for education policy to tackle underachievement and promote inclusion in areas where disadvantage was at its keenest. The various strategies and initiatives which have been introduced have all played their part in changing the educational landscape. They work in tandem with each other, so that the effect of each is frequently related to the effect of the others. They were intended to encourage diversity, extend new opportunities to pupils in deprived areas, increase participation and thereby raise their expectations and achievement. Co-operation between schools was at the heart of the EAZ and the EiC initiatives.

### Education Action Zones

10. EAZs were set up following bids from groups of schools. They are partnerships usually formed between the schools, their LEA and other local organisations, especially from the business community, and other agencies, such as higher education institutions. They were set up to tackle problems of underachievement and social exclusion in disadvantaged areas by devising innovative methods and strategies that would involve disaffected pupils more fully in education and improve their academic performance.
11. Each zone is run by an 'action forum', which contains representatives from the schools and other partners. The forum, set up by statutory instrument, is a corporate body with exempt charitable status. Forum members are also trustees. The forum is required to draw up and implement an action plan agreed with the DfES. The zone director leads the forum and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the zone. Zones vary in size. The number of staff they employ also varies; some have appointed a team of consultants who work with the schools, others have a very small central staff and delegate much of the funding to the schools.
12. EAZs were encouraged to be bold and creative in their use of funding and in their partnerships with the business community and with other agencies, such as higher education institutions. The emphasis was on new activities and combinations of activities that had not been tried together before. The partnership with the business world was seen as a way of bringing the best of successful commercial practice into education, which would create new learning opportunities for teachers and pupils, and raise standards. Zones were encouraged to identify and meet the needs of the wider community that they served by providing lifelong learning opportunities, improving access to information technology and working with families. In some areas, there was opportunity for co-ordinated work with health and employment zones. The intention was that zones should disseminate good practice.

13. Twenty-five zones were established in the first round of inspections with a start date either in September 1998 or January 1999. A second round of 47 zones started in September 2000. The zones were intended to run for an initial period of three years, during which time their work should have boosted the performance of the schools they served and become an integral part of them, to be sustained after the life of the zone. In most cases the three-year period has been extended to five years, after which the DfES intends that each EAZ will either be transformed into an Excellence Cluster or become a zone within the EiC scheme, depending on its location. Transformation for the first-round zones starts in 2003.

### Excellence in Cities

14. Excellence in Cities is another of the government's central initiatives aimed at raising educational standards and promoting social inclusion in major cities and in areas that face similar problems to those faced by the inner cities. This programme is intended to work alongside other initiatives such as those funded through the Single Regeneration Budget, New Deal for Communities and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Strategy.
15. The EiC programme has been phased in operation since its launch in 1999 as a three-year initial programme. Twenty-five LEAs and 438 secondary schools were involved in the first phase of EiC. There have been two further phases involving 33 LEAs and over 600 secondary schools. Initially focusing on secondary education, the initiative has been extended into primary schools in some EiC areas, into small groups of schools affected by pockets of deprivation (through Excellence Clusters), and into post-16 provision (through Excellence Challenge). Annual funding for 2003–04 is over £350 million.
16. In contrast to EAZs, there is no bidding for EiC. The EiC partnerships were set up following DfES identification of LEA areas that were eligible to join the programme, with the funding based on a formula going directly to the designated LEAs once partnership plans are approved. Allocation to schools is then determined by partnerships of schools and the LEA.

17. The EiC initiative aims to tackle underachievement in all the secondary schools in each EiC area and has four core themes: high expectations of every individual, diversity, networking and extending opportunity. The funding for the programme is allocated to specific strands. These include City Learning Centres and EiC Action Zones; specialist and beacon school programmes also receive additional funding through EiC. The other strands are learning mentors, learning support units and provision for gifted and talented pupils. The gifted and talented and City Learning Centre strands have as part of their purposes to demonstrate to pupils, parents, potential parents and the wider community that there can be excellence in cities. Diversity and networking are key aims of working in partnership with others in the area, to which specialist and beacon schools, EiC Action Zones and City Learning Centres are expected to contribute.
18. The EiC programme is more prescriptive than EAZs for the schools involved, in that in the first phase all secondary schools in EiC partnerships were given resources to:
  - employ learning mentors for targeted pupils
  - make provision for gifted and talented pupils
  - provide a learning support unit on site or access to one in a neighbouring school.
19. Through these initiatives the EiC programme aimed to break the spiral of poor attendance, poor behaviour and high exclusion rates among the most disaffected and vulnerable pupils, by offering them the personal and academic support they needed to make the best of their opportunities in school. The gifted and talented strand was aimed at raising standards in general and extending the more able pupils who might have been marking time or getting bored in school. It also encouraged schools to look more closely at the range of gifts and talents among their pupils and help them to realise their potential.

## The survey

### Data analysis

20. This report includes an analysis of the examination performance, attendance and exclusion data for all the schools in the first phase of EiC and the first round of EAZs, comparing these with each other and with all maintained primary and secondary schools nationally. These schools are referred to in the report as the **EiC phase one** or **EAZ round one** schools.

### School visits

<sup>1</sup> It was not possible to follow through all the schools in the case study: some had amalgamated, closed, or become part of the 'fresh start' programme. Other visits were replaced by Ofsted inspections under section 10 or by a programme of visits to schools in special measures, with serious weaknesses, or in challenging circumstances.

21. A sample of schools was selected from the EiC phase one and EAZ round one programmes for visits between June 2000 and June 2002. This involved an initial visit by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in the first year in which the school received support from the respective initiatives, followed by another visit between one to two years later to check on the progress of the initiative and its effect in the school. Evidence was also drawn from specially enhanced Ofsted inspections of the schools, where these fell due in the period. These schools are referred to in the report as **the survey schools**.<sup>1</sup>
22. The schools in the survey were selected to give a representative sample of schools in EiC phase one and EAZ round one areas. As such, they had a number of features in common. They were all schools in economically deprived areas and were adversely affected by factors such as high pupil mobility, staff shortages and teacher recruitment difficulties. Nearly all had a well above average proportion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Around 20% of the schools took over a third of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). A substantial minority of the schools had falling rolls. Most both excluded pupils and received pupils excluded from other schools. Disaffection, low morale and poor attitudes to learning among some pupils contributed to high levels of absenteeism and apathy. With few exceptions, the schools faced combinations of social, economic and educational factors that made the maintenance of standards and improvement of attainment hard for teachers. Performance in national tests and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations were well below the national average in most of these schools.
23. Primary schools became part of the **EiC primary expansion programme** in some areas from 2001. The EiC primary section of the report is based on evidence from visits in 2001/02 by HMI to 30 primary schools. An analysis of inspection judgements from 84 EiC schools inspected between summer 2001 and summer 2002 provided supplementary evidence.
24. Performance data of the 1,104 EiC schools is compared with the performance of a control group of schools, which do not receive EiC funding. However, the size of the sample and the context of these schools closely match the performance of all schools nationally.

## Other evidence

25. The report also draws on the findings from 19 inspections of individual EAZs conducted by HMI over the period 2000/02, using a specific inspection framework.
26. In addition to evidence from school visits, the management of EiC was inspected in the context of 23 inspections of LEAs involved in the EiC programme between September 2000 and April 2002.

## Excellence in Cities: management

27. The aims of the EiC programme are to raise standards of attainment, improve the diversity of provision, provide greater equality of opportunity, and strengthen networking and educational work through partnerships.
28. EiC is intended to be largely managed by schools. In each area the initiative is controlled by a local partnership, which was originally composed of all secondary schools and the LEA. Increasingly, these partnerships now include representatives of primary schools and providers of post-16 education. The partnership makes decisions, subject to DfES approval, about strategic planning, how resources and programmes should be targeted, implementing and managing the strategy, and monitoring progress. Within each EiC partnership, resources are delegated to schools as far as is possible, and targeted on action, not on administration.
29. The LEA is a significant member of the partnership but is not automatically in a controlling position. It must ensure that there is consistency between EiC and its own plans such as the Education Development Plan and Behaviour Support Plan and key corporate strategic initiatives such as Urban Regeneration Plans. It should attempt to ensure that its service provision effectively complements the work of the EiC partnership, and vice versa.

### What has worked well

30. The objective that EiC should improve the partnership between LEAs and schools has been largely achieved. LEAs have generally responded well to the challenge of entering into a different kind of relationship with schools and have managed most aspects of the implementation of the EiC initiative effectively. The majority of LEAs have integrated EiC into their existing improvement strategies at least satisfactorily. EiC has had its greatest effect on LEAs' programmes to improve social inclusion.

31. Almost all LEAs have managed successfully their key strategic role of helping schools to take on and develop the EiC initiatives without dominating the partnership. Indeed, EiC has improved partnerships between schools and LEAs. In many cases LEAs gave crucial support to partnerships in their early days, by lending officer support or by seconding headteachers to get things moving. Just over a quarter of LEAs inspected were contributing to the implementation of EiC particularly well.

*The LEA has supported the development and implementation of the EiC Partnership well. Development was a co-operative venture, with a clear LEA lead and positive involvement from the outset. The LEA grasped the opportunity to use EiC as a vehicle for improving previously poor relationships between LEA and secondary schools, particularly in joint policy and curriculum development, and to address key objectives of raising standards and addressing core social inclusion issues. Schools accept that the LEA has a key role in managing the overall EiC programme and the resources that accompany EiC, including the EiC team that has been appointed through the Partnership, and in maintaining the infrastructure of support services that EiC initiatives need to interact with.*

Ofsted LEA inspection

32. In the great majority of cases, EiC has helped to improve LEA planning of school improvement by focusing on raising expectations and attainment. For the most part, EiC partnership plans were thorough, well structured, coherent and linked closely with existing initiatives in the LEA. Over a third of the plans were strong: they clearly and explicitly defined strategies and the resources needed for improvement.
33. Most LEAs and EiC partnerships managed effectively the complexities of combining EiC with other funded initiatives. Resources were securely integrated into the plans of three quarters of the LEAs, often with imaginative use of differing sources of funding to support school improvement and regeneration projects.

*The LEA uses a number of sources of funding to support the implementation of its improvement strategies. Funding is used effectively and has helped to secure strong and robust processes and practice across the Borough. EiC funds have been strategically supplemented from, for example, Neighbourhood Renewal funds, the Single Regeneration Budget, the Standards Fund and the New Opportunities Fund. All these pockets of money have been used well in the implementation of a cohesive school improvement programme targeted at raising standards and reducing disaffection.*

Ofsted LEA inspection



34. Links between EiC partnerships, key LEA services and external agencies were generally sound and often good, particularly in aligning EiC programmes with LEA support for improving social inclusion. In well over half the LEAs, successful collaboration was leading to particularly effective early intervention strategies to support vulnerable pupils. The work has been most effective where LEA services have contributed directly to the work of management teams, advised on the implementation of EiC, clarified the role of co-ordinators, provided training for EiC staff in schools, and developed good methods of monitoring progress.
35. In most cases arrangements for staffing EiC programmes in schools were working well. Staff in schools generally felt well supported by central EiC staff and strand co-ordinators. The use of LEA staff from school improvement and inclusion services had clearly strengthened the support for schools. Cluster arrangements for the training and support of staff in schools worked effectively where they existed, but opportunities to meet and share experiences in cross-phase groups needed further development.
- The staffing of EiC programmes has generally run smoothly and the LEA has supported schools fully through high-quality training and induction procedures. Support mechanisms for learning mentors, Heads of LSUs and co-ordinators of the gifted and talented programme are highly valued. The LEA's strategic leadership of the three EiC core strands is appreciated by schools as it has enabled them to focus their energies on implementing the initiatives with pupils. Schools report that they have received very good advice on employment legislation.*
- Ofsted LEA inspection
36. Overall, the three core programmes have been implemented well. The learning mentor strand has been the most effective.

## Weaknesses

37. Set against this largely positive picture, evidence from four LEAs shows that the EiC strategy is not a panacea for improving the work of the LEA. In three cases the LEA had not been sufficiently robust as a partner in bringing schools together at the outset, and, in two, entrenched weaknesses in the LEA's overall management hindered the effective implementation of EiC.
- Weaknesses in school improvement strategies have generally meant that the potential benefits of EiC have not been capitalised upon. The potential is there and the strategic partner is beginning to have an effect, but much depends on the overall management of the LEA. EiC cannot do it alone.*
- Ofsted LEA inspection

38. Co-operation between schools and with other members of the partnership has certainly improved, but there is much room for further development. Partnerships could facilitate improvements, for example in transitional arrangements for pupils between primary and secondary schools or by providing more support and training for learning mentors and staff in learning support units.
39. Too frequently, the monitoring and evaluation of the success of EiC were weak. Three quarters of the EiC partnerships had not formally considered, or agreed, their status and role in monitoring, evaluating and ensuring the quality and effectiveness of EiC in schools, or the role of the LEA in this process. Where monitoring occurred, it did not focus sufficiently on how the EiC programmes contributed to the key objectives of raising standards and meeting the targets set. Very few LEAs have begun to identify ways of measuring improvements in the confidence and attitudes of the most vulnerable pupils and those who might previously have opted out of education. Thus they are unable to set meaningful targets, evaluate progress towards them or redirect resources to best effect.
40. Few LEAs or partnerships are yet in a position to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the EiC programme. The following example is typical of the picture that inspectors found in many LEAs:

*The LEA's role in monitoring and intervening to ensure the effective implementation of EiC, both as part of the partnership and as part of its statutory responsibilities, has not been formally considered by the partnership Forum, or by the partnership schools. The LEA has begun to integrate EiC provision and targets into its school improvement strategies and the work of the link inspectors, and into its developing self-evaluation strategies with schools, but this needs strengthening and articulating more specifically. The role of the partnership as 'critical friend' in challenging schools in their use of EiC has not been formally agreed. Discussion still needs to take place to define any mandate for the partnership Forum, the EiC Director and team, or the LEA as a whole, in constructively challenging schools' use of EiC in order to maximise improvement.*

Ofsted LEA inspection

41. Although LEAs generally used EiC resources well, a great many officers, as well as headteachers, were critical of the problems of handling disparate sources of funding. In addition, the lack of clarity from central government over longer-term funding for EiC was constraining strategic planning. In the best examples LEAs had worked to ensure that the benefits of the EiC programme in terms of teaching, learning and inclusion strategies were embedded into schools' practices, but few had begun to seriously address the question of how to sustain the initiative. Recent DfES moves to simplify the funding arrangements have been appreciated.

## Education Action Zones: management

42. EAZs were set up as free-standing bodies to tackle problems of underachievement and social exclusion in disadvantaged areas.
43. Since 2000 Ofsted has inspected and published detailed reports on 19 EAZs, most of them in round one. In addition, as part of the longitudinal study, Ofsted visited a selection of primary and secondary schools which were also in round one EAZs. This section of the report deals with the work of EAZs in general, and the effect of some of the zones' initiatives in the schools in the survey.

### Planning

44. Most of the first-round zones got off to a slow or faltering start and showed limited progress initially, generally because they had plans that were too ambitious, too diffuse, or insufficiently focused on the difficulties faced by schools in their area. There was a plethora of programmes, but often too many for the zone to run successfully or monitor effectively. Managers were unclear about what these programmes were intended to achieve. Targets were sometimes unrealistic, and the plans were often not specific about how they could be reached. Second-round zones had generally learned from this experience, although, here too, original plans were sometimes vague and activities too numerous.
45. The leadership and management of most zones have subsequently improved, and they are now making progress. Zones have reduced the range of activities they sponsor and improved the quality of planning. The most successful zones undertake a systematic and rigorous analysis of the performance data in their schools, and ensure thereby that the activities they sponsor are aimed at improving areas of weakness and match closely the needs of the schools in the community. Planning is usually clear and detailed, and targets are relevant and attainable.

### Monitoring and evaluation

46. Systems for monitoring and evaluation are developing, but require further improvement in most cases, as they are inconsistent at school level, and the criteria by which they are to be judged are often vague. Too often, teachers are expected to monitor and evaluate the initiatives without sufficient guidance or training, so that their views are too subjective, and this leads to inconsistency.

## Partnerships

47. A major success of EAZs has been their ability to bring schools and teachers together. Zones have actively encouraged their schools to work closely together, and most, particularly among the primary schools, do so to good effect. Teachers now know their colleagues in partner schools, and are prepared to discuss the kinds of difficulties and challenges that face them all, and share ideas for solving them. Partnerships with the LEA, higher education, business and the local community are generally more productive than previously found. Some productive partnerships with business encompass: training for headteachers; information and communication technology (ICT) support, training and equipment; work placements for pupils; and science in industry courses. In some areas efforts to attract cash sponsorship have had limited success.

## Dissemination

48. Dissemination of good practice is a strong feature of the work of the most successful zones. Where this occurs, all schools in the area are benefiting from the good ideas developed in the zone. These are principally related to improvements in teaching methodology or school management. Typically, these zones provide an extensive range of opportunities such as high-quality training sessions, conferences and more informal discussions where good practice can be shared. Consultants or members of the zone staff also spread effective practice as they visit the schools. However, although dissemination is improving, not all zones are adept at this and some need to do much more to ensure that good ideas are shared effectively, both among the partner schools and further afield.

## Effect of initiatives

49. Most of the zones now make good use of the resources available to them. This was not always true in the early years, when too often funding was spent on initiatives which did not address the core priorities of the zone sufficiently well. The most successful zones have focused resources on improving the quality of teaching and school management, and employing additional staff to support or train teachers. The use of funds for ICT equipment has been mixed. Where zones invested in useful equipment and staff training, the quality of teaching and learning improved, but this applied in only half the zones inspected.

50. The zones sponsor some effective initiatives for **promoting inclusion**. Musical and artistic projects and outdoor activities increase pupils' cultural awareness, boost confidence and extend creative opportunities. Breakfast clubs are popular and successful at getting the day off to a definite start, particularly with younger pupils. Homework clubs provide older ones with an appropriate study environment and access to support. Initiatives aimed at tackling disaffection include mentoring and counselling schemes, in-school support centres, and adaptations to the Key Stage 4 curriculum for secondary pupils to provide a more practical range of activities, often in colleges or through work-related programmes with local business. There is evidence that such initiatives motivate individuals and are helping to reduce the number of permanent exclusions, but their effect on poor attendance is not significant overall.
51. Initiatives that focus on **raising standards** are having more effect in primary than in secondary schools. Attainment in English and mathematics at Key Stage 1 was rising in six of the seven zones inspected by Ofsted in 2001/02 and in most of them standards were approaching the national average. This was due to effective support from zones for the early years, and to improvements in the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Effective literacy support for schools in Grimsby, for example, produced a particularly rapid rise in attainment at Key Stage 1. At Key Stage 2 standards were more variable. They were often static and were rising in only two of the zones inspected. Both of these zones had taken as priorities improvements to the quality of teaching and management in schools.
52. In secondary schools the standards achieved by pupils in Key Stage 3 often give cause for serious concern. They were rising overall in only one of the zones inspected last year. In the rest they remained poor, being either stubbornly well below the national average, or, in one case, declining. EAZs have not given sufficient priority to the raising of standards at Key Stage 3 and the initiatives that have been introduced are not having sufficient effect.
53. At Key Stage 4 there has been a significant rise in both the GCSE average point score and the proportion of pupils gaining one or more A\*–G grades in all but one of the zones. This rise can be attributed in part to the success of inclusion projects among older pupils. However, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\*–C grades has declined in two cases, and remained static in all but one of the rest of the zones.

54. Low levels of **attendance** among secondary pupils remain a further cause for concern. In the five first-round zones inspected in 2001/02 the average attendance in secondary schools was well under 90%. It was declining or static in over half the zones inspected. In some cases there has been insufficient action by zones to tackle poor attendance, and in others initiatives have proved ineffective. Both of the second-round zones inspected have been successful in improving attendance among secondary pupils, and this has had an influence on raising standards in their schools at Key Stages 3 and 4.
55. Overall, despite some innovative activities, strong working relationships and improved management, EAZ programmes have had only partial and mixed success. Pupils' attainment has risen more successfully in primary than in secondary schools, although this can not be attributed solely to the effect of the EAZ initiative. There are other school improvement strategies, not least the national strategies for literacy and numeracy, that are playing a significant role in raising standards in primary schools. EAZ programmes to promote inclusion and tackle disaffection have generally been more successful in secondary schools than those that have focused on raising attainment.
56. The most successful zones are those which have made effective use of data analysis to implement programmes that focus on the priorities of improving the quality of teaching and school management. Those that have improved attendance among secondary pupils have also succeeded in raising attainment.

## Management in schools

57. A fundamental point emerging from the evaluation of the EiC and EAZ programmes in schools is the link between high-quality school management and the success of the programmes.
58. In the schools making best use of the programmes, headteachers:
  - created a unified approach built on high expectations
  - were clear about what needed to be done to improve the school and how programmes could be shaped to bolster the school's resources
  - were creative in their use of the programmes, manipulating them imaginatively to meet the needs of the school
  - were confident and determined in pursuing the course of action judged appropriate, even if it was different from conventional wisdom, and were not being blown off course
  - encouraged staff to take an active and dynamic management approach to ensure momentum and cohesiveness in what the school was doing
  - particularly in the case in EAZ programmes, focused on increasing the contribution of parents to raising attainment.

59. These characteristics of effective management are demonstrated in the following case studies. The schools demonstrate how effective management ensures that additional provision is connected with the main engines of improvement in the school and complements and enriches what is happening already.

### Hallsville Primary School

HMI visited Hallsville in October 2001 and April 2002. It is a large primary school with over 470 pupils on roll, located in the East End of London in an area with high unemployment and social deprivation. Over 70% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. In addition, 41% of pupils speak English as an additional language, 13% of pupils are refugees and the percentage of pupils with SEN is above the national average.

In 1997 the school was judged to require special measures following an inspection. After the appointment of the current headteacher in 1998, the school made rapid improvement. Key to that improvement were the headteacher's high expectations of pupils and staff; a good knowledge of the school's needs; the ability to shape initiatives so that they meet these needs and are integrated into the school's planning and provision; and the determination to pursue the school's aims in all areas of the school.

Results in Key Stage 2 tests went up sharply. For example, in English the proportion gaining level 4 in English rose from 29% in 1998 to 73% in 2002 and from 32% to 71% in mathematics. The school also significantly improved the percentage of pupils gaining level 5. In 2002, 41% gained level 5 in English, 34% in mathematics (including 2% level 6) and 44% in science. These are well above the national average.

The principles that underpin EiC are fully in tune with the school's ethos. They have been translated into practice, through the learning mentors and the work on provision for the gifted and talented which is well integrated into the school's existing systems. For example, targets which are reviewed each half-term for individual pupils have been increased for the gifted Year 5 and 6 pupils to reflect the additional input from the co-ordinator.

There is a strong concentration on shaping initiatives to meet pupils' needs. As the teacher responsible for gifted and talented pupils put it:

*'A couple of years ago we were just concerned with getting as many children as possible to level 4. Now the atmosphere has changed. We know we also have to address the needs of the more able children and focus on areas such as higher-order reading skills. Teachers' expectations are higher. The head has made us aware that we have a responsibility for stretching and challenging pupils. Now when he monitors the teaching and planning, if the differentiation is not in place, he wants to know why.'*



60. The following is a case study which indicates how a well-run secondary school with capable and committed staff and strand co-ordinators has made use of the EiC programme.

### Aston Manor

Aston Manor is an 11–16 comprehensive school in Birmingham with high pupil mobility. At the time of HMI's visit there were 637 pupils on roll. 75% of pupils were entitled to free school meals, and 30% were on the SEN register. The school serves an inner-city area of high deprivation and high unemployment. Standards of attainment on entry are well below average.

The school has been part of the EiC programme for two years and has a learning support unit, employs learning mentors and provides for gifted and talented pupils. The school improvement plan is practical: it is based on a thorough analysis of performance, identifies the needs arising from this, and focuses squarely on the implications for teaching and learning. The EiC initiatives have been well integrated into the wider framework of mainstream provision, and the school has the structure to support and extend them, adapting them as necessary to meet the needs of the pupils it takes. Good key appointments have been made and their responsibilities are clearly defined. Targets are realistic and demanding. They are regularly reviewed. The system for monitoring the success of provision is clear.

Links between the initiatives are also developing well – for example the learning mentors increasingly support gifted and talented pupils, not just those with special needs. The gifted and talented initiative has made very good progress. It has continued to incorporate good-quality enrichment and extension work, and has an increasingly powerful influence on mainstream provision, the quality of teaching and the planning of lessons for pupils of all abilities. The focus on developing and improving mainstream provision is serving to show many more pupils that they have abilities and potential – not something that has previously been part of their self-perception.

The learning mentors are also making a significant and important impact. The range of pupils' needs is wide and in their various ways mentors are ensuring: better engagement; higher self-confidence; improved standards across the A\*–G range; improved relations between parents and children. The school uses the range of mentors' experience well to help implement its commitment to all pupils, whatever the level of their needs.

The initiatives represent very good value for money. Coupled with other improvement strategies, they have enabled the school to achieve a steep rise in Key Stage 3 test results in 2002, an upward trend in GCSE grades, a reduction in exclusions and an improvement in attendance.

The school is adept at seizing opportunities to build and enrich the provision through wider participation in the community and further afield. In this, the work of the cluster network and the lead co-ordinator has been very helpful.

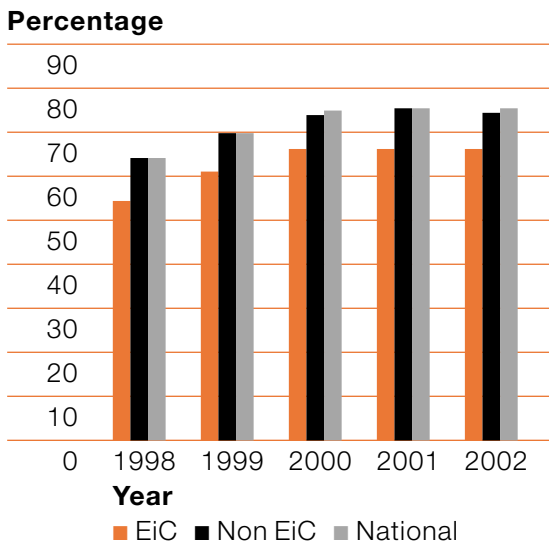
61. In early inspections of EAZs, poor school management was an obstacle to the successful implementation of initiatives in some schools; return visits found little progress had been made in these schools. Because zones failed to tackle sufficiently well weaknesses in leadership and management, in these schools the initiatives provided poor value for money.
62. What signals the difference between schools is the extent to which the school's management at all levels is capable of using the additional funds and integrating the initiatives into the school's own development to meet the specific needs of the pupils. Well-led, well-managed schools with a culture of self-evaluation and good strategies for self-improvement are using and adapting to good effect the initiatives, irrespective of whether they are funded by EiC or EAZ. In such schools the progress of pupils on all fronts is rapid. Inclusion strategies are firmly embedded in the pastoral structure, so that, for example, all staff tackle poor behaviour in the same way; and gifted and talented programmes improve the quality of teaching and planning in all lessons, not just those directed at these pupils. The school has adopted the good practice encouraged by the initiatives and can sustain and develop it throughout all its activities.
63. In short, whatever the source of funding and the improvement strategy, it works best in a school which is well run, both by senior managers and by those responsible for the co-ordination of specific programmes, who influence directly the work of other staff. All staff share a common philosophy, commitment and approach to improvement, and bear a joint responsibility for making it happen. The programmes have far less effect, and sometimes very little at all, in schools where these features are not present.

# Excellence in Cities programmes in primary schools

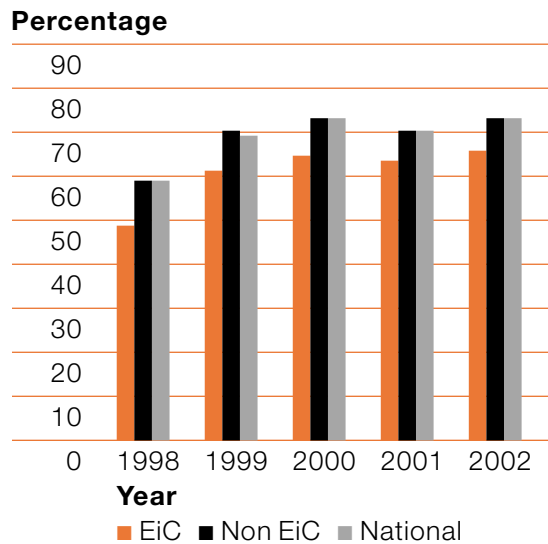
## Attainment

64. The EiC expansion to primary schools has been running only since September 2001 and it is too early to see an effect on attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. The schools' performance has been on an upward trend. Overall, attainment has risen slightly above the national trend and the trend for similar schools at Key Stage 2 during the period 1998 to 2002. Figures 1 and 2 show the results of national tests in English and mathematics. They show a rise of one percentage point above the average gain in English and three percentage points in mathematics.

**Figure 1.** Key Stage 2 English tests: level 4 and above



**Figure 2.** Key Stage 2 mathematics tests: level 4 and above



## Learning mentors

### Key findings

- The creation of learning mentor posts has marked a significant change in the way primary schools are staffed.
- In most schools, learning mentors are making a valuable contribution to attainment and inclusion.
- In schools using learning mentors well, there is good understanding of barriers to achievement and confidence and creativity in shaping the learning mentor role to help pupils overcome them. The role has been carefully integrated with other school systems. In schools where the effect of learning mentors has been negligible, poor management is often the reason.
- Learning mentors frequently deal effectively with behaviour issues previously handled by the headteacher or class teachers, leaving more time for headteachers to lead and manage and teachers to teach.
- Learning mentors need to be targeted more effectively at improving rates of attendance and reducing the number of pupils excluded from primary schools.

### Principles

65. The learning mentor strand offers additional resources to provide vulnerable pupils with adult help to prevent them from disengaging from learning and school life. The focus of a learning mentor's attention in a primary school is broadly similar to that in a secondary school, but with greater emphasis on working with families or carers and on transition.
66. Most of the schools visited had from one to three learning mentors, with the exception of one large school, which employed 12, most from its own resources. Mentors have been recruited from a variety of backgrounds to support pupils at risk of disaffection, with social, emotional, behavioural and attendance problems. A few of the mentors in the schools visited were qualified teachers.
67. Some schools made a shaky start and were unsure about what learning mentors would do. Gradually, learning mentors have been giving increasing attention to pupils' academic progress as well as supporting pupils' personal and social development. Support tends to be effective where it is balanced in this way.
68. Schools using learning mentors successfully have a good understanding of barriers to achievement and inclusion and they show confidence and creativity in shaping the learning mentor role. Some schools have had difficulty defining accurately what factors were impeding pupils' learning before providing them with extra support.

69. The majority of learning mentors carry out a wide range of tasks to support pupils. They include: monitoring attendance and punctuality; providing in-class support for targeted pupils; leading sessions to work on self-esteem; discussing progress with individual pupils; liaising with the SEN co-ordinator and class teachers, parents and support agencies; supporting pupils new to the school; running lunchtime and after-school clubs; and supporting residential trips.
70. Most learning mentors know what is expected of them and are successful in carrying out their tasks, as the following case studies demonstrate.

#### The use of learning mentors: case study 1

At Yew Tree Primary School, Birmingham, learning mentors are having a strong effect. They are helping to improve pupils' attendance so there are fewer missed lessons and as a result pupils are making better progress. Mentors are also developing strong relationships with parents. Learning is improving as a result of work to develop pupils' self-esteem and improve their attitudes to school. Learning mentors successfully tackle issues related to behaviour by building positive relationships with pupils. Support in lessons enables teachers to teach more effectively. Mentors encourage and motivate pupils so that they improve their concentration and the way they work. Pupils' attainment is improving as indicated in the test results.

Assessment procedures and planning systems are good. An action plan is drawn up for each child with clear targets relating to each pupil's specific needs. Progress is regularly monitored and evaluated. The work of learning mentors is regularly reviewed by the senior management team.

Links with other primary schools are improving as a result of the networking set up by the EiC co-ordinator. The school has also made good use of community workers to support learning.

### The use of learning mentors: case study 2

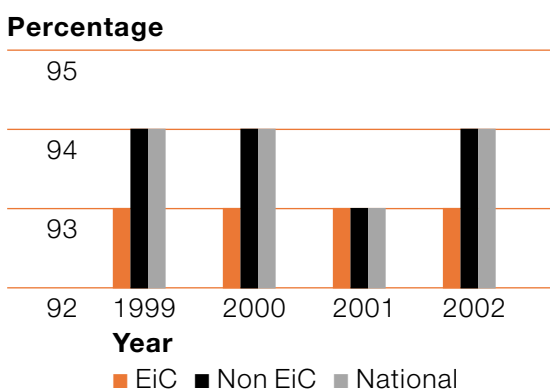
Immediately after his father died 'Robert' appeared to be coping well, but some months later his behaviour deteriorated and he became increasingly disruptive. His class teacher complained that he was not paying attention and frequently distracted others. Occasionally he walked out of lessons or was violent towards other children. In one incident he threw a chair across the classroom.

The headteacher, class teacher and the home/school liaison officer decided to arrange bereavement counselling from outside the school and to provide support in the school from the learning mentor. During the summer term the mentor provided Robert with one-to-one support with his reading and took a general interest in his progress. The mentor listened to his reading and praised the improvements in attainment, his attitude to learning and his behaviour around the school. As a result of the successful relationship they had established, the learning mentor encouraged Robert to attend the literacy summer school, which he did, arriving punctually each morning.

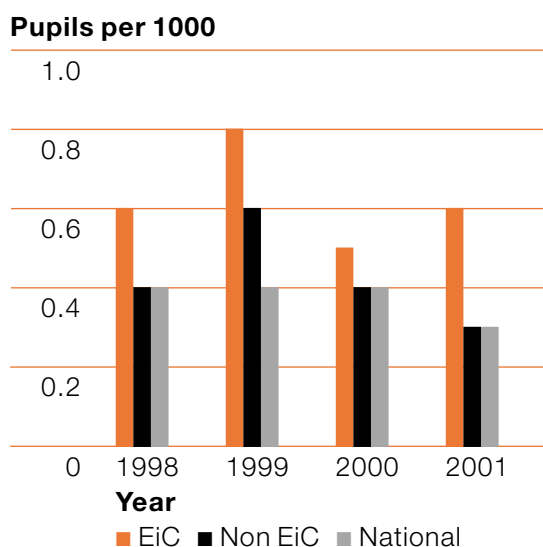
At the beginning of the autumn term, the school reviewed the mentoring arrangements and decided that although Robert had made progress there was more to be done. Currently, the learning mentor works with Robert in the classroom to ensure he remains attentive. Robert also attends a lunchtime club as a good role model for pupils who find the lack of structure or the length of the break too long. The learning mentor provides regular feedback by telephone to Robert's mother, who is very proud of his progress. Robert is also pleased with his progress and is enjoying his success. His class teacher reports that Robert's behaviour has improved significantly. He is making good progress in his learning.

71. Learning mentors are not yet generally having a significant effect overall on **attendance** and **exclusions**. The attendance rate in EiC primary schools is a percentage point below the national average and that difference has remained constant over the period from 1999 to 2002. Exclusions are much higher than the national average. Despite a rise in 1999, the difference between EiC schools and all schools has changed very little. Between 1998 and 2001, the national exclusion rate fell from 0.4% to 0.3%, while for EiC schools the rate remained constant at 0.6%. Although some good work in improving attendance and inclusion was seen in the visits, strategies to improve attendance and reduce exclusions generally needed to be sharper.

**Figure 3. Primary attendance**



**Figure 4. Primary exclusion**



**Organisation**

72. Partnerships have been effective in providing schools with documentation to implement systems, in-service training and a forum for sharing good practice.
73. Systems for identifying pupils, establishing targets and monitoring and evaluating pupils are often very similar to those used by the SEN co-ordinator, ensuring a coherent approach. Schools where the initiative is successful have carefully integrated the learning mentors' work with the other support systems in the school.
74. By the end of the school year 2001/02 three quarters of the schools visited had not only identified the barriers preventing some of their pupils from learning but had designed suitable action plans with specific targets to break down the barriers and improve pupils' access to education. Record-keeping, along with target-setting and the regular reviewing of pupils' progress, was at least satisfactory.

75. All the learning mentors had attended initial training courses, organised within Excellence in Cities partnerships and covering issues relating to the job. This training included behaviour management, mentoring and home visits. However, only a few schools have since produced clear plans for the professional development of learning mentors. The visits indicated that some learning mentors required additional training if they are to support pupils effectively. For example, in some cases, when learning mentors were assigned to supporting pupils in the literacy hour or daily mathematics lessons, they did not possess the knowledge and skills to support pupils' learning. Networks are beginning to be developed by partnerships but these are embryonic. In some LEAs constraints on pay levels imposed by the partnership are preventing schools from attracting learning mentors with the necessary skills.
76. An example of the progress made by schools in organising their use of learning mentors is given in this case study.

### The use of learning mentors: case study 3

When HMI first visited in December 2001, the senior management team was not clear about the objectives of the learning mentor initiative and, in many respects, they had left responsibility for managing the initiative to the learning mentors. Consequently, the learning mentors were operating very much on the margins of the school.

When the school was revisited a year later, the new headteacher had made substantial changes to the management of the programme. The roles of the learning mentors were clearly defined and communicated to staff, pupils and parents. The job was given a high profile and status in the school, with, for example, one learning mentor attending weekly management meetings. Consequently, the learning mentors are an increasingly integral part of the school.

### Links with parents and others

77. In many schools learning mentors have been appointed from the community that the school serves. This often has a positive effect on perceptions of the school in the community, as well as on the aspirations of those employed. In most schools learning mentors have established sound links with parents or carers of mentored pupils. There is wide variation between schools in both the extent and the success of the links with parents, but in many instances the increased contact with parents is helping to change parents' perceptions and relationships with the school.

*The school benefits from the learning mentor bridging the gaps between the school and the community. He makes the first point of contact and his approach has increased parental support.*

Deputy headteacher



78. In those schools with learning support units there were usually productive links between unit staff and learning mentors. Under such circumstances provision for targeted pupils was largely well co-ordinated.
79. Links with receiving secondary schools are slowly improving but are generally weak. There were only a few examples of learning mentors adequately preparing pupils for transfer to secondary school and setting up effective links with mentors in the secondary sector.
80. Liaison with other agencies also tends to be weak. While there has been some progress in this respect and there have been a few examples of good and very good co-ordination, in many cases liaison is not sufficiently deliberate or sustained.

### Recommendations

81. To improve the use of learning mentors, partnerships and schools need to:
  - step up the management of learning mentors in the minority of schools where their work lacks clear purpose and structure and where links with the school's main improvement work are weak
  - provide suitable training for learning mentors, for example in behaviour management and in how best to support learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy
  - consider devolving funding for learning mentors to schools so that salary levels can be set by schools in accordance with the precise nature of the job carried out and to enable them to attract the calibre of staff they need
  - evaluate the work of learning mentors in terms of its effect on attendance, attitudes, attainment and exclusion of the mentored pupils
  - focus on improving transition arrangements and supporting pupils at the point of transfer
  - strengthen liaison with other agencies, including social services and LEA support teams, for the greater benefit of pupils at risk.

## Provision for gifted and talented pupils

### Key findings

- The gifted and talented strand is beginning to have an effect on the culture of some schools. In other schools, uncertainty, misunderstanding or reservations about the approach implied are inhibiting effect.
- There is a need for some schools to raise their expectations of pupils and broaden the repertoire of teachers to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to extend and challenge pupils appropriately.
- Partnerships do not monitor effectively the schools' use of resources for the gifted and talented support programme.

82. The gifted and talented strand was not introduced in all primary schools in the EiC programme. Partnerships were invited to decide the number of schools involved and the level of funding per school. However, the DfES expected that schools which implemented the strand should be a subset of those with learning mentors.
83. Schools were required to identify a gifted and talented cohort comprising 5–10% of pupils in Years 5 and 6, but were free to extend their provision to other years if this was part of the partnership plan. In the majority of schools visited, the process of identification encompassed all year groups, although resources were focused on Years 5 and 6.
84. Pupils that are identified as ‘gifted’ should be achieving, or have the potential to achieve, significantly above the average of their year group in National Curriculum subjects other than art, music or physical education (PE). ‘Talented’ pupils possess significant ability in the arts or sports. The DfES recognises that some gifted and talented pupils will be all-rounders. At least two thirds of the gifted and talented pupils in each year group were to be identified on the basis of their academic ability (that is, gifted or all-rounders).

#### Principles

85. A positive approach to achievement, based on high expectations for all and a recognition that high ability does not guarantee high performance, was the key ingredient in successful implementation. In schools with this kind of approach higher-attaining pupils were keen to do well and were free from negative peer pressure. Teachers frequently emphasised the need for pupils to do their best at all times and make the most of their capabilities, establishing a culture of ambition and achievement.
86. Implementation was less successful in schools in which teachers did not appreciate how the strand could improve the achievements of individual pupils and the school as a whole. Expectations were not high enough in a third of the schools visited. Some teachers were unsure about what they perceived to be an elitist initiative and, in some cases, there was anxiety about implementing it.

#### Identification

87. Most schools concentrated on identifying high-attaining pupils in English and mathematics. Qualitative and quantitative data were used satisfactorily in the identification process. However, schools tended to select pupils who were already achieving highly and gave insufficient emphasis to identifying those with potential for high achievement. In a few schools, minority ethnic pupils and pupils who speak English as an additional language are under-represented on the gifted and talented register.
88. Identification and provision for pupils gifted in subjects other than English and mathematics were limited. The majority of schools focused on providing enrichment activities for pupils, for example by extending the range of educational visits and experiences. Many of these visits clearly made a valuable contribution to pupils’ understanding and motivation.

89. Schools were far less adept at identifying talented pupils. Few talented pupils in primary schools were taught by specialist teachers of sports or creative subjects. Where schools employed such specialist teachers, sessions were often disconnected from the main work of the school, with the result that talents were not systematically developed.

#### Organisation

90. The funding for the strand has been relatively limited. In the schools visited, funding varied widely, from £3,000 to £26,000 per year, depending on how the partnership decided to allocate its resources. In some cases the partnership spread the money too thinly and, as a result, there was too little funding to make an effect in individual schools. Conversely, in other partnerships, tensions have been created where funding has been concentrated on a few schools without delivering wider benefits to the others.
91. All schools have identified a teacher to co-ordinate the work of gifted and talented pupils. Three quarters of these designated teachers attended a five-day national training course. On the whole, where the responsible teacher had undertaken this training, provision was much more structured and sure-footed. Despite the recommendation in the DfES guidance, some teachers had been appointed to lead the strand in addition to being the SEN co-ordinator; the success of the initiative was mixed in these schools.
92. Where partnerships had provided further training and established a solid network for sharing good practice, the effect on the work of the schools was good. Most partnerships have been effective in providing schools with the necessary documents – for example, a draft policy – to implement the initiative. Most schools have a policy, a register of gifted and talented pupils and at least embryonic monitoring procedures in place.

#### Effect on teaching and learning

93. The initiative has flourished in those schools that have built on a foundation of good teaching. High-quality teaching provides a basis upon which provision for the gifted and talented can be shaped and refined to meet pupils' needs. During lessons that were well-paced and demanding, pupils enjoyed their work, were focused and made good progress. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, or the teacher did not have the necessary knowledge to sufficiently challenge higher-attaining pupils, the objective of the initiative was not being met.
94. The following cameo exemplifies the importance of, among other things: embedding the gifted and talented strand into the school's overall approach to teaching and learning; assessing pupils' strengths and weaknesses; setting challenging targets as part of a consistent system of monitoring pupils' attainment; and shaping responses to the pace of pupils' learning.

### Provision for gifted and talented pupils: case study

Although the school had made dramatic improvements in national tests during the last three years, the sharp improvement in English at Key Stage 2 had recently stalled. From 1999 to 2000 the increase in the percentage of pupils attaining level 5 had been 12 percentage points (from 12% to 24%); in the following year it was one percentage point (to 25%). Analysis by the school revealed that pupils' writing was the weak area and so teachers decided to target those who attained levels 3A, 4C and 4B in the end of Year 5 optional tests. The co-ordinator for gifted and talented pupils provided two extra lessons each week to improve specific aspects of these pupils' writing so that they consistently attained level 5.

In a lesson observed, the co-ordinator began by asking the five girls and two boys about the key features of story writing. This included an effective discussion of structure, plot and character. Prior to modelling the outline of a story opening, the teacher established clear objectives. The objectives were skilfully incorporated in the opening, with the co-ordinator talking aloud about what he was doing. This strategy was highly successful in developing pupils' understanding. In addition, the co-ordinator drew attention to the grammatical features of his own writing so that pupils knew they were to: (a) extend sentences using interesting vocabulary and a variety of connectives; (b) use parenthesis imaginatively and correctly; and (c) use paragraphs appropriately. The co-ordinator re-read sections of his own text as the lesson progressed, making very good use of intonation and expression to sustain the pupils' interest in the development of the plot and the structure of the story.

The teacher made it clear that pupils should use what they had learned in the shared writing in the earlier part of the lesson to improve their own writing, such as selecting effective vocabulary and using paragraphs to mark shifts in the plot. The co-ordinator made very good use of his subject knowledge when answering pupils' queries. He showed a genuine interest in pupils' ideas and work and gave very good one-to-one feedback, highlighting areas and strategies for improvement.

Pupils listened attentively throughout and were keen to do well. They asked questions that demonstrated they were keen to understand the points discussed. The teacher had a very good relationship with the pupils. When one boy was admonished because he was not concentrating, it was evident that the teacher knew him well and knew about his work and behaviour in other lessons.

95. All the pupils in the group seen achieved level 5 in the Key Stage 2 tests and, overall, the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 in the school was well above the national average: for example, 41% of pupils gained level 5 in English. The extract below from one of the pupils' stories demonstrates features of writing at level 5, such as good awareness of the reader, an assured tone to the writing, lively choices of vocabulary and accurate punctuation.

*'I know you know the story of Little Red Riding Hood (well, at least you think you do) so I am about to tell you something that has been eating away at me for decade upon decade! I want to tell you before I die, pass away, kick the bucket, end my life. It is something that is so unbelievably different to what generations of your family have heard and been told that, trust me, you won't believe it. But I promise, I don't lie!!! So let me tell you the true story of: LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD!!'*

96. Important in improving pupils' attainment are the school's very good procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' progress. The targeting of gifted and talented pupils is structured and built into the existing systems in the school. At the beginning of each year the school conducts a rigorous self-evaluation process which includes a thorough analysis of data. This process underpins the school development plan and informs the setting of targets. Challenging targets are set for all pupils in the core subject with an additional degree of challenge for those pupils receiving additional support through the gifted and talented programme. Each half-term teachers assess pupils' attainment to determine whether they are on track to meet the targets set at the beginning of the year. This precise focusing of provision is contributing much to raising standards.
97. In almost all schools visited, the initiative has increased the number of extension and enrichment activities for pupils who would not otherwise have access to these opportunities. This is having a positive effect on achievement and has widened the interests of many.
98. However, the critical issue for most schools is how to affect ordinary classroom practice. Schools needed to embed strategies for developing gifted and talented pupils more firmly in the mainstream curriculum. Some connections were being made with other improvement work, such as that inspired by the national literacy and numeracy strategies. But, in tackling this issue, few schools were drawing well enough on guidance and examples from elsewhere, such as those in the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) guidance for working with gifted and talented pupils in English and mathematics.<sup>2</sup> There was little evidence of the use of this guidance to challenge and plan for gifted and talented pupils, and most co-ordinators were unaware of its existence.

*In one school, funding had been used to provide courses for teachers on effective questioning techniques and incorporating provision for gifted and talented pupils in termly and weekly planning. To ensure the training was having a positive effect, the co-ordinator for gifted and talented pupils reviewed planning each half-term so that agreed strategies were incorporated, and the headteacher targeted this aspect of teaching when monitoring classroom practice.*

<sup>2</sup> Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2001, *Working with gifted and talented children, key stages 1 and 2 English and mathematics*.

99. Until deliberate and systematic steps of this kind are taken, the effect of the initiative, which was still at an early stage at the time of the visits, is likely to be limited. That greater effect is needed is shown by the data on level 5 performance in the core subjects at Key Stage 2. Analysis shows that in all three core subjects the difference between EiC schools and all schools nationally has widened since 1998. In 1998, 12% of pupils in EiC schools gained level 5 in English compared with a national average of 17%, a difference of five percentage points. By 2002, 19% of EiC schools gained level 5 compared with 29% nationally.

#### Links with parents and others

100. Primary schools have communicated appropriately with parents about the initiative, although a few have been nervous about drawing attention to the identification of pupils and the targeting of support for them. Schools have informed parents that pupils have high ability in an academic area or a particular talent. In the most successful schools parents are told about targets and strategies for meeting them. Some parents have supported additional activities for gifted and talented pupils, for example attending tennis coaching sessions. In one school, where the identification of gifted pupils was emphasised too strongly, the pupils reported that they felt pressurised.
101. Strategies for improving the transfer of gifted and talented pupils from primary to secondary school are not well developed. The DfES guidance recommends building on the primary experience, but there is little evidence of joint planning by Key Stage 2 and 3 teachers.

#### Recommendations

102. In order to improve provision for gifted and talented pupils EiC partnerships should:
- extend training to develop understanding of the initiative to more headteachers and teachers
  - focus on ways of embedding strategies to develop gifted and talented pupils more firmly in the mainstream curriculum
  - provide more guidance on good practice, including methods of identifying gifted and talented pupils who are underachieving
  - make better use of data to check the participation and achievement of different ethnic groups
  - provide a better balance of support and challenge to all partnership schools, and tackle those schools that are not meeting the requirements of the strand
  - reconsider the rationale for the allocation of funding for the gifted and talented strand within all partnerships, which is often not secure and equitable.

## Learning support units

### Key findings

- The introduction of the programme relied too heavily on the established secondary model. This resulted in delay as primary schools attempted to interpret the guidance and in considerable variation in practice.
- The planning and support for establishing learning support units were unsatisfactory in most EIC partnerships. There was much delay and confusion, particularly with regard to capital funding and building works.
- The integration of learning support units with other support for vulnerable pupils has been inadequate.
- Despite these difficulties, progress has been made in the management and operation of all learning support units between visits and the effect in the majority of schools has been largely positive. The majority of the pupils who have been in a unit have gained from their placement; some were wrongly placed in the units.

### Principles

103. Learning support units in primary schools were initially established on a similar model to those in secondary schools. They are intended to provide intensive support for pupils whose behaviour and attitudes to learning are causing concern. Placement in units is limited to two terms, and the intention is to provide pupils with skills to enable them to return successfully to full-time mainstream education at the end of that period. Each unit serves an identified small group of partner schools, and is based in one of these schools.
104. The DfES has provided general guidelines for operation; within these, the schools and partnerships are responsible for establishing the most effective approach to suit their particular context. The DfES guidance, which developed from a secondary model, has required considerable adaptation by individual units to meet specific needs of primary schools.

### Organisation

105. The part played by partnerships in assisting units to establish appropriate systems and structures has been unsatisfactory, with more than three quarters of units experiencing significant problems. A number of partnerships did not initially have a designated person with sufficient time available to co-ordinate developments. Half the schools have experienced difficulties and postponements with building or adaptation work, so many units started late and others began work in a cramped or otherwise unsuitable environment.

106. Some decisions on the location of units were inappropriate. For example, one was located in a school at risk of closure and at some distance from schools with the greatest need for placements. Another had only one partner school and relationships between the two schools, not good at the outset, quickly broke down.
107. Partnerships have not always set out their expectations clearly enough. As a result, learning support units have developed in isolation, and have different systems for target-setting and measuring pupils' progress. Although these systems are often appropriate, they are not consistent across a partnership or established with a view to demonstrating value for money. Three quarters of partnerships in this exercise have not monitored practice or established any systems for the schools' accountability.
108. The provision made by units varies greatly. For example, some only accept pupils after they have received support from the LEA behaviour support team. Others act as an alternative to an over-stretched team, and others again refer pupils to the behaviour support service after a placement. These systems have usually developed in an ad hoc way. Lack of clarity by the LEA and EiC partnership prevents learning support units from operating to maximum effectiveness.
109. There has also been confusion over the responsibility for funding pupil transport and over the amount available, which means that pupil transport is a significant problem for many units.
110. Some teachers are reluctant to refer pupils to the unit because they believe they are better able to meet their needs within the school. This is sometimes appropriate, and is supported with effective outreach work from the unit. In some cases, partner schools with pupils who would benefit from a placement do not involve the unit in any way. Some units therefore accept a disproportionate number of pupils from the host schools to make up numbers. A quarter of units in the sample are actively exploring ways of extending the number of partnership schools.
111. Despite strong support in most cases from senior school managers, a number of unit managers have had to work very hard to gain acceptance and credibility for the work of the unit among mainstream staff. This occurs in both the partner schools and, sometimes, also in the host school. In these situations, unit staff can feel isolated.
112. It is difficult to identify a general cost per pupil because staffing arrangements and the way that units operate vary markedly. Costs are generally high. A third of units visited were operating below capacity. In one, the manager of the unit had left, but the school had decided not to appoint another manager until they were certain about the future funding. Despite receiving £130,000 from the DfES to provide the unit, the school suspended it for almost a year.



### Quality of provision

113. The quality of teaching was good or better in the majority of units visited. Staff demonstrated good subject knowledge, and structured their lessons carefully to provide a routine of appropriate learning behaviour and reinforcement of new learning. Half the staff regularly used the national literacy and numeracy frameworks to support their work; a quarter also used structured programmes such as Reading Recovery.
114. The majority of units employ teaching assistants. These provide effective support for teaching and learning. Most of these staff are also from the local community and provide a valuable link and role model for pupils.
115. Most of the pupils who have been in a unit have gained from their placement. Improvements in behaviour management have been better than progress in academic learning. All the pupils observed during the inspections were positive about the work and the relationships within the unit and most now felt more able to cope with difficult situations in the classroom. Many of the pupils were clearly developing increased belief in themselves and their ability to relate positively to others, for example in being able to give and receive praise.
116. Not all pupils are appropriately placed in the units. Some pupils with very high levels of need have been placed in them, when they need intensive, longer-term support of other kinds and from other agencies.
117. Most units offer a balanced combination of attention to academic work and intensive support on social development and behaviour. A minority focus almost exclusively on therapeutic approaches. In schools where the unit focuses equally on academic and behavioural targets, academic progress is almost commensurate with progress in behaviour.
118. Common features of effective practice in learning support units were:
  - effective referral systems, with clear information about pupils and the measures already taken to address any difficulties
  - a clear structure for supporting pupils
  - robust target-setting and monitoring systems
  - a manager with specialist qualifications and expertise in dealing with pupils with behavioural difficulties
  - a manager who is part of the school's senior management and has a whole-school responsibility for areas such as the behaviour policy
  - good liaison with learning mentors who provide connections between the school and the unit
  - good liaison with class teachers at all stages of the placement so that teachers are fully informed about pupils' progress.
119. In the best cases, learning support units are developing a distinctive approach to meeting the needs of primary schools. This includes: a greater focus on professional development to improve class and whole-school behaviour management; more outreach work in partner schools; and earlier identification and intervention work with younger pupils, including those in reception.

### Recommendations

120. To improve the work of primary learning support units, there is a need to:
- provide guidance appropriate to primary schools, making clear the functions of learning support units and offering criteria for the placement of pupils and the nature of the support they can receive
  - improve the strategic management of learning support units by requiring EIC partnerships to:
    - draw up plans indicating how units fit with existing provision in the LEA and specifying ways of improving connections between partnership schools, other units and other support services
    - demonstrate the need for units where they are located and that the schools are committed to the initiative
    - clarify the source, amount and allocation of funding for pupil transport so that there is sufficient for units to operate effectively, and ensure transport arrangements are effective
    - ensure referral systems across the partnership are appropriate
    - support units in extending their work to a larger number of schools and in developing consultancy and outreach support for schools wherever appropriate
    - establish a system for monitoring and evaluating the work of learning support units.

## Conclusions

121. The EiC primary expansion is a young experiment but is already having an effect. Learning mentors in primary schools are a welcome initiative, fulfilling a need that previously could be met only by headteachers and teachers. In some schools the gifted and talented strand has prompted teachers to challenge higher-attaining pupils and is encouraging schools to look at their provision and ethos. Many learning support units are at an embryonic stage, mainly because of delays in establishing them and because of inadequate planning of their use.
122. Overall, the early indications are positive. However, there are areas for development that need to be addressed quickly if schools are to capitalise on the initial gains and the full potential of the programme is to be exploited. In particular, weaknesses in leadership and management need to be addressed. The DfES and EiC partnerships need to consider what further steps can be taken through, or in association with, the programme, in order to improve school management. Greater emphasis should be placed on providing training for headteachers and the co-ordinators for each of the strands.
123. Partnerships should monitor schools more closely to ensure that they are meeting targets, and that initiatives demonstrate value for money. They should not hesitate to intervene when schools fail to use the funding for the purposes intended or if management is ineffective.
124. The quality of dissemination is variable. More needs to be done to share good ideas and to help schools support one another.
125. Many schools in the EiC programme face worse behaviour problems than other schools and, as a result, exclusion rates are often higher. The appointment of learning mentors has made an effect but establishing more effective systems for improving behaviour and attendance would enhance the value of their work.

## Education Action Zone programmes in primary schools

126. The range of EAZ initiatives seen in primary schools was very wide. It included, for example, activities on the arts and sport, the provision of study support, work on general learning skills, programmes to develop self-esteem, and action on behaviour and attendance. The most common initiatives have been in relation to family and early learning, ICT, and literacy and numeracy. This section concentrates on those three areas of work.

### Attainment

127. Round one EAZs have been in action since 1998 or 1999. Results at Key Stage 1 in the zones have been rising somewhat faster than the national average. Results in national tests for reading, writing and mathematics have risen by five, six and seven percentage points respectively between 1998 and 2002, one percentage point more in each case than the national trend. Attainment in schools in the areas of greatest disadvantage is still below the national average. At Key Stage 2 standards in EAZ round one schools remain below average, but they too are rising at faster than the average rate, particularly in mathematics. This represents a significant achievement in the light of the difficulties faced by many of these schools, such as high pupil mobility and staff recruitment.
128. Initiatives sponsored by EAZs that focus on raising standards have had more effect in primary than in secondary schools, although the effect has not been consistent across the zones or across the schools in zones. Attainment in English and mathematics at Key Stage 1 was rising significantly in six of the seven zones inspected in 2001/02. In most of them results were approaching the national average. EAZ programmes were making a contribution, notably through better work with parents, an improved early years curriculum and better teaching of literacy and numeracy. As in Key Stage 2, other factors, such as the national strategies and better school planning and evaluation, were also contributing positively.

### Family and early learning

129. Family learning and early years initiatives organised by the zones have been successful in helping to ensure that young children have a good start to their education. Links between school and home have been strengthened and some parents have been helped to develop the skills to support their children's learning.

130. In the majority of EAZs where early years and family learning activities have been developed, there has been a steady and, at times, marked improvement in attainment in national tests at 7 and 11. Where well-managed activities have been matched by effective work in schools on early learning goals, these activities have helped pupils start their new schools better equipped for learning.
131. The focus on family learning has made a significant contribution to inclusion. Those parents involved were generally highly positive about what the programmes had done, especially those who lacked confidence in their own skills and understanding of educational developments. They have become more knowledgeable about the work their children do at school and are more confident about approaching schools. Some parents have improved their employment potential through work on their own skills. Schemes involving links with higher education institutions have often been productive in this respect.
132. Schools have invested a great deal of effort in getting initiatives off the ground. The special funding made the difference, sometimes by extending a small-scale scheme to larger numbers and sometimes by increasing specialist support. Many schools were developing good practice but sometimes in isolation: very often, zones needed to find ways to disseminate good practice more widely.

### Information and communication technology

133. The effect of ICT initiatives has varied greatly, with much depending on the quality of work by ICT co-ordinators in schools and by zone consultants.
134. Generally, better access to a wider range of ICT resources has contributed positively to schools' attempts to promote inclusion. Schools have made considerable investments in hardware and software. The use of ICT suites and interactive whiteboards, for instance, has been notably successful. Schools would not have been able to afford significant and rapid investment from within their own budgets. They have also valued the technical and professional help provided to set equipment up and make good use of it.
135. Teachers' confidence and competence in using ICT have improved. EAZ ICT co-ordinators and technicians have provided good-quality trainers and other assistance to teachers, giving them the confidence to tackle more complex ICT lessons. Teaching was more effective in the majority of schools because teachers made good use of ICT in their lessons. In the best examples, teaching assistants had also been well trained and used their ICT skills confidently for the benefit of the pupils.
136. In their visits, inspectors saw an improvement in standards of ICT among pupils. As a result of more and better opportunities to use ICT, their skills were better developed. Their attitudes and behaviour were also good, and in particular had improved among the disaffected.

137. Overall, in nearly all the schools the initiative was providing satisfactory value for money. The main weakness was in the strategic management of the initiative. In particular:
- few zones were evaluating the effect of the initiative on achievement
  - few schools had good links with other education providers
  - community links were also weak, and in the majority of schools far more could have been done to make available their resources to parents and the communities served by the school
  - links with local businesses were not well exploited.

### Literacy and numeracy

138. Most literacy and numeracy initiatives organised by zones were successful in helping specific groups of pupils progress faster than otherwise would have been expected, enabling them to make up for lost ground or improve the poorest levels of attainment in both key stages.
139. One of the most effective types of support has been through the employment of additional literacy and numeracy consultants to work in schools in similar roles to those deployed by the national strategies. Such support, often more intensive and over a longer period than would have been possible under the national strategies, has had a positive effect on teaching skills and, in some cases, on the school's management of the improvement programme.
140. Many zones have employed additional teaching assistants to good effect, usually, although not only, to support literacy and numeracy. They often receive good quality training to support literacy and numeracy. The use of teaching assistants has been effective where they have had clearly defined objectives, good line management and close liaison with class teachers.
141. Initiatives designed to improve attainment in literacy and numeracy through the use of ICT have been partly successful, with schools increasingly using interactive whiteboards well to enhance whole-class teaching.
142. A significant number of schools have used the additional funding to purchase published schemes of work or introduce research projects to improve teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy. These initiatives have provided schools with a fresh start to tackle the challenge of raising standards, particularly in reading, writing, spelling and to a lesser extent in numeracy. However, in some cases, analysis of the problems which the materials or projects were intended to overcome has not been sharp enough to direct their use intelligently.
143. In just over two thirds of the schools the additional initiatives in literacy and numeracy have been well managed and are contributing to long-term improvements in school performance. On return visits, half the schools could demonstrate improvements in the quality of teaching and standards, with satisfactory performance in a further quarter.

## Conclusions

144. EAZ initiatives have improved co-operation and communication between primary schools about the curriculum and teaching. Liaison between advisory teams in their support for schools has also improved. There has been much less sign of development through zone activities of co-operation between primary and secondary schools. In a few cases, joint planning of transfer arrangements and associated curriculum programmes began to develop in the third year of the zones.
145. Improved relations between primary schools, at least, are a contribution to longer-term development. Another contribution is what has been learned about making productive links with parents. Nurture groups, workshops on the curriculum for parents, behaviour modification sessions for families, the observation of and participation in lessons, helping with clubs: activities of these kinds have helped to extend schools' ideas about involving parents in their children's learning. The picture in this respect has been inconsistent. Some schools in zones blame parents for their lack of interest, while elsewhere parents are closely involved.
146. Also contributing to longer-term development has been the experience in some zones, though by no means all, of bringing together efforts to improve attainment with efforts to improve attitudes and behaviour.
147. The importance of zones learning and spreading lessons such as these has been more generally recognised in the work of zones inspected in 2001/02. In that time, initiatives have increasingly been designed and implemented in ways that encourage schools to be self-reliant and the initiatives to be sustainable beyond the period of direct funding.

148. On the other hand, some common causes of weaknesses in EAZ programmes have persisted. Among them are that:
- plans and activities have often been too diffuse to tackle major issues
  - innovations have sometimes been pursued without first analysing the problems they are meant to resolve or being clear enough about how they will work and with what outcomes
  - the effect of initiatives has been limited where senior management is weak, and the failure of some zones and LEAs to tackle the problem has resulted in poor value for money
  - in some zones consultants and advisory teachers have been reluctant or unable to challenge poor practice in schools
  - action to improve connections between primary and secondary schools, for example to secure the continuation of support for pupils or curriculum development sponsored by the zone, has generally been weak
  - in the absence of coherent strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of their programmes, many EAZs have relied too heavily on schools to monitor initiatives and, in some zones, schools have been insufficiently accountable for the extra resources and support they receive
  - there has been inadequate attention to sustaining the benefits of the programmes when funding ends.
149. In addition, there are weaknesses in links with other agencies. The setting up of EAZs assumed and encouraged a good deal of co-operation between schools and other agencies. There have been successes, notably in the involvement of health services and adult education in work with parents, but, on the whole, not as much has been attempted or seen through as zone plans often proposed.

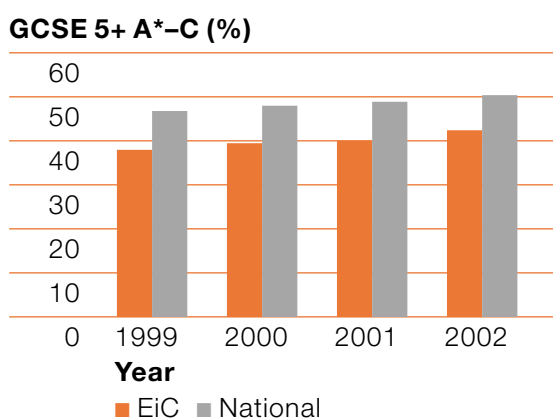


# Excellence in Cities programmes in secondary schools

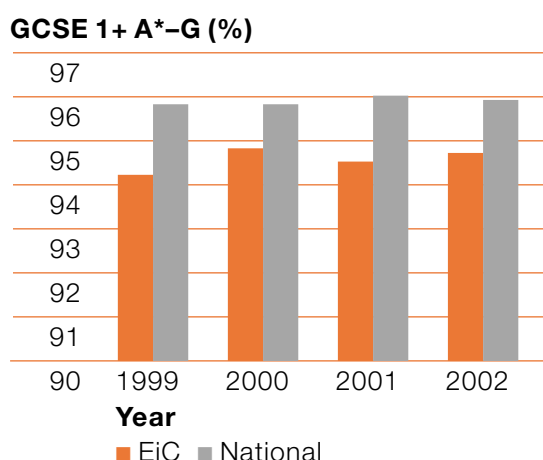
## Attainment

- 150. In 1998, the average performance of schools in EiC phase one areas was overall much higher than that of schools in round one EAZs. The introduction of the EiC programme has been associated with a faster rise in standards in EiC areas than in the EAZs and nationally, although other factors have also played a part in this. There is further progress to be made, since standards in the EiC phase one schools are still below the national average, but the trend is positive.
- 151. Results in Key Stage 3 tests in English and mathematics in EiC phase one schools have risen faster than the national rate over the four years from 1998 and 2002. In English they have outstripped the national rate of improvement by 1.5 percentage points and in mathematics by 1.8 percentage points. The rise in results was particularly strong between 2001 and 2002. Although results are still below the national average, the gap is closing.
- 152. Results at GCSE in EiC phase one schools are also below the national average, but there has been a steady rise in the three widely used GCSE performance indicators. This rate of improvement has not reached the national trend in terms of the average point score, but the improvements in the higher grades of five A\*–C are very close to the national trend over the five-year period and exceeded the extent of improvement nationally between 2001 and 2002. The rise in the proportion of pupils reaching one A\*–G grades has outstripped the national rate of improvement.

**Figure 5.** Percentage of phase 1 secondary EiC schools achieving GCSE 5+ A\*–C compared with national



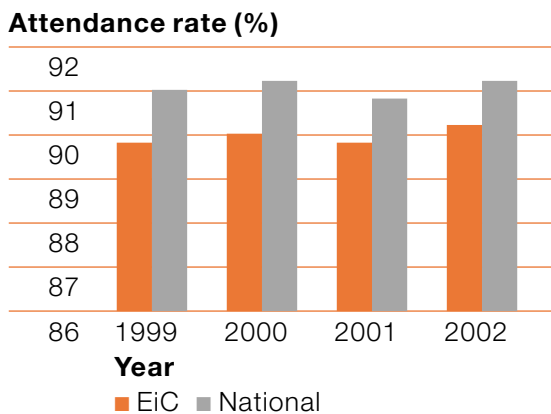
**Figure 6.** Percentage of phase 1 secondary EiC schools achieving GCSE 1+ A\*–G compared with national



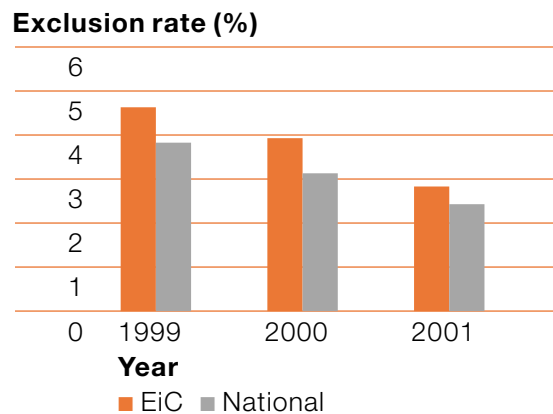
## Attendance and exclusions

- 153. Trends in pupils' behaviour and attendance are also positive. Exclusion rates are falling and attendance is improving faster than in other secondary schools, although absenteeism is still too high in EiC schools, as elsewhere.
- 154. Most of the schools had specific programmes to promote inclusion and target poor behaviour. Schools in EiC partnerships received funding to appoint learning mentors and, in some cases, to set up a learning support unit on site. In terms of permanent exclusions, the results in survey schools were encouraging: around three quarters of them had reduced the number of pupils who were permanently excluded by more than the national average rate of reduction.

**Figure 7.** Attendance rate of phase 1 secondary EiC schools compared with national



**Figure 8.** Exclusion rate in secondary EiC schools compared with national



## Learning mentors

### Key findings

- Learning mentors are making a significant effect on the attendance, behaviour, self-esteem and progress of the pupils they support.
- The support of learning mentors is valued highly by pupils and their parents.
- The learning mentor scheme enables schools to provide appropriate and flexible support for pupils when they need it.

155. An increasingly large number of schools use EiC provision for learning mentors well. This is, overall, the most successful and highly valued strand of the EiC programme. Headteachers and other staff welcome the presence and contribution of learning mentors in the school, and their work is popular with the pupils and their parents.
156. In 95% of the survey schools, inspectors judged that the mentoring programme made a positive contribution to the mainstream provision of the school as a whole, and had a beneficial effect on the behaviour of individual pupils and on their ability to learn and make progress. When inspectors revisited the schools they found that almost all the schools had developed their mentoring provision. Overall, the programme was seen as providing good value for money.

### Learning mentors and their work

157. There is no typical profile of a learning mentor. Mentors have a wide range of experience and qualifications. Some may have a background in teaching or youth work, others have experience of social work, or bring counselling qualifications and skills to their role. Schools report few difficulties in recruiting suitable learning mentors from their local communities. They usually try to match mentors to their pupils carefully, with a mentor sometimes being chosen deliberately to provide the pupil with a positive role model.
158. A good learning mentor is enthusiastic about working with young people, a sympathetic listener, and someone who inspires the trust of the pupil. A good mentor is well-organised and well-trained for the role, and is fully aware of how he or she fits into the school's pastoral system. The mentor engages quickly with pupils, provides the flexible support needed and gains the pupils' confidence as someone who is firm but fair. Mentors generally support between 15 and 25 pupils, sometimes more, but they need to be flexible in order to provide appropriate support when it is needed.
159. The pupils generally saw their learning mentor as someone they could talk to and trust. Indeed, the sympathetic, understanding approach of most mentors won over many of those pupils who were initially reluctant to participate in the scheme. They also understood the mentor's role as different from that of pastoral staff and tutors. In a number of instances, pupils used learning mentors to mediate for them when relationships between themselves and pastoral staff had broken down.

160. The pupils valued most the fact that an adult in the school was making time for them and showing a real interest in their development. Some pupils, who were often disruptive in a classroom situation, were prepared to listen, try hard, and do their best to please the mentor. This brought about both academic and personal progress, which in turn inspired further effort and success. Comments like these were typical:

*'You can really talk to him. He is patient and he helps me to understand the key facts I need to know. He doesn't make me feel thick if I don't get it first time.'*

*'It is relaxing – it makes me calm down a bit. We talk about how to act in class so I can handle it and don't show off in front of my mates.'*

*'She is always there for you: she gives me confidence.'*

*'I'd really like to, but I can't talk to my mum at home. My mentor is like a big sister and she helps me a lot. I really want to try hard so as not to let her down.'*

161. Teachers saw the scheme as helpful both for the pupils involved and as a means of reducing the disruption these pupils might have caused in class. It was also a way of targeting help for the difficulties experienced by a pupil in a particular subject without taking the time from the rest of the class. One headteacher said:

*'This is a major success for our school. The effect of the mentor is greatest in terms of behaviour and personal development, but the effect on standards is still hard to judge. Disruptive pupils are moving back into class, pupils with low self-esteem are receiving support, and pupils with a poor record of attendance are coming to school on a regular basis. Some pupils with poor social skills and those vulnerable to bullying are being eased back gradually into the system. This is not to deny that there are some failures, but on the whole the system is good at dealing flexibly with a range of needs.'*

### What works well?

162. Features of successful use of learning mentors are:
- clearly defined roles for mentors and systems for referral to them
  - comprehensive staff briefing and training
  - good links with pastoral and academic staff
  - definite targets for pupils, with regular review
  - adequate time for regular meetings
  - well-organised records
  - manageable caseloads
  - regular liaison with parents.
163. The most successful practice identified clearly the nature of the work to be done with the pupil and the amount of support and length of time each pupil would need. Outcomes were easier to measure when targets were set for a specific length of time. In the best practice attention was given to developing both personal and academic targets so that pupils learned to manage their behaviour and their work better in lessons. Both mentors and pupils knew and understood the targets well.
164. Over half the schools reviewed progress fortnightly. The regular review was identified as a key to success. Learning mentors prepared short reports on the pupils' progress that formed the basis of further planning with staff to support them. The use of this short-term review helped staff, pupils and parents to see progress being made.
165. In the best practice, pupils were allocated set times to meet mentors. Steps were taken to ensure interviews were not interrupted. In some schools pupils had the same time each week and had to bring with them work and reports as evidence of progress. During discussion pupils were given feedback on achievement and strategies for coping with new targets.
166. In most schools learning mentors were effective in managing day-to-day work with pupils. Record-keeping and target-setting were generally well done, although in just under a quarter of schools record-keeping was too complex, resulting in too much administration at the expense of time with pupils.
167. Good management ensured that the learning mentor had a clear role, and that this was firmly linked into the established pastoral and academic provision. This enabled the mentor to liaise effectively with subject teachers and pastoral tutors, and avoided unnecessary repetition, for example when contacting parents and outside agencies. In this way the mentor knew about work assignments and approaching deadlines, and could help the pupils to prepare for them. Equally, the academic staff became aware of pupils' problems in their subjects and could help the mentor to provide effective support.

168. Effective briefing of all staff, which was a feature in two thirds of schools, helped classroom teachers understand the role of learning mentors. Without this, there was confusion about the role of learning mentors that led to inconsistency in supporting pupils and to duplication of activity. Contribution to staff training by mentors themselves was also a factor, but not all schools appreciated that they brought to the job a variety of experiences of dealing with young people which they could share with staff.
169. In almost all schools mentors established good relationships with parents and spoke to them on a regular basis. They shared with parents the progress pupils were making and sought their advice. Headteachers felt that hitherto reticent parents appeared more confident in contacting the school. The parents interviewed by inspectors believed that positive feedback helped them to reinforce and support the work of the school.
170. In the most successful schools senior staff monitored the work of mentors closely, ensuring that their caseloads were realistic and that the support they provided was effective. In the best examples, staff evaluated the contribution of the learning mentor and sought to assess each pupil's progress against individual targets.

#### What needs to be improved?

171. The success of the learning mentor scheme was hindered where:
- there were poor systems for integrating learning mentors into the school
  - mentors had unmanageable caseloads
  - the school had not established good links with parents and outside agencies
  - too great a focus was placed on personal support at the expense of improving pupils' ability to learn
  - monitoring and evaluation were weak.
172. The management of the learning mentor scheme was unsatisfactory in nearly 10% of the survey schools. In these schools the senior management was often disorganised and there were no clear guidelines for mentors. Their work overlapped with that of the form teacher or the head of year, and this led either to the duplication or omission of attention. In one school the parents received telephone calls about the behaviour of their child from several different members of staff, some giving conflicting messages.
173. In some schools ineffective supervision of mentors by senior managers led to friction between pastoral staff and caused difficulties for pupils and parents. In such schools the learning mentors worked inconsistently and without direction. No-one ensured that they were following an agreed programme of support for their mentees. Links to other agencies were rudimentary.

174. The lack of monitoring and evaluation meant that these schools had no idea of the work or effectiveness of its mentors. In some cases this led to mentors being overwhelmed by their caseloads. Some of the schools had self-referral systems for pupils which were too flexible and not monitored sufficiently rigorously by senior managers. Strategic planning was ineffective, as it often missed key issues and did little to raise standards. Despite the large sums spent, there was little to show as a result.
175. Similarly, senior managers did not always know the plan of support for each pupil referred to a mentor, and were unaware of targets, progress or the strategy planned for withdrawing the mentor's support. Even schools with good pastoral systems were not always very careful about monitoring the success of the mentoring scheme. They did not analyse tangible measures of success such as a reduction in the numbers of pupils referred to the pastoral system for poor behaviour, a reduction in fixed-term exclusions or improvements in attendance.
176. While most mentors provided good pastoral support for pupils, their effectiveness was sometimes reduced by a lack of emphasis on improving pupils' ability to learn and make progress. A common weakness was the lack of communication between academic staff and mentors, who in turn did not understand how best to help pupils to learn more effectively. This was particularly true in schools which had not invested sufficiently in training.
177. The following note of an inspection visit illustrates what could happen when the scheme was not well managed, despite the good intentions of the individuals involved.

#### The use of learning mentors: case study 1

The enthusiasm and personal skills of the post holders are carrying the learning mentor initiative, but the lack of a whole-school approach is of serious concern, as it reduces the effectiveness of the mentors.

The school has high levels of absenteeism and fixed-term exclusions (with two thirds of the fixed-term exclusions involving black pupils), yet it appears unaware of this and has not analysed the reasons nor researched solutions. Learning mentors operate in isolation. A concerted school strategy is needed to tackle this problem, and learning mentors require co-ordination so that their approach is uniform. The work of some mentors is undermined by the size of their caseloads.

Inadequate management means that mentors tackle issues in their own way and the school has no idea how effective mentors are. There is little evidence to indicate that the pupils supported are making academic progress. Pupils like the support of the learning mentors who accompany them to lessons and act like SEN support staff, but they are not well briefed by academic staff, so they do not understand the pupils' difficulties and how best to help them improve. Liaison between staff is poor. As a result, learning mentors have no formal way of engaging with staff about learning and teaching strategies.

### Effect of the scheme

178. It is difficult to demonstrate the effect of learning mentors on performance at a whole-school level, particularly that on pupils' attainment. This is because mentors support the pupils who need it most, sometimes for a comparatively short period of time, and not necessarily those in examination classes. The effect of the mentor in such cases would not become apparent in the school's results. It is equally true that those schools which are successful in raising the attainment of pupils manage to do so through a range of strategies, the contributions of which are difficult to separate.
179. It is possible, however, for schools to demonstrate the strong effect of a learning mentor on the progress, behaviour, personal organisation and attendance of individual pupils. The following case study is one significant illustration of the positive effect of the learning mentor on the life of a pupil.

### The use of learning mentors: case study 2

'Sofia' is an able Year 10 pupil at a community college in the north of England. She attained level 7 in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9. She shares a small and over-crowded terraced house with her six siblings and a sister-in-law with three young children. Her mother is ill and requires nursing. Sofia is the main carer for the whole family as the sister-in-law speaks little English.

Sofia was diagnosed as suffering from stress and depression. After discussion, the school decided to allocate Sofia to a learning mentor. The mentor, who has a similar cultural heritage to Sofia, readily identified with the difficulties faced by the teenager. She devised a plan of support that involved seeing Sofia regularly, visiting her at home, and staying in touch during the school holidays. She enabled her to attend school regularly, and tutored her in the work she had missed when, through illness, she was unable to come to school. She gradually gained the trust and confidence of the whole family. With the support of the learning mentor and school intervention, the extended family has been re-housed into better accommodation. The learning mentor has also helped the family gain cultural support and better social services provision. Sofia's life has improved and she is now on target to achieve very well at GCSE. Without the mentor's support, the school believes that Sofia would have stopped attending school.



### How has the initiative developed?

180. In all but one of the survey schools revisited, inspectors judged that the schools had developed their mentoring provision successfully, by either maintaining or improving its quality further. In most cases the initiative had taken root in the school's life and pastoral provision, and was beginning to grow and blossom. Schools had used the funding constructively in a range of different ways to benefit their pupils and, in the best examples, the wider community also.
181. There were many innovative developments. Some schools had undertaken a wide-reaching review of pastoral provision and appointed an inclusion manager, generally represented at senior management meetings, whose role it was to integrate the work of mentors, the learning support unit staff, form tutors and year heads, SEN staff and the education welfare officer. This approach ensured good overall co-ordination of the scheme and appropriate representation at a senior level.
182. Other schools used mentors' skills creatively to train other staff, by running sessions on behaviour management, for example. Mentors were also asked to lead discussions in personal and social education sessions, to run short courses in confidence assertiveness, or to contribute to an anger management programme for small groups of pupils. In one school the mentors ran a project for vulnerable Year 8 girls designed to reduce teenage pregnancy.
183. The most successful schools had improved their record-keeping for each pupil and used the records to plan suitable support. In this they were able to be more flexible and innovative with the support they offered. A few schools had trained pupils to be peer group mentors, and successfully changed attitudes to learning among some boys in particular. In one secondary school, this had proved so successful that its students were working with Year 3 pupils in a nearby primary school. It had improved the self-esteem of both groups.

### The use of learning mentors: case study 3

The learning mentor initiative has developed significantly and is an integral feature of the whole school strategy for pupil support. It now provides very good value for money.

Pupils requiring support are identified quickly and an individual programme is carefully tailored to meet their needs. The mentor is selected with care. Relationships with pupils are very good and have improved behaviour considerably in all year groups. Without such support many of these pupils might have disengaged from education and been in trouble outside school.

The school has developed a detailed and focused system of individual pupil records, which provides a useful mechanism for tracking their pastoral and academic progress. A weekly review of targets enables managers to keep track of progress and assess the effectiveness of the mentoring scheme. Records show that students receive focused help and make good progress with their literacy and numeracy needs, so that most outgrow the need for support within a term.

Learning mentors are well integrated into the work of the school. They attend staff and year group meetings. The school makes use of their expertise in counselling and behaviour management to train other staff, so that there is a systematic approach to managing unacceptable behaviour. Learning mentors are also developing courses on parenting skills in order to strengthen the partnership with parents. The senior mentor has established very good links with a range of local agencies and the Connexions service.

## Provision for gifted and talented pupils

### Key findings

- In most schools provision for gifted and talented pupils is developing well, although provision for talented pupils is not as well co-ordinated or as far advanced as that for gifted pupils.
- The programme is having a good effect on targeted pupils and is helping to improve their progress, motivation and confidence.
- Where the provision is well managed it is having a beneficial effect on the quality of teaching and learning in the school as a whole.
- Some of the provision is fragmented and does not directly support pupils' progress in school.

184. The gifted and talented programme is designed to raise standards among the most able pupils by providing them with a higher level of challenge. Schools are asked to identify 5–10% of their pupils who will benefit from the programme and to use the funding to make additional provision for them.

185. The pupils who have benefited from the gifted and talented programme in schools are generally enthusiastic about the scheme. Most of them recognise that they have been given opportunities that they otherwise would not have experienced. Some recognise that the teaching is more challenging and that they are making better progress. Among older pupils the programme has often raised expectations of higher education and careers.

*'This school has given me so many opportunities that I wouldn't have had. I went to the university to do a project building a model Formula 1 car. We raced them at the end. They taught us all about aerodynamics for when we were designing the car, but unfortunately ours didn't win, because it was too heavy. We need to use lighter materials next time. I'd like to be an engineer and design things when I leave school.'*

#### What works well?

186. The following features were common in schools where the gifted and talented programme is making a difference to motivation, aspirations and achievement:
- a broader range of teaching styles, in which pupils are encouraged to be more active in researching and developing ideas on their own
  - the sharing of good teaching practice both within and outside the school, for example on learning styles, setting higher expectations, and planning innovative work and challenges
  - opportunities for sharing good practice with subject specialists in neighbouring schools
  - the commitment of staff to providing additional programmes outside school time
  - management that ensures that the gifted and talented programme is embedded in the school development plan and in departmental planning
  - careers advice that supplies pupils with the information they need and secures placements or experience to match their aspirations
  - libraries and research centres that aim to develop independent learning
  - rigorous monitoring which complements the school data-collection and management system, and demonstrates clearly the success of the scheme at pupil and school level.

#### What needs to be improved?

187. The strand has made little effect in schools where the above features are not present and, in particular, where:
- enrichment activities, even if valuable in themselves, are uncoordinated and not related to teaching and learning in ordinary lessons
  - additional tasks are inadequately planned, so that pupils are given simply more work rather than more challenging work
  - there are few opportunities for staff to meet either within the school or with subject colleagues in the area, and there is a lack of advice from co-ordinators
  - parental support has not been developed
  - there is ineffective monitoring of the programme's success
  - provision for talented pupils is not well developed.

#### How has the initiative developed?

188. Follow-up visits to the survey schools in 2002 showed that around four fifths of the schools were making satisfactory or better provision for gifted and talented pupils. The provision had either remained good or improved.
189. Overall, the gifted and talented programme has had a positive, though uneven, effect on mainstream provision, and on targeted pupils in particular. School co-ordinators are frequently enthusiastic and manage the provision well.

190. The range of provision for gifted pupils is now diverse and frequently extensive. Many schools have built on the contacts they established with colleges, universities and independent schools in their areas and forged productive links with local businesses. Through these links pupils take part in day and weekend schools, masterclasses and after-school activities designed to inspire them and further their knowledge and understanding, both of subjects in the curriculum and their wider application. Many of these classes are still unrelated to mainstream lessons, but most pupils gain a good deal of interest, derive benefit from the stimulation they provide and enjoy the challenge of working collaboratively with gifted pupils from other schools.
191. Early identification of pupils to be included in the programme has improved and some schools have set up detailed dossiers for each pupil, which enable them to track their progress more effectively. Almost all schools have improved their identification of gifted pupils and developed accordingly the provision made for them. Schools generally analyse pupils' test results as they enter the school, set them, monitor and ensure they are making good progress.
192. Most schools have also improved their identification of talented pupils, although this aspect is less advanced and provision is not always well co-ordinated. Some schools provide additional courses and opportunities in the field of music, the arts and sport. Talented musicians, for example, have been given individual instrumental lessons. In some cases this has had a dramatic effect on increasing their motivation, raising aspirations and opening up new career choices. Schools were providing good additional opportunities in dance, technology and public speaking. Individual profiles recorded pupils' success in ballet, drama and music examinations. Overall, however, less attention has been given to consistently developing pupils' individual talents.

#### Provision for gifted and talented pupils: case study 1

'Darren' entered the school in Year 7 with average test scores. The eldest of four siblings, he was not particularly well motivated or interested in schoolwork. However, he did concentrate in music lessons, could play the recorder well and picked up melodies quickly. He was identified as talented in music and given individual instrumental lessons with a peripatetic musician, which his family could not otherwise afford. Now in Year 10, Darren has taken Grade 5 flute. He is proud of his achievements and wants to work in the music industry. Darren's behaviour, commitment and achievement in other areas of the curriculum have also improved since he has been on the gifted and talented programme.

193. Few co-ordinators are members of the school's senior management team. The firm support of the school's managers is vital for success because this enables the co-ordinator to influence the work of subject departments. In the best examples, departments include provision for gifted and talented pupils in their schemes of work, offering relevant differentiated or extension material to take them further in their understanding and widen their knowledge. The co-ordinator often organises training to encourage teachers to raise their expectations of these pupils and explore more challenging and innovative ways of teaching them. In the best schools, these innovative methods have influenced teaching and learning more generally and standards were rising at both key stages.

#### Provision for gifted and talented pupils: case study 2

At the time of the last visit the gifted and talented initiative consisted of a plethora of disparate ideas: twilight dance sessions; enrichment; Saturday schools; links with private sector; extra music lessons; 'think club'; foreign exchanges; masterclasses. All of these had some individual merit, but they were not co-ordinated and had little significant effect on the mainstream curriculum, and thus on the standards the pupils achieved.

In the last two years the programme has developed considerably. There is now very careful identification of individual gifts and talents. All higher-attaining pupils on entry to school are initially put into special groups in mathematics, science and English, where their progress is closely monitored. They are given differentiated tasks, as detailed in schemes of work. Heads of department monitor the progress of other pupils closely, and there is movement between groups, which enables individual progress to be recognised and encouraged. Additionally, those showing talent in specific areas – such as ballet, sports, music, art, languages or technology – are targeted for specific help. Each pupil builds up a folder. The quality of these is high.

The gifted and talented strand is now firmly anchored in the school's development plan which provides targeted coaching for pupils in Year 9 tests and GCSE, some extension classes in mathematics and science, and masterclasses in art, music and dance. The co-ordinator is doing an effective job, ensuring that money is spent wisely on teaching and learning activities. Numbers gaining five or more A\*–C at GCSE are rising and now match the national average, which shows clear added value in view of school's intake.

## Learning support units

### Key findings

- Most learning support units are successful in promoting inclusion, tackling disaffection and reducing exclusions.
- They provide good personal support for pupils, helping them in tangible ways to improve their behaviour.
- While providing good care and personal support, a quarter of the learning support units did not do enough to help pupils learn more effectively.

194. Learning support units are school-based centres designed to support pupils whose attitudes to learning are poor, whose behaviour often causes concern, and who may attend irregularly. It is for the schools to determine how the support unit is organised, following a broad set of principles issued by the DfES. Pupils are referred to the unit, where they work with dedicated staff for a planned period of time at learning more productively and improving attitudes and behaviour.
195. Pupils are usually referred through the school pastoral system. DfES guidance advises that parents should be involved in discussions so they are clear, for example, that the provision is preventative and not a punishment. Placement in a unit should not exceed two terms and in most cases the intervention lasts from a few weeks to a term. Placements may be full-time or part-time depending on the needs of the pupils and the policy of the school. Schools are expected to have clear systems that identify what is to be achieved in the centre and establish what will be done to help pupils settle back into mainstream classes after the placement. In many schools the work of learning mentors is closely linked to that of the learning support unit, and they are frequently used to ease the pupils' return to mainstream lessons.

### Early stages in establishing the units

196. The initial visits to the survey schools found that around two thirds of the units had made a satisfactory start and were helping schools to support pupils whose behaviour was a cause for concern.
197. Most units were generally well managed from day to day, but in many schools headteachers had not ensured that staff fully understood the role of the unit. Procedures for entry and exit were often unclear, and teachers often regarded the units as somewhere to remove disruptive pupils for the benefit of those who wanted to learn. Too frequently, units focused on personal support at the expense of helping pupils to learn more productively. In just over a third of units planning was weak, often because the targets for pupils were too general and gave no indication of how they would be achieved. Examples of such targets were 'improve literacy skills' or 'behave more responsibly' – an approach which made the effect of work in the unit difficult to assess.

198. Within the same EiC partnership schools often had significantly different ways of working, which sometimes made it difficult for staff to share experiences and develop common approaches. Partnerships rarely organised sufficient training for unit staff.
199. Records of individual progress required development. Very few partnerships or schools had effective systems to monitor and evaluate the effect of the units.

#### What works well?

200. In learning support units where pupils make the greatest progress the common features of good practice were:
- a well-organised working environment where there was good access to resources, particularly ICT, to support learning
  - thorough assessment of pupils' attainment to inform lesson planning and regular review of progress recorded on individual plans
  - a varied programme of activities designed to develop each pupil's academic and social skills, including specific programmes to help pupils to manage their behaviour
  - clear criteria for entry to and exit from a placement, including the opportunity to attend mainstream lessons in subjects where pupils were successful
  - liaison between the unit manager, form tutor, year head and parents, and with external agencies as necessary.
201. Good liaison is critical. Units work best where the teacher in charge works closely with the pupil's form tutor, subject teachers and the SEN co-ordinator to understand the nature of individual difficulties. This enables the planning of work which is at the right level and will assist re-integration. The SEN co-ordinator is an important figure in the joint planning of work, since there is a frequent link between low levels of basic skills, disaffection and disruptive behaviour.
202. The focus of successful units was support for learning, linked to the development of strategies that help pupils to examine their own behaviour and responses. In just under half the units, teaching staff and learning mentors had developed effective programmes for pupils on managing behaviour, including anger. Where the intention of the unit was to return pupils to mainstream lessons quickly, these programmes had a sharper focus.
203. In just under half of the units, staff were effective in devising individual learning plans with realistic targets and measurable outcomes. In these units staff planned lessons carefully to make sure that time and resources were used to best advantage. Careful planning contributed to good teaching and assessment, and in an atmosphere of high expectation this had a positive effect on achievement.



- 204. The arrangement of the learning environment helped pupils focus on achieving their personal best. In some units, for example, pupils were allocated a display area to mount work they completed each day, thus making their output and its quality visible. Once a week, their pastoral head or tutor visited to view and discuss the pupils' work and progress. In one school the headteacher joined the group to appraise their work. Such visits helped to motivate pupils and build self-esteem.
- 205. Increasingly, unit staff liaise with outside agencies over specific pupils. This was managed well in schools where the pastoral head was the link, thus avoiding the unit becoming the surrogate pastoral system for the pupil.
- 206. Links with parents were good in just under three quarters of schools. In just over half the schools visited the unit managers contacted parents every day with a progress report. Pupils therefore knew that all parties were working together and this gave the placement a sense of urgency.

#### What needs to be improved?

- 207. Weaknesses in the use of learning support units remained fairly common. Weaknesses were associated with the use of units simply as 'remove rooms' where disruptive pupils were sent at random.
- 208. In a quarter of the units staff focused heavily on discussion about improving behaviour, at the expense of work on improving pupils' learning. Much of this discussion lacked focus and failed to follow basic counselling and support principles.
- 209. Systematic monitoring and evaluation were the weakest feature of most learning support units. Few schools could demonstrate objectively the effectiveness of their unit or identify the most successful approaches for pupils of different age groups.
- 210. In many units staff training needs were not being met. Staff often worked in isolation and had insufficient contact with teaching staff in the school or with unit staff in other schools.

### How has the initiative developed?

211. Follow-up visits to the survey schools showed that most had improved since the previous visit. Provision was at least satisfactory in over four fifths of units, although it was good in only a third of schools.

#### The work of learning support units: case study

A great deal of progress has been made in the work of the learning support unit since the last visit, when the social inclusion manager had only just been appointed. The unit is now very well managed, and there is a strong sense of purpose among all who work there. The manager is very well organised, monitors the work of the unit very closely and acts on this information. Questionnaires are also sent to pupils, parents and teachers and unit staff to gauge the unit's effectiveness.

The school has devised a successful range of intervention programmes, with good procedures for the referral and induction of pupils. On referral, the pupil is interviewed to establish where and why behaviour is poor. The unit manager then puts together an intervention programme to fit each child's needs. It is unusual for a pupil to be withdrawn from all lessons even when referred for the 12-week programme, and pupils are rarely out of any lesson for more than four weeks, although they are closely supervised for much longer.

Links with academic staff and the SEN co-ordinator are strong. Once a pupil has been referred to the unit and returned to mainstream classes the staff maintain a watching brief and follow the progress of the pupil carefully to ensure there is no regression. The Year 10 'fresh start' and the Year 11 'refresher' programmes are devised to reinforce good behaviour among those who have attended the unit in previous years. Links with parents are very good, and additional support is provided through a parenting programme and by intervention from a part-time social worker employed by the school.

212. While the successful schools had improved their assessment practice and used target-setting and review effectively, weaker units still focused insufficient attention on learning. Pupils spent far too long in such units and the gap between their attainment and that of their peers widened, making re-integration problematic.

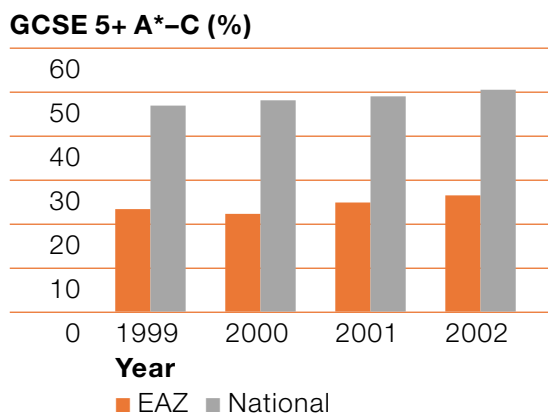
## Education Action Zone programmes in secondary schools

### Attainment

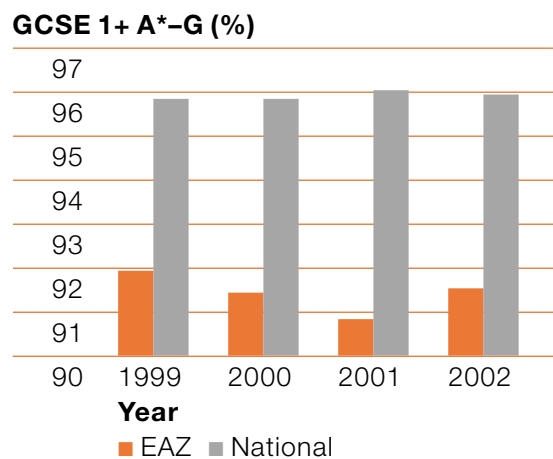
213. The statistics from EAZ round one schools demonstrate far less progress for secondary pupils than their primary school counterparts. The results in national tests in both English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 remain stubbornly well below average and the standards achieved by 16 year olds in zone schools are an area of serious weakness.
214. While the percentage of pupils nationally gaining level 5 in Key Stage 3 tests in English in the four years between 1998 to 2002 has improved by almost two percentage points, results in round one zone schools have fluctuated, declining to their lowest level in 2001, when they were over 25 points below the national average. The English results in 2002 improved well on the previous year, but overall standards in English at Key Stage 3 from 1998 to 2002, although rising, have done so slowly, and have not kept pace with the national trend.
215. A similar picture emerges in mathematics, where the percentage of 14 year olds in round one EAZ schools reaching the expected level for their age is 23 percentage points below the national average. Although results for these pupils have risen over the five-year period, they have done so more slowly than the results of other pupils nationally.
216. In this respect, the wide disparity between the achievements of Key Stage 3 pupils in the areas of greatest disadvantage and those elsewhere is not being reduced and, at worst, it is increasing. Rapid improvement in Key Stage 3 results in a few schools is set against declining results in others.
217. There are several reasons why this overall pattern has emerged, but the most important is that EAZs in general have not accorded sufficient priority to the improvement of standards at Key Stage 3. Many of the initiatives in secondary schools have targeted the inclusion of vulnerable pupils, or sponsored activities to extend opportunities, improve access to ICT, and broaden the curriculum for disaffected youngsters in Key Stage 4, but comparatively few zones have given sufficient thought or resources to raising attainment in Key Stage 3. In those zones where this has been a priority, some distinct successes have been achieved. For example, some fairly short-term ICT-based revision courses have boosted test results at comparatively low cost.

218. In Key Stage 4 the picture is more mixed. Although the proportion of 16 year olds in round one EAZs who gain five GCSEs at grades A\*–C has now reached the government’s target for the zones of 25%, this figure still represents only around half the national average. Furthermore, the rate at which this improvement has been achieved has been slower than the national trend. The position with the average point score at GCSE is similar.
219. However, one encouraging sign is the rise in 2002 in the proportion of pupils achieving one A\*–G pass at GCSE in EAZ round one schools. Fewer pupils are now leaving school without any qualifications.

**Figure 9.** Percentage of phase 1 secondary EAZ schools achieving GCSE 5+ A\*–C compared with national



**Figure 10.** Percentage of phase 1 secondary EAZ schools achieving GCSE 1+ A\*–G compared with national

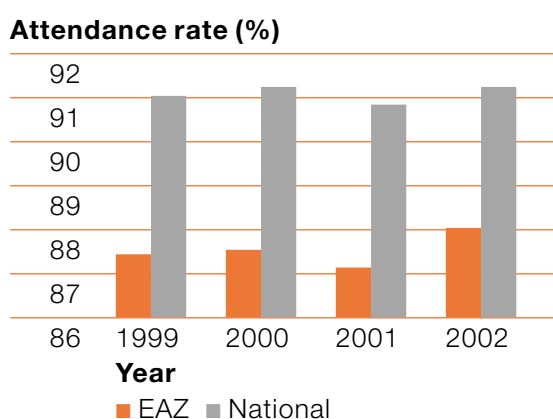


### Attendance and exclusions

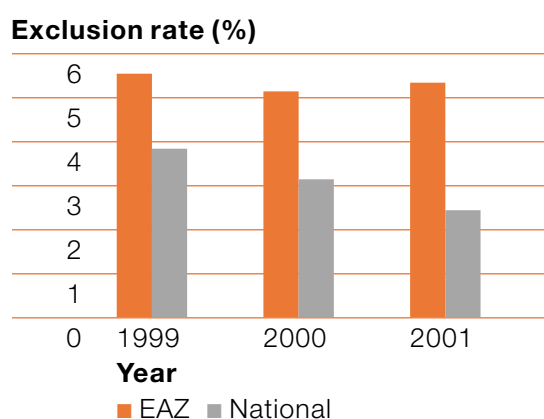
220. Attendance remains a serious problem for schools in EAZs, as it does for many schools nation-wide. While the attendance of secondary pupils in round one EAZ schools has risen over the last four years at well in excess of the national trend, absenteeism among secondary pupils is still disturbingly high. An attendance rate of 88% in EAZ schools means, that in a secondary school of 1000, on average 120 pupils are absent each day. There is a strong correlation in schools between poor attendance and low achievement. When pupils feel they are not learning well and achieving success, they lose interest and vote with their feet.
221. The overall average figures for attendance mask some large fluctuations across zones and some of the schools within them. In some of the more successful zones which have concentrated on improving the quality of teaching and management in secondary schools, and where standards at both key stages have risen rapidly, attendance rates have risen also.

222. The trends in exclusion from school are more encouraging overall. Here, EAZ schools are narrowing the gap between themselves and the national average, although there is still a way to go. Reductions in the overall exclusion figures and improvements in the achievement of lower-attaining pupils at GCSE testify to some of the painstaking work of staff in zone schools with difficult or vulnerable pupils. They are an indicator of the success of many of the inclusion projects that zones have established.

**Figure 11.** Attendance rate of first-round secondary EAZ schools compared with national



**Figure 12.** Exclusion rate in first-round secondary EAZ schools compared with national



### Zone programmes

223. The schools in the survey which were in EAZ partnerships were visited to follow up a variety of initiatives.
224. One feature of EAZ programmes for secondary schools was the extent to which they took up approaches used in EiC programmes. Some schools had introduced learning mentor schemes and learning support units; others had introduced programmes for gifted and talented pupils. In carrying through these approaches, their successes and failures did not differ significantly from those in EiC areas, and the observations made in the earlier sections of the report apply equally to EAZ schools.
225. Because EAZs involve a relatively small number of secondary schools, there was usually less collective development. The success of initiatives within a school depended more on the way that the school managed the programme and on the quality of the teaching and support staff involved directly with the pupils than on the organisation of the EAZ.
226. In some of the EAZ survey schools HMI inspected other initiatives, mainly in literacy and numeracy, ICT and work-related learning. All of these initiatives were having an effect on the pupils and teachers, but in most cases the link between them and improvements in standards was difficult to discern.

## Literacy

- 227. The need to improve literacy in secondary schools was often identified in EAZ plans and deliberate programmes to pursue the aim were relatively common in the zones and schools visited. These programmes were usually established before the Key Stage 3 Strategy, with its focus on English and literacy across the curriculum, went national.
- 228. EAZs which funded programmes to improve literacy among secondary pupils enabled the schools to profit from the services of a centrally based literacy consultant, who provided training sessions for staff and worked alongside them in the classroom. The appointment of a literacy co-ordinator in the schools, funded by the EAZ, brought literacy matters to the attention of heads of department and teachers in all subjects, thus enabling them to understand the need for a concerted effort in all areas of the school's work to help pupils improve their reading and the quality of their writing.
- 229. The schemes worked best with the support and collaboration of the SEN co-ordinator, particularly where the latter held a key role in the literacy team. Pupils were supported best in secondary schools where all teachers worked together, seeing improvements in literacy as their joint responsibility and not as the sole preserve of the English department.
- 230. Work of depth and sustained quality was rare. Programmes tended to lack a comprehensive approach and were often slow to develop. The raising of awareness among subject departments was not always translated into practical action, and the action that was taken was often too slight in ambition, too small in scale and inconsistent in delivery to make a real difference.

## Information and communication technology

- 231. EAZs have invested heavily in the latest ICT equipment. Most secondary schools in zones now have good-quality equipment, although at the start of the project some zones spent money unwisely on equipment which was unreliable, incompatible with other systems, or unsuitable for school use. Others did not budget effectively for the running and repair costs. Few began by training teachers well enough for them to feel they could use the equipment confidently.
- 232. They have learned from these mistakes. A good appointment in the key role of ICT co-ordinator has frequently made the difference to the success of schools in the zone, particularly where the main focus was in-service training for staff. It is now common to see both pupils and their teachers using the Internet, computers and electronic whiteboards with increasing confidence in a range of subjects.

233. The availability of funding to furnish schools in the most deprived areas with modern equipment has brought a number of benefits. Not the least of these is the improvement to pupils' motivation. The quality of teachers' demonstrations and explanations has also been improved by better equipment and this often makes lessons more interesting. Pupils enjoy using technology to complete their tasks, rapidly become skilled in its use and find that it improves the presentation of their work. ICT competence has improved among pupils in zone secondary schools with the advent of the new equipment, but use of computers has not necessarily raised standards and extended pupils' knowledge and understanding in all subjects.

### Work-related learning

234. EAZs have enabled some secondary schools to make an appreciable difference to their curriculum in Key Stage 4, particularly through extending links with colleges and local businesses to provide more vocational courses and work-related opportunities for young people. These local schemes have picked up developments from elsewhere rather than been radical in themselves, but they have made a significant difference to the motivation and aspirations of those pupils involved.
235. Links with colleges, for example, have enabled pupils to spend time outside school acquiring practical skills, such as construction or catering, in which they can gain useful qualifications. Such courses are frequently worthwhile, but they are also expensive to run, and can only be sustained through EAZ funding. The schools themselves do not have the equipment or expertise to sustain them on site. The costs are often further increased by the need to supply an additional tutor or mentor, to enable pupils to catch up with work in the subjects they miss when at college.
236. Local businesses involved in the programmes have also extended the opportunities they provide to young people. In a number of cases, curriculum projects involving applications to the world of work have been developed. In others, employers have accepted pupils into part-time on-the-job training through which they can become qualified. Pupils often benefit a good deal from these opportunities. In one scheme, for example, disaffected pupils were given training and a chance to experience a range of work in a local factory and to explore how the work fits into the overall strategy of the company. The placement enabled pupils to gain National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in food hygiene, and held a guaranteed job for them when they left school on successful completion of the course.

## Conclusions

237. Initiatives sponsored by EAZs have had an effect on the lives of the pupils involved in them, principally by extending opportunities and increasing motivation. There have been a number of striking individual successes. However, the effect of the initiatives has generally not matched the ambitions set out in zone plans and has been modest in terms of effect on attainment.
238. The circumstances of zones has been different, but there have been common constraints on developments. One is that few zones have given sufficient priority to tackling low standards at Key Stage 3, and pupils need to make more progress in basic skills for there to be an overall rise in their achievements. Associated with this has been relatively weak links between developments in primary schools and those in secondary schools. Another problem is that the developments have not been strongly enough connected with other school improvement work, notably on the curriculum and teaching, in individual schools.



## Conclusions and recommendations

239. Overall the special funding programmes of EiC and EAZ are making a positive effect in schools in disadvantaged areas, but not comprehensively or consistently so.
240. In secondary schools they have had a good influence on the motivation, attitudes and self-esteem of pupils, and they have enabled more young people to benefit from a new range of opportunities. Their influence on pupils' attainment overall is more evident in primary than in secondary schools, although they must be viewed in the context of other school improvement strategies which are helping to raise standards.
241. Overall trends in improved performance conceal a very disparate picture from individual schools in both programmes. While some present a story of constant improvement, others have little to show in terms of performance for the money that has been spent. Standards in schools in disadvantaged areas are rising at a slightly faster rate than in all schools, but the gap between them is still too wide, particularly among older pupils. Low rates of attendance and high rates of exclusion, even where the special funding has made a difference, still give cause for concern.

### Attendance and attainment

242. There was a strong link between attendance and attainment in the schools in the survey. The six secondary schools that demonstrated either the lowest attendance or the greatest decline in attendance over the three years also showed the biggest reduction in average point score at GCSE over the same period. The vicious circle is clear: if pupils do not attend school they do not make progress; if the school does not help them to learn and achieve, they become disenchanted and do not attend.
243. It was therefore a matter of concern that, despite projects that targeted disaffected pupils in particular, some of which were highly successful for individuals, only around a third of the secondary schools in the survey had improved their attendance, while two thirds had not. Despite improvements, many secondary schools were still struggling with regular attendance rates well below 90%.
244. The same problem was evident in primary schools, whether in EAZs or in EiC. Not enough action was being taken to address poor attendance, whether through the work of learning mentors or in other ways.

## Form of the programmes

245. In general, the EiC programme has had more effect on raising standards and improving inclusion than the EAZ programme.
246. The EAZ programme was the more radical of the two. It invited groups of schools to form partnerships with other agencies, within and outside education, including local businesses, to form plans to tackle disadvantage in innovative ways, and to raise some of their own funding. EAZs were slow to become established. There were initial suspicions on the part of some LEAs and teachers about the government's motives. Partnerships often proved difficult to get off the ground or unwieldy to manage. Directors expended time and energy raising funds, recruiting and retaining central teams was often problematic, and the early management of zones was often weak. Early plans very often lacked shape, realism and overall direction. The spirit of innovation frequently meant that zones pursued too many initiatives without being clear enough about what they were intended to achieve. Too few of these initiatives tackled the real barriers to pupils' achievement and progress or did so in a deliberate way. Innovation was often not matched by rigour in planning, evaluation and dissemination.
247. Most zones have subsequently learned from their mistakes.
248. In contrast, the EiC programme was based on a few improvement strategies which were underpinned by clear written guidance and helpful dissemination conferences. The main strands focused on direct provision for particular groups of pupils. The partnerships were simpler, and LEAs had a clearer idea about their role. There were no complications for the partnerships about having to raise funds, which left them free to organise the strands and encourage collaboration between schools. Most of the additional funding was then delegated to the schools to implement the EiC strands.

## Implications for school management

249. One weakness was common to both schemes at their inception. There was not enough attention – and sometimes not any – to the implications of the schemes for management in schools. More attention has emerged as the schemes have developed.
250. Much of the success of the initiatives in schools relies on the quality of leadership and management. In primary schools this rests principally, although not exclusively, with the headteacher; in secondary schools it depends on having clear management structures and the right people in key roles to manage the initiatives effectively. The quality of teaching and pastoral care is, of course, crucial. It is essential that additional provision such as that sponsored by these programmes is carefully knitted with mainstream work to improve the quality of teaching and care. One important implication is that the successful introduction of new provision calls for thorough review of basic policy. This is the case, for example, in the introduction of learning support units or in the development of extended work-related learning in the Key Stage 4 curriculum. In short, new initiatives work best where they are fully integrated into the life of the school and with its systems.
251. This is not yet happening in all schools, and it shows in the amount of progress and improvement that they have made. A clear message emerges: to increase their effect, school improvement strategies need to improve the quality of leadership and management in city schools, so that there is an appropriate climate and structure in place for the school to make optimum use of the funding.

## Recommendations

252. In the context of these overall conclusions the **DfES** should consider:
- further simplifying the range of separate sources of funding and the rules attached to them, so that they are easier for LEAs and schools to access and work with
  - capitalising on the knowledge of which interventions work best in the light of experience, and providing guidance and training before implementation for those who are to run the programmes
  - making partnerships and schools more accountable for the success of intervention strategies
  - providing support for improving school management at all levels and raising the quality of teaching
  - providing further support to tackle poor attendance
  - providing clearer guidance for the establishment and running of learning support units in both primary and secondary schools.
253. **LEAs** should consider:
- how to modify their planning and management in order to take full advantage of EiC programmes, and enable schools to work together more productively
  - monitoring the success of EiC more rigorously and ensuring that the programmes are implemented effectively and that good practice is shared
  - giving the greatest possible priority to recruiting and developing the right headteachers, managers and strand leaders for city schools.
254. **EiC partnerships and EAZs** should consider:
- focusing on the major challenges and weaknesses in schools in their area and planning to tackle these as a first priority
  - improving ways of measuring success and ensuring that rigorous evaluation leads to improvement
  - building on the co-operation between schools to sustain the benefits of the programmes in the longer term
  - ensuring that additional funding is concentrated on improving pupils' performance
  - strengthening the connections between schools, agencies and other local service providers.

255. **Schools in the EiC** should consider:

- rigorous examination of data leading to action to raise the attainment of all pupils
- ensuring that learning support units give more attention to improving pupils' ability to learn and make progress, and that effective records are kept and used
- managing the work of learning mentors so that they are properly integrated into the work of the school
- ensuring that the gifted and talented programme is more than a series of enrichment activities, is properly co-ordinated and is embedded in the work of the school so that it benefits the quality of teaching for all pupils
- improving the identification of talented pupils and making more consistent and planned provision for them
- providing suitable initial and continuing training for teachers and mentors so that they all understand their roles and work together, and provide opportunities for all staff to learn from one another.

