**nfer LSE**

Excellence Clusters

# THE EVALUATION OF EXCELLENCE CLUSTERS:

## Third Interim Report

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the work undertaken by the NFER/LSE evaluation team since the previous interim report was written in March 2003. It focuses on the analysis of the school survey undertaken during the spring 2003 term.

## 1.1 School Survey 2003

The evaluation of Excellence Clusters (EC) has focused on the work of 11 Clusters: the first seven Clusters announced in October 2000 and the four Clusters announced in February 2001. All of these Clusters began operation in September 2001.

The first questionnaire survey of all schools in the 11 Clusters was undertaken at the beginning of 2002. Similar questionnaires were sent to all primary and secondary Cluster schools. The aim of the survey was to gain a picture of how the EC strategy was operating in individual schools, the impact on school processes, and senior management perceptions of the initiative. A second survey was carried out between January and March 2003, when schools were asked similar questions to those in the 2002 survey in order to facilitate the assessment of progress made during the past year.

It should be noted, however, that the schools responding to the 2003 survey were not identical to those responding in 2002, although there was of course an overlap between the two groups (see Table 1.1). It is not therefore possible to directly compare results, as a difference could simply reflect the inclusion of different schools. Where the analysis indicated a possible change, this was explored further by repeating the analysis for the subset of schools which had participated in both years.

**Table 1.1    Schools responding to the 2002 and 2003 surveys**

|  | Responding 2002 | Responding 2003 | Responding 2002 and 2003 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Primary Schools | 71 | 69 | 53 |
| Secondary Schools | 35 | 29 | 22 |

The broader picture presented by the survey data is considered alongside that built up from visits to Cluster schools and interviews with key Cluster personnel within the schools and at Cluster level (see Schagen *et al.*, 2003). The aim is to provide as complete a picture as possible of the development and progress of the initiative to date and to examine implications of the survey findings.

The impact of the broader context within which schools operate is an important consideration in a discussion of within-school processes. The EC initiative is part of the government drive to raise standards in schools in areas of disadvantage. Cluster schools are located in areas facing many and varied socio-economic problems. These include the loss of traditional local industries and employers, high and long-term unemployment, considerable poverty, poor health, high rates of crime and drug addiction, inadequate infra-structure, geographical and cultural isolation, and extremes of social mobility.

These socio-economic factors translate into considerable problems and barriers to learning within the schools. Whilst some problems arise from specific local conditions, others are the result of pupil and parental disaffection with education and a poor image of its value. These problems and issues were presented in detail in our previous report (Schagen *et al*., 2003) and are addressed here under relevant headings.

## 1.2    Structure of the Report

The findings from the 2003 school survey are discussed in the next seven chapters. Chapter 2 considers staffing, pupil intake and the specific issue of primary-secondary transfer. Chapter 3 looks at parental and community involvement, Chapter 4 at links with Beacon and Specialist Schools. Chapter 5 examines each of the four Clusters strands in turn. Chapter 6 considers the question of funding, and Chapter 7 the Pupil Learning Credits (PLC) initiative, in which some Cluster secondary schools are involved. Chapter 8 outlines respondents' views of the challenges and advantages of the Cluster initiative as a whole. Finally, Chapter 9 summarises the survey findings and outlines plans for the next and final stage of the evaluation.

## 2.     TEACHERS AND PUPILS

In order to inform an understanding of the context within which Cluster schools were operating, general background information with regard to staffing and pupils was requested on both primary and secondary questionnaires.

## 2.1     Staffing in Cluster Schools

Both primary and secondary schools were asked for information regarding the recruitment and retention of teaching staff.  This is a key area of concern for schools in deprived areas.  Because of falling birth rates and the exodus of young families from local areas, schools may face falling rolls and an uncertain future.  In such circumstances, schools may find it difficult to attract and/or retain staff.  Although survey respondents in both primary and secondary Cluster schools were asked for *overall* information regarding the recruitment and retention of staff, the general picture with regard to staffing will undoubtedly have an effect on the progress of the EC initiative within individual schools, an issue which is discussed at the end of this section.

### 2.1.1   Staff recruitment

Primary school respondents were asked for details about their full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching staff vacancies, the number of these vacancies that had to be advertised more than once, and the number of teachers leaving and joining the school the previous school year, i.e. during 2001/02.  Secondary schools were asked to indicate the number of FTE teacher vacancies across a range of key subject areas as well as the number of teachers leaving and joining the school within these subject areas.  These figures were combined to give an average figure for secondary school vacancies and for staff turnover.

### Primary schools

The primary school data from the 2003 survey indicates an average of 0.31 FTE staff vacancies, 0.13 of which had to be advertised more than once.  When the analysis was restricted to the schools which had responded to these questions in both years, the figures for 2003 were 0.13 and 0.1, compared with 0.47 and 0.37 in 2002.  This would seem to suggest that recruitment had become less problematic.  However, the same respondents reported that an average of 1.6 teachers had left the school, and an average of 1.53 teachers had joined.  Given that the questions referred to **current** vacancies, and to staff changes during 2001-2, it could be that there had been

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additional teacher recruitment during the first part of 2002-03 (the questionnaires were completed in the spring term). The other possible explanation is that the number of available posts had decreased.

**Secondary schools**

Reported secondary school vacancies in 2003 are summarised in Table 1.2. Compared with 2002, the number of vacancies appeared to have dropped across the full range of subjects. All departments either gained staff overall or gained and lost staff in equal numbers. Figures for mathematics, science, the humanities and ICT indicate a greater number of staff joining departments than leaving, and a balance in English and modern foreign languages.

Average figures were again compared for the schools which had responded to both surveys. This indicated that overall FTE vacancies were 1.5 in 2003, compared with 2.0 in 2002, yet the number of teachers leaving (average 5.5) was higher than the number joining (4.33). Possible explanations for the discrepancy are suggested above with reference to primary schools.

**Table 1.2      Teaching staff recruitment – Secondary Schools**

| Subject | Average number of current FTE vacancies | Number of teachers of this subject who left in previous year (2001/02) | Number of teachers of this subject who joined last year (2001/02) |
|---|---|---|---|
| English | 0.3 | 0.8 | 0.8 |
| Mathematics | 0.3 | 0.7 | 0.9 |
| Science | 0.2 | 0.7 | 1.1 |
| Modern Foreign Language | 0.2 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| Technology (excluding ICT) | 0.2 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| ICT | <0.1 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Humanities | <0.1 | 0.4 | 0.7 |
| All other subjects | 0.3 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| **Average** | **1.6** | **4.8** | **5.8** |

### 2.1.2  Staff retention

The EC schools surveyed were asked to rate the difficulty in retaining good quality staff over the previous three-year period. The primary schools were asked to provide

a general rating across the school as a whole, whereas secondary schools were asked to consider retention within subject areas.

In 2003, 45 of the 69 responding Cluster primary schools reported that the retention of good-quality staff over the previous three years had stayed about the same. Nineteen schools reported that it was becoming more difficult and only four schools reported that retention was becoming easier. The figures show little change over the two years of the survey.

The retention of good-quality staff in the secondary schools is a continuing problem. In 2003, half (14) of the 29 responding secondary schools reported that retention was becoming more difficult in all or most subjects and most other schools (11) reported that it was becoming more difficult in some subjects. Only three schools reported that retention was no more difficult than before; and only one school reported that it was becoming easier in some subjects (no schools reported that retention was becoming easier in all or most subjects).

The staffing of any initiative with high-quality staff is key to the success of its implementation. Difficulties in recruitment, the loss of good-quality staff and a high degree of staff turbulence will undoubtedly have an impact on the EC initiative, whether staff are recruited to EC positions from outside the school or from within. Recruitment or identification of staff for key EC positions has been a major problem for Cluster schools. Eleven of 71 primary schools responding to the 2002 survey and nine of 69 primary schools responding to the 2003 survey cited this as one of the main problems encountered with the EC initiative (see Section 8.1). It has previously been reported that progress in two Clusters had suffered because they had been unable to recruit and/or retain staff in key positions. Changes in school personnel were also seen as significant in affecting implementation of the initiative at school level (Schagen *et al.*, 2003).

## 2.2    Pupils

In order to provide an indication of the context in which they were operating, Cluster schools were asked for information on pupil applications and admissions to the school at main intake and at other times. The latter provided an indication of the casual intake of pupils. Schools were also asked to indicate the proportions of pupils availing themselves of further and higher education provision.

### 2.2.1  Applications and admissions

Data for responding Cluster primary schools indicates that the average Standard Number/Approved Admissions Number was 55 pupils in 2003.[1]  In both 2002 and 2003, the average numbers of pupils applying and admitted to the schools were below capacity.   In 2003, an average of 44 pupils applied (though the school concerned may not have been their first choice) and 42 were admitted.

Secondary school data indicates an average Standard Number/Approved Admissions Number of 183 in 2003.  The average number of pupils applying for entry was 228 with an average of 168 being admitted.  As in the primary schools, the number of pupils admitted was below school capacity, creating space for casual pupil admissions at other times during the school year.  It also confirms that the schools were not first choice for all applicants.

### 2.2.2  Casual Intake

As indicated in previous reports (see Schagen *et al.,* 2003) the deprived local context of the schools covered by the EC initiative translated into a variety of pupil issues. One of these was the mobility of the pupil population.  The high mobility of the local population, including the movement of young families out of the local areas, created problems of pupil turbulence within the schools and often, high casual intake figures. Some schools received large numbers of refugee children and the children of asylum seekers, some of whom had been traumatised by previous experiences.  These children may initially have poor English skills and many other children in EC schools come from families where English is not the first language.

To give an indication of the casual intake of pupils, primary and secondary schools were asked to report on the numbers of pupils of all age ranges entering or leaving the school at times other than as part of the main intake or at the normal leaving date.

In 2003, the average figures for the responding primary schools were 19 pupils entering and 17 leaving.  In the secondary schools, the average figures were 28 and 26 respectively, although, as secondary schools are much larger than primaries on average, this represented a smaller percentage of the school roll (3.9 per cent entered, and 3.4 per cent left; primary percentages were 7.4 and 6.7 respectively).  It should be noted that these average figures mask great variation between schools.  In secondary schools, the percentage entering ranged from zero to 12 per cent, and in primary

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[1]   In calculating this average, we excluded schools which had reported a Standard Number which was obviously too high.

schools from one to 26 per cent, with a corresponding variation in the proportion leaving.[2]

### 2.2.3 Further and higher education

An influence of deprivation in Cluster areas is a high rate of pupil and parental disaffection with education and a poor image of its value (Schagen *et al.,* 2003). Parents, pupils, and sometimes, teachers, may have low aspirations and expectations for/of pupils, and in such a context, progression to further education (FE) and higher education (HE) tends not to be the norm.

An increase in post-16 staying-on rates is a stated policy aim. Cluster secondary schools were asked to indicate the proportion of Year 11 pupils going on to post-16 education and, where applicable, Year 13 pupils going on to higher education.

The average proportion of secondary pupils availing themselves of FE provision was reported as 69 per cent in the 2003 survey, although the proportion in individual schools ranged from 40 per cent to 100 per cent. The percentage of Year 13 pupils going on to HE in 2003 was also 69 per cent, compared with 59 per cent in 2002. However, this figure is based on responses from just 11 schools (those with sixth forms), a different sample from those responding in 2002. It is therefore not possible to infer a change in attitudes to HE.

### 2.3   Primary-Secondary Transfer

Some Cluster schools were concerned about a decline in the achievement and attainment of pupils in Year 7. Two Clusters were giving special consideration to transition issues and highlighted this area of concern as a focus of the Tailored Strand. EC funds were enabling them to focus on transition issues in depth, to set up new procedures and formalise pre-Cluster arrangements. In some Clusters, Learning Mentors were playing, or were expected to play, a key role in primary-secondary transition (Schagen *et al*., 2003).

Evidence collected thus far suggests that Cluster mechanisms are fostering liaison between local schools in Cluster areas. The initiative is seen as having a positive impact on cross-phase continuity and progression arising as a natural consequence of the improved liaison between the schools that are part of local Clusters and between

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[2]   Some primary figures seem exceptionally high, and there is a possibility that one or more respondents failed to read the question properly, and included children entering/leaving as part of the main intake.

these and other schools in the local area.  To date, it appears as though this impact has largely been, and is expected to continue to be, on a more *informal* level.  Impact on *formal* transition activities was expected to be limited because such arrangements were largely in place in most schools before the initiative began, and because only two Clusters were specifically addressing the issue as part of the Tailored Strand.  In addition, the limited nature of many local Clusters and the large numbers of schools involved in the transition process, means that many local schools would not formally be part of specific Clusters although would probably benefit as the effects of the initiative spread from Cluster schools to others in the locality.  In other words, it was felt that being involved in the Cluster would have little impact on primary-secondary transfer unless transition was the specific focus of the Tailored Strand (Schagen *et al.*, 2003)

Primary schools were asked to report on the number of secondary schools to which their pupils transferred at the end of Year 6.  The average number was eight, but ranged from zero (at an infants school) to 62 schools.  The data indicates the large numbers of schools involved in the transition process and the need for arrangements to facilitate the effective transfer of pupils between phases.

In 2003, 59 of the 69 primary schools responding to the questionnaire reported special arrangements in place to facilitate the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school.  The most popular transition activities were:

♦   induction/taster days for pupils (mentioned by 57 schools)
♦   pupil visits between schools (56 schools)
♦   staff visits between schools (54 schools)
♦   involvement in cross-phase projects (35 schools)
♦   cross-phase working groups (17 schools).

Twenty-four primary schools reported 'other' arrangements such as organised visits by the secondary school's Learning Mentor (11 schools), secondary staff teaching in primary schools (three schools), and special events, such as sports events (three schools).

All but one of the 29 secondary schools reported special arrangements to facilitate transfer.  They confirmed that taster days for students and staff visits between schools were the most popular activities.  Collaborative cross-phase activities (mentioned by

22 schools) and joint summer/holiday projects (mentioned by 19 schools) were also popular.

## 3.    PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

During case-study work, Cluster schools reported a lack of parental and community support of their work (see Schagen *et al.,* 2003).  Part of the problem is community and parental disaffection with education and a poor image of its value, leading to poor attendance at parents' meetings, parentally-condoned pupil absences, a lack of commitment to homework, no tradition of helping pupils with educational activities, and low expectations and aspirations of/for local children.  Other problems stem from the fact that parents often have poor skills themselves and are unable, albeit willing, to help their children in their educational pursuits.

The involvement of parents and the local community in supporting schools was a key concern for a number of Clusters.  A focus on 'parents' and/or the 'family' is the second most popular focus for the Tailored Strand in both primary and secondary schools (Schagen *et al*., 2003).  Activities are designed to combat parental disengagement and increase parental involvement in, and support of, the child's learning.  Alongside the raising of parental awareness, specific attention has been directed towards the provision of workshops and other programmes for parents and families, and the development of family partnerships.

A 'community' focus for the Tailored Strand is ranked third amongst the secondary schools and fifth in the primary schools.  This focus includes the building of civic pride, addressing community change and turbulence, the identification and support of local community needs and the work of EC-appointed 'Community Development Workers'.

Questions in the 2002 and 2003 surveys sought information on the involvement of parents and the local community in the life and work of all Cluster schools as suggested by a range of indices likely to be applicable to most schools, for example, the proportion of parents attending parents' evenings and school provision for the local community.

### 3.1    Parental Involvement

In order to provide some indication of the involvement of parents in the life of the school, both primary and secondary schools were asked to report upon the proportion of parents attending parents' evenings, the percentage of parents completing home-

schools agreements and the whether the school had an active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or equivalent.

**Attendance at Parents' Evenings.**  Primary and secondary schools were asked to report on the percentage of parents attending parents' evenings to discuss their children with teachers, and for other events, for example, for information about subject choices.

In 2003, primary schools reported that 75 per cent of parents attended evenings to discuss their children with teachers, and 35 per cent attended for other events.  An analysis of schools responding both years indicated that average attendance at parent' evenings (for individual discussion) had increased from 75 per cent in 2002 to 79 per cent in 2003, but the numbers attending other events had decreased from 48 per cent to 36 per cent.

Responding secondary schools reported 68 per cent attendance at parents' evening to enable parents to discuss their own children with staff, and 59 per cent attending other events.  Again, for those responding to both surveys, there was an increase for parents' evenings (from 66 to 69 per cent) and a decrease in other events (62 to 59 per cent).

**Completion of Home-School Agreements.**  Responding primary schools reported an average 73 per cent of parents/carers completing home/school agreements or contracts.  In the secondary schools the proportion was 90 per cent.

**Active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Equivalent.**  The data from the responding primary and secondary schools indicate that just over half of the schools of each type had an active PTA (16 of the 29 secondary schools, and 36 of the 69 primary schools).

Case-study evidence suggests that the initiative has led to an increase in parental involvement in schools, especially those parents who might not be used to being in school because of their own past bad experiences.  As well as the Tailored Strand, the Learning Mentor strand is reported to be having a positive impact in this regard.  It is reported that LMs have been successful in increasing the involvement of parents in school life through a variety of strategies.  They have encouraged parental involvement at parents' evenings, held open coffee mornings for parents, have looked

at parenting skills and styles, and undertaken one-to-one sessions with parents and home visits (Schagen *et al.*, 2003).

## 3.2 Community Involvement

Primary and secondary school survey respondents were asked to give an indication of community involvement by providing details of school provision for the local area. Primary schools were asked about their involvement in a number of community-focused initiatives and the secondary schools were asked about their involvement with local employers.

### 3.2.1 Provision for the local community

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent of community involvement in the life of the schools. Schools were asked to indicate their provision of adult education courses, access to school facilities, e.g. ICT and sports facilities, and any other types of provision for the local community.

**Table 3.1      Provision for the local community – Primary & Secondary Schools**

| Provision to Community | Number of Primary Schools | Number of Secondary Schools |
|---|---|---|
| Adult basic skills classes | 27 | 9 |
| Other adult education | 19 | 14 |
| Access to ICT facilities/ providing ICT classes | 34 | 14 |
| Access to language labs/ Providing language lessons | 4 | 2 |
| Access to sports facilities | 23 | 25 |
| Access to music/arts facilities | 14 | 14 |
| Use of facilities by community groups | 36 | 21 |
| Other provision | 6 | 2 |
| **N =** | **69** | **29** |

In the primary schools, the most popular types of provision for the local community offered by approximately half of the responding schools was the use of school facilities by local groups (36 of 69 schools) and the provision of access to ICT facilities and classes (34 schools). At least a third of primary schools provided adult basic skills classes (27 schools) and access to sports facilities (23 schools). Over the two years of the survey, there was an apparent increase in the numbers of primary schools offering provision in most areas, but in particular in the number of schools

offering ICT access and lessons (up from 27 schools in 2002), and music/arts facilities (from eight to 14 schools).

The most popular types of provision offered by the secondary schools were access to sports facilities (offered by 25 of the 29 responding schools) and the use of school facilities by community groups (21 schools). Just under a half of all secondary schools (14) offered access to music/arts facilities, access to ICT facilities and classes, and adult education classes.

### 3.2.2  Involvement in community-focused initiatives

As a further indication of primary school involvement with the local community, schools were asked to indicate school or staff involvement in a range of community-focused initiatives, including Sure Start and Family Literacy.

The most frequently cited community-focused initiative for Cluster primary schools was Sure Start (28 of 69 schools). Involvement in Sure Start has apparently increased since 2002 when 14 of 71 schools reported participation; this may reflect the 'rolling out' of the programme over the period, although it needs to be remembered that the samples of schools were not identical. Twenty-three schools cited involvement in Family Literacy programmes, and 17 mentioned Early Years Development Childcare Partnerships. Eighteen schools reported being involved in a variety of other area- or neighbourhood-based initiatives, including the Children's Fund, literacy projects, parent initiatives and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). In contrast with 2002, there was no mention this year of involvement in Communities that Care, Single Regeneration Budget programmes, and Learning Towns and Cities (presumably because this initiative has since been discontinued).

### 3.2.3  Involvement with local employers

Secondary schools were asked to indicate the involvement of pupil year groups in a range of activities with local employers as an indicator of local business participation in the life of the school. Responses are summarised in Table 3.2.

As might be expected, the figures indicate the greatest involvement of employers with pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11, but with some schools providing work-related experiences for younger pupils, for example, project work and industry days. Employers are involved in a wide range of activities with schools.

**Table 3.2    Involvement with local employers – Number of Secondary Schools**

| Activity | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Year 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Work Experience | 1 | 0 | 0 | 21 | 15 |
| Extended work-related learning | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 22 |
| Project work | 7 | 7 | 13 | 12 | 10 |
| Mini-enterprise | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 5 |
| Mentoring | 0 | 1 | 6 | 10 | 14 |
| Industry Days | 2 | 3 | 12 | 4 | 6 |
| Mock Interviews | 0 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 20 |
| Other | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 |
| Non-response | 15 | 16 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| **N = 29** | | | | | |

The most widely reported activities for Year 9 pupils were project work, industry days and mentoring.  For Year 10 pupils the most frequently reported activities were work experience, extended work-related learning, project work, mock interviews and mentoring.   Extended work-related learning and mock interviews were the most frequency cited activities for Year 11 pupils, but mock interviews, work experience, mentoring and project work were also frequently mentioned.

Previous evidence suggests that, *in general terms*, the initiative, and especially the work of the Tailored Strand, was seen as positive in promoting the involvement of the local community in the schools.  The EC initiative was regarded as having an impact on the breaking down of barriers between schools and local communities.  It was felt that local communities were more aware of how schools operate and of the good work going on in schools.  This was perceived to have had a very positive impact in leading to renewed respect for the work of the schools and for the value of education. Improved links with local businesses were also reported (Schagen *et al*., 2003).  These improvements in community relations may be difficult to quantify.

## 4.    LINKS WITH BEACON AND SPECIALIST SCHOOLS

The philosophy underlining the EC initiative is the raising of standards by encouraging cooperation between local schools having to deal with similar issues and problems.  One of the great benefits of the programme is seen as the opportunity it provides for facilitating professional dialogue through the sharing of experience and good practice within and across school phases in local areas.  Indeed, the cooperation and collaboration of schools involved in the initiative has been a key feature of development and is seen as one of the greatest successes of the initiative (see Schagen *et al.*, 2003).

In an effort to address the issue of raising standards in disadvantaged areas, Clusters were required to include schools designated as 'more successful' in achieving good academic results under the same local conditions.  These may be Beacon Schools, Specialist Schools or schools with particularly good examination results.  The role of these schools within local Clusters is one that has developed over time although initial doubts as to the role they might play have persisted in some cases.  However, reports of positive relationships between these schools and other Cluster schools were emerging (see Schagen *et al.*, 2003).

The 2002 and 2003 surveys sought information on the overall extent of Cluster school involvement with Beacon and Specialist Schools (not necessarily part of their local Cluster) and the nature of the relationship.

In 2003, 22 of 69 primary schools reported links with (or as) a Beacon School, and 16 schools reported a relationship with a Specialist School.  These figures (particularly the latter) are much larger than those reported in 2002, so a more precise comparison was undertaken by restricting the analysis to schools responding to the questions in both years.  Of 50 schools responding to the question about Beacon partnerships, ten were involved in 2002, and 20 in 2003.  (Eight of the ten 2002 partnerships had continued, and a further 12 schools had formed new partnerships.)

Of 44 schools responding both years to the question about Specialist Schools, four reported a link in 2002, and ten (three of the four, plus seven additional schools) in 2003.  This confirms that the number of partnerships had indeed increased in the interim, although the evidence is insufficient to determine whether this development was influenced by the Cluster initiative.

As might be expected, the proportion of secondary schools involved in partnerships of this type was higher. In 2003, 13 of 29 schools reported Beacon links, and 14 schools reported a link with Specialist Schools. Of the 22 schools responding in both years, the number with Beacon links had increased from seven to nine schools, and the number with Specialist School links had increased from six to ten.

Where links between Cluster schools and Specialist Schools had been established, respondents were asked to indicate the types of activities in which they had been involved. Tables 4.1 present the data for all primary and secondary schools which reported such links in 2003.

**Table 4.1      Involvement in Specialist School Activities**

| Activity | Number of Primary Schools | Number of Secondary Schools |
|---|---|---|
| In-service training in specialist subjects | 4 | 7 |
| Specific ICT training | 6 | 6 |
| Additional classes for Gifted and Talented students | 6 | 7 |
| Additional literacy/ numeracy classes for low attainers | 3 | 4 |
| Provision of technical ICT support | 2 | 5 |
| Mentoring of staff | 1 | 5 |
| Curriculum support in specialist areas | 5 | 12 |
| Other | 2 | 3 |
| **N** | **16** | **14** |

The survey data indicates that Cluster schools – primary and secondary – are becoming increasingly involved in relationships with both Beacon and Specialist Schools and that the Specialist Schools are a valuable resource for the Cluster schools, offering activities which benefit both staff and pupils and which serve particular strands of the initiative, for example, additional classes for Gifted and Talented pupils.

## 5.    THE FOUR STRANDS

In this chapter we discuss each of the four Cluster strands in turn.

## 5.1    Gifted and Talented Strand

This section focuses on the Gifted and Talented Strand.  The following issues relating to the Strand were covered in the questionnaire survey:

- the number of students identified as Gifted and Talented in each year group
- background information on the Gifted and Talented Responsible Teacher or Coordinator
- the impact of the Strand on Gifted and Talented students and on the school as a whole.

These issues are explored in turn below.

### 5.1.1  Gifted and Talented Students

Table 5.1 illustrates the average percentage of gifted and talented students in each year group in all of the primary and secondary schools included in the survey.

**Table 5.1      The average percentage of Gifted and Talented students**

| Year Group | Average percentage of Gifted and Talented Students | Range of Gifted and Talented Students (Number) |
|---|---|---|
| **Primary** | | |
| 3 | 11 | 0-15 |
| 4 | 12 | 0-14 |
| 5 | 14 | 0-19 |
| 6 | 14 | 0-21 |
| **Secondary** | | |
| 7 | 10 | 0-58 |
| 8 | 12 | 0-61 |
| 9 | 12 | 7-68 |
| 10 | 12 | 7-73 |
| 11 | 12 | 6-76 |
| 12 | 7 | 0-39 |
| 13 | 10 | 0-33 |

Years 5 and 6 had the highest proportion of Gifted and Talented students, which was also the case in 2002.  Despite the DfES guidelines stating that the Gifted and Talented Strand in primary schools is particularly for Years 5 and 6, there were still

relatively high proportions of gifted and talented students in Years 3 and 4. Year 12 had the lowest average percentage of gifted and talented students.

## 5.1.2  Coordinating the Gifted and Talented Strand

A total of 62 primary and 28 secondary schools respectively reported that they had a designated Gifted and Talented Responsible Teacher or Coordinator in post, suggesting that in only a small number of cases had no appointment been made.

In primary schools, on average, Responsible Teachers had 15 per cent of their time dedicated to their work relating to the Gifted and Talented Strand (although the range was from zero to 100 per cent). Most Responsible Teachers (49) had other specific posts of responsibility, in some cases more than one. They included:

- 16 subject coordinators
- six deputy headteachers
- five heads of key stages
- five SENCOs
- four senior teachers
- four year group coordinators
- three ICT managers.

The picture was quite similar in secondary schools; on average, 17 per cent of gifted and talented coordinators' time was dedicated to the role (the range was four to 100 per cent). Again, most coordinators (23 of the 28 coordinators in secondary schools) had other responsibilities:

- 11 teachers with departmental responsibilities
- four deputy headteachers
- four class teachers
- others, including heads of year, SENCOs and work experience coordinators.

In primary and secondary schools, most Responsible Teachers and coordinators had been appointed in September 2001, from the outset of the Clusters initiative.

### 5.1.3 The Impact on Gifted and Talented Students

The 2003 questionnaire included a new question on the perceived impact of the Gifted and Talented Strand on students identified as gifted and talented (this was an open-ended question).  The most frequent responses were as follows:

- **Increased opportunities and an enriched curriculum.**  This was the most frequent comment made by respondents in primary (24) and secondary (16) schools.  For instance: '*It is a strong programme of enrichment*', '*expanding opportunities to students is central to their development*' and '*a wide range of enrichment opportunities have been taken up by our gifted and talented pupils*'.

- **Raised self-esteem**, mentioned by 13 primary schools and six secondary schools.  Being identified as gifted and talented was thought to help students develop their self-esteem and '*confidence to succeed*'.

- **Raised students' expectations**, mentioned by ten secondary and seven primary schools.  Being identified as gifted and talented was thought to '*raise* [students'] *expectations and aspirations*' in terms of what they could achieve.  One teacher said, '*it has helped to develop a "it's cool to achieve" culture*'.

- **Further development of skills and talents.**  Ten primary school staff suggested that being identified as gifted and talented meant students were able to develop talents further.  For instance, '*it has encouraged them to further develop, and be confident in sharing, their talents*'.

- **Students' awareness of their own capabilities**, mentioned by seven secondary and seven primary school respondents.  Comments included, '*It has had a great impact on recognising their own abilities*', '*pupils are clearer about personal strengths and areas for development through individual targets*'.

- **Increased motivation**.  Eight primary and five secondary schools commented on the increased motivation of students identified as gifted and talented.  In some cases, respondents felt this was because '*students like to be challenged*'.

- **Increased attainment**, mentioned by eight primary schools and four secondary schools.  For instance, as one primary school respondent said, '[the Gifted and Talented Strand] *raised Level 5 results in English and Maths in 2002*'.  Other primary teachers commented, '*certain pupils' attainment (writing) improved*' and '[Gifted and Talented] *resulted in the best SATs results ever*'.  One secondary school teacher said, '*it has improved GCSE A-C grades*'.

- **Tailored provision.**  Eight primary schools and four secondary schools were positive about the tailored provision for gifted and talented pupils.  As one respondent reported, '*activities have been matched more appropriately to pupils' abilities*'.

It is worth noting that a number of respondents said that it was still early days and the Gifted and Talented Strand was '*just beginning to have an impact*'.

### 5.1.4  The impact of the Gifted and Talented Strand on the school

The 2003 survey included a new question on the impact of the Gifted and Talented Strand on the school as a whole (another open-ended question).  The most frequent responses are summarised below:

- **Identification of gifted and talented pupils.**  By far the most frequent response, mentioned by 26 primary schools and 13 secondary schools, was that the Strand had raised awareness of gifted and talented which had helped to identify suitable students.  For instance, one secondary school teacher commented that, '*The school has a more carefully identified cohort and is able to provide more targeted support...*'.  A primary headteacher said, '[the Gifted and Talented Strand has] *raised awareness of just how talented our students are*'.

- **Increased opportunities and an enriched curriculum.**  As well as being an advantage for the students, respondents (16 primary and eight secondary schools) thought the Gifted and Talented Strand was positive for the school as a whole in terms of enriched provision, which was often open to students other than just those identified as gifted and talented.  A typical comment was, '*It has increased the range of opportunities for all children to develop skills and participate in a wider range of activities*'.

- **Staff training/improved teaching approaches.**  Fourteen secondary schools and seven primary schools mentioned that involvement in the Gifted and Talented Strand had led to improved teaching strategies in the school.  Comments included that the Strand had resulted in '*considerable steps forward in training and development of staff to provide challenge in lessons*'.

- **Raised expectations.**  Eleven primary schools and five secondary schools reported that the Gifted and Talented Strand had helped raise expectations in terms of what students could achieve.  As one primary school respondent commented, '*it has raised staff, pupil and parent expectations*'.

- **Increased differentiation.**  The identification of gifted and talented students had led to improved differentiation in classes (as mentioned by 12 secondary schools).  As one respondent said, '[the Gifted and Talented Strand] *improved match of task to ability in increasing numbers of classes*'.

Again, a number of respondents felt it was too early to comment on impact.

### 5.2  The Learning Support Unit Strand

The original intention of EC was that each Cluster would have a number of learning support units (LSUs), located in what partnerships agreed to be the most appropriate schools; other schools would have access to the provision  Survey respondents were therefore asked whether they had an LSU on site, or whether they had access to an LSU.  In the 2003 survey, 17 of the 29 secondary schools said that they had an LSU on site, and only two that they had access to an LSU elsewhere.  This is very similar

to the findings from the 2002 survey, and confirms the fact (also attested by case-study visits) that most LSUs are used exclusively by pupils from the schools where they are situated.

Schools were asked whether, pre-Clusters, they had a unit where pupils who needed particularly intensive support could spend some of their time. Of the 17 schools with an LSU on site, nine responded positively, suggesting that half of the Cluster LSUs were developed from existing provision.

Primary LSUs were much less common, and only two of the 69 schools responding to the 2003 survey had one on site. A further ten reported having access to an LSU. As the 2002 survey suggested, LSUs are relatively new to primary schools – only one 2003 respondent reported having a specialist unit before Clusters.

Those schools with an LSU on site were asked how many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff were employed in the LSU. For secondary schools, the average was 1.12 teachers (minimum 0, maximum 2) and 2.19 members of support staff (minimum 1, maximum 5). Both of the primary LSUs were staffed by one teacher, with either one or two members of support staff.

### 5.2.1  Patterns of attendance

Schools with an LSU on site, and those with access to an LSU, were asked how many of their pupils had attended the LSU during the school year 2001-02 (the last full year before the 2003 survey). For secondary schools, the mean number of pupils attending from each year group is shown in Table 5.2, together with the range. It should be noted that the range is wide, with the total numbers attending ranging from 0 to 80.

**Table 5.2      The average number of pupils attending LSU**

| Year Group | Average number of LSU pupils | Range of LSU pupils |
|---|:---:|:---:|
| 7 | 6 | 0-25 |
| 8 | 7 | 0-24 |
| 9 | 9 | 0-26 |
| 10 | 4 | 0-12 |
| 11 | 3 | 0-18 |
| **Overall average** | **28** | **0-80** |

*Due to rounding, the average numbers do not sum to the overall average*

Of the two schools that reported having access to an LSU, one school did not actually send any pupils there during the school year 2001-02. The other sent just two Year 11 pupils, and reported that the impact on them had been *'limited'*. This confirms case-study findings that genuinely 'shared' LSUs are rare in Clusters, and perhaps not entirely successful (see Schagen *et al.,* 2003).

Of the 17 schools with an LSU on site, two reported that their LSU has only recently opened, and therefore they could not report figures for 2001-02. At the other schools attendance varied considerably, in terms of overall pupil numbers and of the year groups from which they were drawn. Two LSUs were used exclusively by key stage 3 pupils, and in several other LSUs there were relatively few pupils from Years 10 and 11. By contrast, two LSUs were apparently attended only by Year 11 pupils (two pupils in one case, eight in the other).

The two primary schools with an LSU on site varied in terms of the number of pupils attending the LSU: at one school, 29 pupils attended during the 2001-02 school year, at the other school, only ten. In both cases, the children were drawn from the whole of key stage 2, although at the former school, two thirds of the 29 children were from Years 5 and 6.

Of the ten schools reporting access to an LSU elsewhere, only two made use of the facility, and both sent a single pupil to the LSU (one from Year 5 and one from Year 6). The Year 5 pupil spent '25 weeks or more' at the LSU, and the respondent reported *'limited success'*. The Year 6 pupil attended for 'one day or less', and yet the respondent reported a positive impact on the pupil concerned (*'It raised the girl's self-esteem and reduced negative attention seeking behaviour'*) and on the school as a whole (*'Improved classroom working environment'*).

Scrutiny of the relevant questionnaires confirmed that most schools reporting access to an LSU did not use it, and may not perhaps have understood what the question was seeking to establish. Two respondents noted on their forms that they had *'access to staff expertise – not to the unit itself'*. It seems that several primary respondents were thinking in terms of an LSU based in the secondary school to which their pupils would ultimately transfer, rather than one to which their present pupils could be referred. One wrote on the questionnaire that Year 6 pupils had **visited** an LSU as part of their work on transition. Another noted that the LSU had only just opened in the feeder secondary school, and went on to talk about the positive impact which this would have on pupils **in the future**.

**Table 5.3     Average length of time pupils attended LSU**

|  | Primary Schools | Secondary schools |
|---|---|---|
| One day or less | 2 | 5 |
| Between two days and a week | 1 | 8 |
| 2-6 weeks | 1 | 8 |
| 7-12 weeks | 1 | 8 |
| 13-24 weeks | - | 7 |
| 25 weeks or more | 1 | 6 |
| **N =** | **12** | **19** |

Schools were asked how long pupils tended to spend in the LSU. The responses, for both primary and secondary schools, are summarised in Table 5.3. It is clear that there was no standard pattern, and that, within individual LSUs, the amount of time could vary, presumably in accordance with pupils' needs.

Schools were also asked whether pupils most commonly attended the LSU part-time, full-time, or a combination of both. Of the 19 secondary schools, seven said part-time and 11 a combination. (The school which had 'access' to an LSU, but did not use it, marked this and other questions as not applicable.) Of the 12 primary schools, two said part-time, two full-time and one a combination. The other seven did not respond, reflecting the fact that they did not actually make use of 'accessible' LSUs.

### 5.2.2 The impact of LSUs

Respondents were asked what impact they felt the LSU work had had on the pupils attending, and on the school as a whole. Secondary respondents described the impact of the LSUs on pupils attending in terms of:

♦ positive influence on behaviour: '*Work on behaviour and anger management has meant that a number of pupils have returned to school full-time*'

♦ successful reintegration

♦ preventing exclusion

♦ tailoring provision to pupils' needs: '*providing a positive and supportive environment to meet the specific needs of pupils both emotionally and educationally*'

♦ encouraging / supporting pupils: '*less stress, greater achievement and more confidence*'

♦ educational improvements: '*pupils can work on and be more successful in curriculum areas previously found difficult*'

- improved attendance / punctuality.

Again, there were relatively few responses from primary schools, reflecting their limited experience of LSUs. Those who did respond mentioned positive impacts related to self-esteem, motivation, independence and improved attitudes.

The impact of LSUs on schools was described by secondary respondents in terms of:

- improved provision: '*prompted new approaches to teaching and learning*'
- decrease in exclusions: '*reduced temporary and permanent exclusions, quite significantly*'
- pressure taken off teachers: '*gives teachers the support and security they need in their working with some particularly difficult pupils*'
- improved behaviour: '*removed disruptive influences from mainstream groups, enabling them to succeed*'.

## 5.3 The Learning Mentor Strand

As in the 2002 survey, schools were asked how many full-time and part-time Learning Mentors (LMs) they had in post. Twenty-six of the 29 secondary schools reported LMs (part-time or full-time) funded by EC, and nine said that they had LMs funded by other sources. Thirteen of the schools had one EC-funded LM, 12 schools had 2-5, and one school claimed to have 20.

Fifty-seven of the 69 primary schools had at least one learning mentor (full-time or part-time) funded by EC. Most of these schools had one EC-funded LM, but 11 schools had two and two schools had three. Nine primary schools reported that they had one or two LMs funded by other sources.

Schools were also asked whether, pre-Clusters, any staff had dedicated time to mentor students. Positive responses were received from half (14) of secondary respondents and just nine of the primary schools. These figures are consistent with the findings from the 2002 survey.

### 5.3.1 Background and deployment of LMs

Respondents were asked to indicate the background(s) of their LMs. Those most frequently mentioned for secondary schools were learning support/teaching assistants (mentioned by 16 schools), youth work (ten schools), counselling (eight schools) and teaching (six schools). As in the 2002 survey, the majority had a school background.

This was also the case in primary schools, where 42 respondents reported former Learning Support Assistants as mentors, compared with no more than nine reporting any other category.

Schools were asked what approach they had adopted to the deployment of LMs. The picture indicated by responses was similar to that obtained in the 2002 survey and on case-study visits to schools. All (26) of the secondary schools with LMs reported that they did targeted work with individual pupils; in addition, 16 worked with specific groups, and ten offered drop-in access. The primary pattern was very similar, with drop-in access more common than in 2002.

### 5.3.2  The impact of LMs

Respondents were asked what impact they thought the Learning Mentors had had on (a) the pupils mentored and (b) other pupils in the school. With reference to the pupils mentored, the most frequent responses from secondary schools were in terms of:

♦ feeling supported / encouraged: '*mentees feel understood and a bit special*'

♦ raised self-esteem

♦ improved attendance

♦ educational improvements: 'very positive [impact] – especially C-D borderline at GCSE'.

One respondent commented:

> *Support has been available for those pupils not catered for by other support mechanisms within the school. It has been especially effective with pupils with personal issues and looked after children. The work of the mentor has to be flexible as these issues are often unforseen* [sic] *and have an extended timescale.*

Another respondent described the LM as a '*person to turn to for advice',* who offered '*specific, direct, individual support and intervention on a supportive and non-judgemental basis'.* A third spoke of the *special links forged between home and school'* by the LM.

A number of respondents noted that *'a lot of pupils express a desire to be mentees when they see peers being mentored'.* This confirms observations made by interviewees during case-study work.

Primary respondents also spoke of increased self-esteem (25), improved attendance (19) and pupils feeling supported / encouraged (17). In addition, they referred to improved behaviour (15), greater confidence (eight) and improved relations with pupils' families (eight). It should be noted that there is a considerable overlap between these impacts and those attributed to LSUs (see previous section).

The question about the impact of LMs on other pupils in the school elicited similar responses from primary and secondary schools. A number of respondents from both phases (four secondary, 24 primary) stressed that LM provision was available to *all* pupils: *'all pupils may access the mentoring strand through the drop-in'*. The fact that LMs were available to work with difficult pupils meant that there was less disruption elsewhere (four secondary, 15 primary) and resulted in a general improvement in the school's ethos (four secondary, 15 primary).

Overall response to the Learning Mentor Strand was extremely positive (one headteacher, in response to the question about the impact of LMs, wrote simply *'Huge! Positive!'*). Again, this accords with the very enthusiastic comments made by interviewees during case-study work (see Schagen *et al.,* 2003). However, a few were more cautious, particularly with reference to the impact on the school as a whole (*'not clear as yet',* said one respondent; another wrote simply *'none'*).

## 5.4    The Tailored Strand

The Tailored Strand allows scope for flexibility, enabling Clusters to design provision to meet specific local needs and circumstances. The main focus for each Cluster's provision is determined at partnership level to reflect the needs of their schools and, as discussed in earlier reports, the work being undertaken is very diverse. Individual Clusters were focusing on a number of areas, including:

- ♦  curriculum/teaching and learning
- ♦  parents/family
- ♦  specific subjects
- ♦  cultural/community.

In most Clusters the focus of the Tailored Strand was the same across all participating schools; however, there were a few cases where primary and secondary schools had chosen to concentrate on different areas of need. An example of this was a Cluster

where the primary schools' focus was on partnership with parents and the community, while secondary schools were focusing on independent learning and the use of vocational GCSEs. Another Cluster had identified two foci for the Tailored Strand and schools had chosen to follow one of them, with the intention of changing to the other in the second year.

### 5.4.1  Schools' recent involvement in the strand

For the 2003 survey, schools were asked about their recent involvement in the Tailored Strand and any activities undertaken so far. A wide range of activities was undertaken in both primary and secondary schools (Tables 5.4 and 5.5) and they tended to be quite different, although a proportion of both types of schools reported that they aimed at increasing home-school liaison and communication with parents.

**Table 5.4     Primary schools' involvement in Tailored Strand**

| Involvement/activity | Primary Schools |
| --- | --- |
| Staff training | 15 |
| Attendance-related activities | 13 |
| Problem-solving activities | 13 |
| Theatre/arts visits | 12 |
| Cultural enrichment | 9 |
| Appointment of staff | 8 |
| Home/school outreach | 7 |
| Workshops for parents | 7 |
| Visits of artists/performers to school | 6 |
| Transition | 6 |
| Literacy/numeracy | 5 |

**N=69**

*A multiple response question; schools could report more than one activity.*

Staff training, attendance-related activities, problem-solving activities and theatre and arts visits were the most often reported activities in primary schools. A smaller number of schools reported activities related to cultural enrichment and visiting artists, transition, home-school liaison and workshops for parents and literacy and numeracy. It should be noted that appointing staff still featured in the activities, suggesting that the Tailored Strand is only now becoming fully operational. Other responses were in small numbers, some relating to curriculum development or to specific events, while others involved raising parents' awareness and supporting individual groups of students.

As 53 of the primary schools surveyed had returned questionnaires in both 2002 and 2003, it was possible to make a direct comparison between their responses year on year and these indicate how schools have developed their Tailored Strand activities. There was a marked decrease in the number of schools reporting planning and preparation of materials for Tailored Strand activities, although the appointment and training of staff was ongoing in a number of schools. Increases in activities undertaken by schools can be grouped into four distinct areas relating to:

♦ raising attainment

♦ curriculum enrichment

♦ home/school relationships

♦ attendance.

The most often mentioned activities in secondary schools related to curriculum enrichment opportunities. These activities, which were wide-ranging and included environmental and arts projects, summer schools and festivals, poetry writing workshops and theatre visits, as well as thinking skills, are listed in Table 5.5. Staff training and parental liaison through the employment of neighbourhood enrichment officers were also key activities that were enhanced through the Tailored Strand.

**Table 5.5     Secondary schools' involvement in Tailored Strand and activities**

|                                          | Secondary Schools |
| ---------------------------------------- | ----------------- |
| Curriculum enrichment                    | 9                 |
| Staff training                           | 4                 |
| Thinking skills                          | 4                 |
| Neighbourhood enrichment officer visits  | 4                 |
| Transition                               | 3                 |
| Network learning community               | 3                 |
| Trips                                    | 3                 |
| **N=29**                                 |                   |

*A multiple response question; schools could report more than one activity.*

Many schools gave very individual responses to this question, some were about raising the attainment of specific groups of students and others aimed to involve parents or the community in the life of the school.

Twenty-two of the secondary schools returned survey questionnaires in both 2002 and 2003 and, as in the primary schools, staff training remained at a similar level over both years. Although numbers were small, there was some evidence of the secondary schools moving on from the previous year since there were increases in the following activities:

- curriculum enrichment
- thinking skills and study skills
- involvement in community activities.

### 5.4.2 Ability of Tailored Strand activities to meet schools' needs

Teachers were asked an open-ended question about the extent to which they thought the Tailored Strand would meet the needs of their schools. In 2003, 20 of the primary schools and 12 of the secondary schools said that the Tailored Strand would meet their needs completely/fully, or would have a great/significant impact. As one secondary school headteacher commented:

> *It will fully meet the needs of our school because the project has been designed with the work of the relevant departments at the heart of it but with their involvement and commitment.*

Schools referred to specific contributions that the Tailored Strand would make to meeting their needs, for example, 16 primary schools and six secondary schools mentioned the provision of support and resources in areas of need. As one primary school headteacher commented *'we can identify individual's needs and make progress towards meeting them'*.

Raising parents' awareness and getting them involved in communicating with the school was an area of concern that the Tailored Strand was able to address. Primary schools, in particular, considered this to be an important activity (14 responses). A primary headteacher remarked that because of the strand: *'Immediate follow-up and response via telephone or home visits* [is] *now possible, therefore* [we are] *able to deal more efficiently with situations where parent contact is needed'*.

### 5.4.3 The impact of the Tailored Strand

Schools were asked to report on the impact of the Tailored Strand. The most frequent responses from both primary schools and secondary schools are shown in Table 5.6.

**Table 5.6  Impact of Tailored Strand to Date**

| Impact | Primary Schools | Secondary Schools |
|---|---|---|
| Home/school links improved | 18 | 3 |
| Enriched opportunities/expertise | 10 | 5 |
| Thinking skills impacting on learning | 9 | 0 |
| Improved attendance/punctuality | 8 | 2 |
| Transition improved | 7 | 4 |
| Cultural awareness | 7 | 1 |
| Improved student motivation | 4 | 5 |
| Staff development | 4 | 1 |
| Improved teaching/learning strategies | 4 | 3 |
| Improved attainment | 2 | 5 |
| N= | 69 | 29 |

*A multiple-response question: schools could indicate more than one impact.*

Both primary and secondary schools reported that the Tailored Strand had provided enrichment opportunities for pupils, had improved transition and motivation, and had supported the development of teaching and learning methods.  Primary schools particularly emphasised home-school links, cultural awareness, thinking skills and improved attendance/punctuality.

It should be noted, however, that while some respondents described the impact of the Tailored Strand as *'considerable', 'significant'* or *'very positive'*, a few (two primary, three secondary) said that the Strand had had no impact, or limited impact (*'less than other strands'*), and a few others did not respond, implying perhaps that they could not identify any impact.  Further, 12 primary schools and two secondary schools said that it was too soon to comment on the impact.  Some of these schools had only begun to implement new strategies from the beginning of the present academic year and had not yet evaluated a whole year's response.

As mentioned earlier, the focus of the Tailored Strand in primary and secondary schools in the same Cluster sometimes differed and inevitably the two sectors reported different impacts.  For example, primary schools remarked upon the impact of the Tailored Strand on improving home/school links, thinking skills and pupil behaviour.  Secondary schools reported a positive impact of the Tailored Strand had been to provide them with the opportunity to develop new strategies and enhance students' experiences.  An improvement in student attainment was also noted by some

teachers, although there was some reluctance to directly attribute this to the initiative, until the evidence could be carefully assessed.

Overall, schools appeared to be relatively happy with the Tailored Strand and indicated that they valued the opportunity to design activities that responded directly to the needs of their school and community.

## 6. THE FUNDING OF CLUSTERS

The funding for the Excellence Cluster programme reaches schools through the Standards Fund via their LEA. This chapter examines how EC funds were used by participating schools, for the four strands. The information used is based on survey responses from the school surveys conducted early in 2003. Where appropriate, comparisons are made with the first round of surveys carried out in 2002.[3]

### 6.1 Use of Excellence Cluster Resources at School Level

Survey schools were asked how they had used resources allocated for each of the four EC Strands. Respondents were also asked whether, as a result of funding for each strand, resources had been 'freed' to be spent elsewhere in the school and, on the other hand, whether resources from the main school budget had supplemented Cluster funding.

### 6.1.1 Gifted and Talented Strand

Schools were asked what percentage of funds allocated through the Gifted and Talented Strand had been budgeted to be spent on a range of items such as additional management points, salaries, in-service training and teaching materials. A total of 48 primary schools (out of 69) and 21 out of 29 secondary schools provided usable information; their responses are presented in Table 6.1.

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[3] Comparisons between the 2002 and 2003 survey schools have to be interpreted with a degree of caution as the sample of schools was not identical, we therefore refer to changes in reported budget shares rather than 'increases' or 'decreases'.

**Table 6.1    The distribution of Gifted and Talented funds (2002-03)**

| Allocation of funding | Average percentage of G&T funds allocated in *primary* schools | Average percentage of G&T funds allocated in *secondary* schools |
|---|---|---|
| Teachers salaries or supply cover | 40 | 22 |
| Teaching materials | 15 | 22 |
| Salary points to the responsible teacher/coordinator | 18 | 18 |
| Out-of-school activities | 16 | 18 |
| INSET | 8 | 15 |
| Other* | 4 | 6 |
| **N** | **48** | **21** |

*Percentages may not always sum to 100 because of rounding.*
*The Ns in the table refer to the number of respondents who provided a complete breakdown of expenditure. Ns are less than 69 and 29 respectively for primary and secondary schools as not all respondents answered this question .*
*\*Such as funding additional workshops, extra lessons, transport or consumables.*

As can be seen, the largest difference between primary and secondary schools related to the average proportion of Gifted and Talented funding spent on teachers' salaries or supply cover: 40 per cent for the primary schools compared with 22 per cent for the secondary schools. The average proportion of funds budgeted by schools to be spent on specialist teaching materials was 15 per cent and 22 per cent respectively. Salary points to responsible teachers (in primary schools) and coordinators (in secondary schools) accounted for just under a fifth of Gifted and Talented funds in each case. Secondary schools spent a larger proportion of their funds on In Service Training (INSET) compared to primary schools, 15 per cent versus eight per cent.

Overall, the breakdown of how Gifted and Talented funds had been spent at school level corresponded closely with the findings from the 2002 school survey. The most noticeable difference was the reduced share of salary points to responsible teachers and coordinators: in 2002 this item (for the sample of schools that responded to this question) made up 24 per cent of overall expenditure in primary schools and 25 per cent in secondary schools, in 2003 both school types reported the average budget share for additional salary points as 18 per cent. It is important to keep in mind that sample schools were not identical, therefore caution needs to be exercised in interpreting these findings.

Headteachers were asked whether the resources from the Gifted and Talented Strand had enabled resources to be freed to be spent elsewhere. Six of the 69 primary school

respondents reported that Gifted and Talented funding had freed up other resources, while 44 stated that no resources had been freed up (19 respondents did not answer this question). In secondary schools, four of the 29 respondents reported resources had been freed and 21 reported they had not (four did not reply).[4]

By way of contrast, comparatively more schools reported using resources from the main school budget to assist with funding the Gifted and Talented Strand – 16 primary schools and nine secondary schools.[5] For the 15 primary schools and eight secondary schools which provided details of the amounts, the average was £1,100 (range: £300 to £3,000) for primary schools and £4,100 (range: £500 to £10,000) for secondary schools.

### 6.1.2  Learning Mentors

In the 2003 survey, respondents were asked what percentage of funds allocated through the Learning Mentor Strand had been budgeted for salaries, training and other items in the financial year 2002/2003. Their responses are shown in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2      Expenditure of Learning Mentor funds (2002-03)**

| **Expenditure** | **Mean percentage of LM funds Primary schools %** | **Mean percentage of LM funds Secondary schools %** |
|---|---|---|
| Salaries or supply cover | 84 | 88 |
| Training | 6 | 7 |
| Other* | 10 | 6 |
| **N** | **46** | **23** |

*Percentages may not always sum to 100 because of rounding.*
*Ns are less than 69 and 29 respectively for primary and secondary schools as only schools where percentages add up to 100 are included.*
*\* Such as materials and other resources.*

In both primary and secondary schools, most of the funding was reported to be budgeted for salaries and supply cover.

Comparing the results above with those obtained from the 2002 school survey shows the same overall picture. The most noticeable difference compared with the 2002

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[4]     For those schools which reported resources having been released as a result of G&T funds, the mean amount for primary schools was £4,600 (range £300 to £12,000 – rounded to the nearest £100) and for secondary schools £10,700 (range £3,000 to £29,000).

[5]     Forty-one primary schools reported no resources from the main school budget had been used to assist with the G&T Strand and 12 did not provide details. Thirteen secondary schools reported no resources from the main school budget had been used to assist with the G&T Strand and seven did not provide details.

survey was that in 2003 a larger share of the budget was allocated to salaries and supply cover in secondary schools: in 2002 secondary schools (that responded to the survey and answered this question) reported that 76 per cent of the LM budget was allocated to salaries and supply cover, in 2003, for the schools that responded, this figure was 88 per cent.  Commensurately smaller budget shares were reported for training and 'other' expenses such as materials and resources.

As a result of the Learning Mentor Strand, four primary schools and three secondary schools reported that resources had been freed to be spent elsewhere in the school.[6] The average sum was £4,100 for primary schools (range: £800 to £10,000) and £23,800 for secondary schools (range: £10,000 to £46,400).

A fairly high proportion of respondents, both in the primary and in the secondary sector, reported that resources from the main school budget had been used to assist with the funding of Learning Mentors: 19 out of 69 primary schools and 10 out of 29 secondary schools.[7]  For the 18 primary and nine secondary schools that provided details, the mean amount of money used to supplement the Learning Mentor Strand was around £5,000 for primary and £8,305 for secondary schools (ranging from £600 to £26,000 and £750 to £25,000 respectively).

### 6.1.3  Learning Support Units

In the 2003 survey, two primary schools and 17 secondary schools reported that they had a Learning Support Unit on site (see Section 5).  These schools were asked what percentage of funds allocated through the Learning Support Unit Strand had been budgeted to be spent on a range of items such as salaries, ICT hardware, specialist teaching materials and training.  Two primary schools and nine secondary schools provided usable information.  The two primary schools reported budgeting almost all their LSU funds on salary and supply cover.[8]  The responses for the secondary schools that provided information (nine of the 17 with LSUs) are given in Table 6.3.

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[6]  Forty-nine primary schools reported that no resources had been freed and 15 did not provide information.  Twenty-two secondary schools reported that no resources had been freed and four did not provide information.

[7]  Thirty-eight primary schools reported that they had not used other resources to supplement the LM Strand and 12 did not provide information.  Fifteen secondary schools reported that they had not used other resources to supplement the LM Strand and four did not provide information.

[8]  Ninety-eight and 90 per cent respectively.

**Table 6.3      Expenditure of LSU funds (2002-03)**

| Expenditure | Mean percentage of LSU funds secondary schools % |
|---|---|
| Salaries or supply cover | 85 |
| ICT hardware | 6 |
| Specialist teaching materials | 5 |
| Behaviour management training | 2 |
| Capital expenditure (not ICT) | 2 |
| **N** | **9** |

*N is less than 29 as the question was only applicable to 17  secondary schools with LSUs.*
*Only the nine secondary schools where  percentages add up to 100 are included.*

Comparing the table above with the findings from the 2002 survey (i.e. those schools that responded to the survey and provided relevant information) the budget share for salaries and supply cover was higher (85 per cent versus 78 per cent in 2002).

Neither of the two primary schools with an LSU on site reported that the LSU had freed up resources to be spent elsewhere in the school.  Two of the secondary schools reported that the LSU had freed up resources; one reported that the LSU had 'freed up' £4,000.[9]

However, a high proportion of schools with an LSU on site reported that other resources had been used to assist with funding the LSU: the two primary schools with LSUs and 12 of the 17 secondary schools with LSUs on site said they had supplemented the LSU funds.  Eleven secondary schools provided information on the actual amounts, averaging £17,200 (range: £1,975 to £50,000).[10]  This fairly high level of financial assistance to the LSU strand had also been reported in the 2002 school survey, possibly pointing to the resource-intensity of the strand or the fact that it was considered worthwhile by participating schools.

### 6.1.4  Tailored Strand

As the Tailored Strand is designed to give individual LEAs the freedom to decide their own focus, we could not ask a question on how the funds were divided between different budget headings in a general questionnaire.  However, we were still interested in whether the Tailored Strand 'freed up' resources or whether other resources were used to supplement it.

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[9]     The other school did not provide information on the amount.
[10]    The two primary schools with LSUs on site reported having contributed an additional £2,000 and £20,500 respectively from other sources to assist with funding the LSU.

Seven primary schools and four secondary schools stated that as a result of the Tailored Strand resources had been freed to be spent elsewhere in the school.[11] The five primary schools which provided data reported average amounts of £1,140 (range: £200 to £3,500); for the three secondary schools that provided details the average was £11,500 (range £4,000 to £26,400).

By way of contrast, comparatively more schools reported supplementing the Tailored Strand with other school resources: 17 primary schools and ten secondary schools.[12] The mean amounts, provided by 16 primary and the nine secondary schools, were £2,300 (range: £300 to £20,000) for the primary and £10,700 (range: £500 to £30,000) for the secondary schools.

Last year's survey observed that although only very few schools reported that Cluster funding had freed resources to be spent elsewhere in the school, slightly more schools reported that the Tailored Strand had freed resources compared with the other three strands. This trend was no longer observed in the 2003 survey which might be an indication that after a comparatively slower start, the Tailored Strand is now being implemented in line with the three core strands.

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[11]   Forty-three primary schools reported that no resources had been freed and 19 did not provide details; 21 secondary schools reported no resources had been freed and four did not provide details.

[12]   Forty-one primary schools reported that they had not used other resources to supplement the Tailored Strand and 11 did not provide information. Thirteen secondary schools reported that they had not supplemented the Tailored Strand and six did not provide information.

## 7.    PUPIL LEARNING CREDITS

Pupil Learning Credits (PLCs) were launched in the 2001 Green Paper, *Schools: Building on Success* as a two-year pilot initiative.  Funding was provided from September 2001 to March 2003, and the initiative has since been discontinued.  However, schools may have organised a programme of activities for the whole 2002-03 school year.

In the Green Paper, the government set out its strategy for providing dedicated funding to help disadvantaged young people *'to access education as the key way out of poverty'*.  In particular, the purpose of the initiative was:

> *To pilot a means of targeting funding to individual pupils whose own social circumstances are exceptionally challenging.  Pupil Learning Credits will provide the secondary schools which these pupils attend with extra funding, to enable the schools to offer them, both within the school day and outside it, the kind of opportunity that many more advantaged pupils take for granted: extra music tuition, museum and theatre visits, as well as extra support in the core curriculum if it is necessary.  (DfEE, 2001)*

The initiative was piloted in 260 schools in 24 Excellence in Cities and six Excellence Cluster areas from September 2001.  It enabled schools to provide additional learning opportunities for students in the key stage 3 (11-14 age group) who had particularly difficult social circumstances.  The key policy objectives of the initiative were:

♦ to enhance the learning experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may have limited access to enrichment activities and

♦ to provide the schools concerned with flexibility in how they allocate these additional resources, both within and outside the school day.

As the latter point suggests, the DfES left decisions on the most appropriate way of using resource allocation to the schools, acknowledging that they have specific knowledge and understanding of their student cohort, and of their needs.

Fifteen of the 260 PLC pilot schools were in Excellence Clusters. The survey questionnaire therefore asked secondary schools about their use of PLC grant allocation in the academic year 2002-2003.  Eight of the 29 schools that completed a questionnaire reported that they were involved in the Pupil Learning Credits initiative.

## 7.1 Students Receiving PLC Funding

Cluster schools were asked the approximate percentages of students in each of the year groups, Year 7 to Year 11, who would be involved in activities wholly or partly funded by this initiative. Table 7.1 shows the average percentages in the eight schools that responded.

**Table 7.1    Percentage of Students Involved in PLC-funded Activities**

| Year Group | % |
| --- | --- |
| Year 7 | 62 |
| Year 8 | 61 |
| Year 9 | 61 |
| Year 10 | 48 |
| Year 11 | 38 |
| **N = 8** | |

The table shows that key stage 3 is the main beneficiary of the PLCs, since over 60 per cent of the students in each of Years 7-9 were involved in activities funded by the initiative. However, responses from individual schools showed that widely differing proportions of students were funded by PLCs, ranging from five per cent to 100 per cent. The table reveals that students in key stage 4 (Year 10 and Year 11) also benefited from PLCs to a lesser but considerable degree. In these key stages nearly half of Year 10 students and 38 per cent of Year 11 students were involved in funded activities. Again, schools' estimate of the proportion of students involved in activities wholly or partly funded by PLCs ranged between 10 per cent and 100 per cent.

Eligibility for free school meals is one of the criteria suggested by the DfES for identifying students who might be involved in activities funded by PLCs. On average, 54 per cent of the students involved in activities wholly or partly funded by PLCs were eligible for free school meals.

## 7.2 Schools' Use of Pupil Learning Credits

Schools were asked to provide an estimate of the percentage of PLC funds budgeted to be spent on various items during the financial year 2002-2003. Table 7.2 shows the responses from those that answered this question.

**Table 7.2      Percentage of PLC Funds Budgeted for Specific Spending by School**

| Budget Item | % |
|---|---|
| Salaries (including payment to instructors, staff, supply cover etc.) | 39 |
| Activities | 32 |
| Equipment/resources in school | 21 |
| Equipment/resources for students to use at home | 5 |
| Training | 1 |
| Other (e.g. new reward system) | 3 |

**N = 7**

*Due to rounding, figures do not sum to 100*

As can be seen from the table, more than a third of the spending was intended for salaries and another third was to be spent on activities.  Equipment and resourcing in the school accounted for over one fifth of the budget.  The amount budgeted for spending on equipment or resources for students to use at home was small.

## 7.3    The Effects of Pupil Learning Credits on other School Funding

Schools were asked whether PLC funding had freed other school resources to be spent elsewhere in the school.  Five of the eight schools which responded to this part of the survey said that it had, and reported widely varying amounts that had been freed for other purposes, ranging from £2,500 to £30,000.

Three schools said they had used other resources from the main school budget to assist with funding PLC activities.  One of these quoted the amount as £964, another had used £10,000, while the third did not provide details.

Schools were asked if the PLC initiative had resulted in more funds coming into the school from other specified sources.  Five said that no additional funding had been received, of the remaining three schools, one had received funding from parents (£4,000), one from community groups (£50) and businesses (£1,000) and one from the New Deal for Communities fund (£3,000).

## 7.4    Advantages and Disadvantages of the PLC Initiative for Schools

Schools were asked an open-ended question on the main advantages and disadvantages of the initiative.  Respondents agreed that the main advantage was that

it enabled them to provide a wide range of high-quality activities, for the benefit of all students but particularly those who would otherwise not be able to afford to participate. As one respondent said, the PLC initiative offered *'support for addressing the learning impact of social/economic disadvantage'*. Other benefits mentioned included:

- flexibility of expenditure
- improved academic performance
- improved teacher-student relations.

Schools welcomed the opportunity that the funding gave them to support disadvantaged students and provide them with enhanced learning opportunities that had the potential to improve motivation and raise standards. As one headteacher pleaded, *'please can it continue!!!!'*. Schools thought that the funding had provided benefits for students through the opportunities it gave them to tailor expenditure to meet the specific needs of disadvantaged students and to provide social and cultural experiences linked to the curriculum that they would not otherwise have had.

Comments by schools on the disadvantages of the PLC initiative tended to be related to funding. Three teachers mentioned that there were limited funds and one that funding was time-limited. Another school had found it difficult to prioritise expenditure, while one respondent reported difficulty in engaging students and parents in out-of-school activities. Three schools reported that they that they could find no disadvantages in the PLC initiative.

It is apparent that Pupil Learning Credits were welcomed by respondents, who appreciated the fact that they could develop and fund plans and strategies relevant to their schools' needs which they considered were effective in meeting the needs of disadvantaged students.

## 8. OVERVIEW OF THE EXCELLENCE CLUSTER INITIATIVE

Primary and secondary school questionnaires included questions on the main challenges associated with the Excellence Clusters initiative and the main advantages of involvement. The findings are reported in the following two sections.

### 8.1 Main Challenges of the Initiative

An open-ended question on the main problems encountered with the Clusters initiative resulted in very individual responses. However, there were some common themes, as discussed below.

- **Slow pace.** Nine primary school respondents reported that the '*slow pace*' had been frustrating. For instance, in some cases meetings had taken place but, '*little progress has been made*'. In one case, this was thought to be due to the time it had taken to convince staff that additional work was worthwhile: '*it is hard to change/influence staff thinking…*[for instance] *it has been hard to convince staff that gifted and talented children need extra support*'. In another case, the funding levels were thought to be an issue, which, in turn, had meant the school could dedicate little time and few personnel to the initiative, which had hindered the pace of activities. One respondent commented that '*the project seemed to take a while before it took off but this earlier time spent in planning has paid off*'.

- **Identifying and recruiting staff.** Nine primary school respondents had faced problems identifying and recruiting staff. In particular, there had been difficulties recruiting gifted and talented responsible teachers, as '*many teachers already had a wide range of responsibilities*'.

- **Time consuming.** Eight primary schools and three secondary schools reported that the initiative took a considerable amount of time to implement, particularly in schools which were already involved in a number of other initiatives. For instance, '*The time needed by the headteacher was a problem when other initiatives were also being developed*'. Moreover, given time pressures, '*it is not possible to effectively implement all the strands simultaneously*'.

- **Releasing staff.** Five primary school respondents had faced difficulties in releasing staff from lessons to participate in Cluster activities or meetings. For instance, releasing staff caused a lack of continuity for the pupils: '*we had a succession of supply staff to cover classes...disastrous!!*' Another respondent commented, '*A lot of training, both local and national, was arranged...people were never in school*'.

- **Management of the Tailored Strand.** Four secondary schools had experienced problems managing the Tailored Strand; given that the Strand is tailored to individual school's needs, there was initially '*no management structure*'. As one respondent said, '*The Tailored Strand was hard to get to grips with*'.

However, five primary and six secondary schools stated specifically that they had had not encountered any difficulties with the Clusters initiative.

## 8.2 Main Advantages of the Initiative

In response to an open-ended question on the advantages of the Clusters initiative, a number of teachers simply gave general positive responses, such as '*all strands are useful*'. The majority of specific responses were unique, but the following advantages were common across a number of Clusters:

- **Liaison/sharing knowledge.** By far the most frequent response, mentioned by 18 primary and ten secondary schools, was that the Cluster initiative was beneficial in terms of liaison with other schools in the Cluster. Typical comments included, '*Cluster schools are working together and sharing expertise*' and '*There is good cooperation between Cluster schools*'.

- **Focus on needs.** Nine primary school respondents thought that they had benefited in terms of an increased awareness of and attention to the needs of their school. For instance, '*The Tailored Strand is enabling a range of issues with regard barriers to learning to be addressed*'. One respondent said that involvement in the initiative had led to '*more accurate identification of needs and more specific support*'.

- **Funding.** Eight primary schools and four secondary schools wrote positively about the additional funds. Comments included, '*...additional funding, which we have been able to direct at particular needs*' and '*financial benefits have been much appreciated and monies put to innovative use*'.

- **Extended provision/opportunities.** The Cluster initiative was considered to have contributed to increased opportunities and an '*enriched curriculum*' (six primary and five secondary schools). As one primary school respondent said, '*additional activities* [have been] *taking place which have enhanced the quality of experiences*'.

- **Improved home-school links.** Seven secondary school staff and one primary school respondent commented that being involved in the Cluster had led to improved home-school links (particularly the Learning Mentor Strand and/or the Tailored Strand, if this focused on activities with parents). For example, '*the Learning Mentor has had a very positive impact on...communications with parents*'.

- **Standard of teaching.** Five secondary and one primary school responded that the initiative had contributed to improved standards of teaching, due to training and staff development. As one respondent reported, '[There have been] *opportunities for whole-staff training...resulting in much wider impact*'.

More specific details about perceptions on the impact of the strands can be found in Chapter 5.

# 9.    SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings from the 2003 school survey.  An overview of each of the four strands is given, followed by a discussion of cross-strand issues, and Cluster funding.  The chapter concludes with a note of plans for the next and final stage of the evaluation.

## 9.1    The Four EC Strands

The key findings relating to each of the four strands are summarised below.

### 9.1.1  The Gifted and Talented Strand

Nearly all of the schools surveyed appeared to have a Gifted and Talented Coordinator or Responsible Teacher.  About one sixth of their time, on average, was dedicated to Gifted and Talented work.  The proportion of pupils identified as Gifted and Talented was highest in Years 5 and 6 (14 per cent), and lowest in Year 12 (seven per cent).

Teachers believed that the Gifted and Talented programme would offer increased opportunities and an enriched curriculum to identified pupils.  They also believed that it would raise their self-esteem, their expectations and their awareness of their own capabilities, and improve both motivation and attainment.

Respondents felt that the Gifted and Talented programme would have a positive impact on the school as a whole, in terms of raising expectations, increasing differentiation and improving the range of teaching strategies.  In many cases the enriched provision was available to students other than those identified as Gifted and Talented.

### 9.1.2  The Learning Support Unit Strand

More than half of the secondary schools, but only two of the primary schools, had an LSU on site.  The survey confirmed previous evaluation findings, that most LSUs are used exclusively by pupils from the schools where they are situated.

Secondary LSUs were attended by an average of 28 pupils, mainly from key stage 3.  The length of time spent in the LSU varied in accordance with pupil needs, from one day or less to 25 weeks or more.

LSUs were said to have a positive impact on pupils attending in terms of behaviour, educational attainment and attendance. They provided individual support, helped to prevent exclusion, and were successful in achieving reintegration of pupils into mainstream education. Because disruptive pupils could be removed from the classroom, pressure was taken off teachers and other pupils were better able to progress.

### 9.1.3 The Learning Mentor Strand

A large majority of the primary and secondary schools surveyed had at least one Learning Mentor funded by EC. As in the previous survey, the majority had a school background, although a considerable number of secondary schools reported LMs who had previously been in youth work or counselling. The LMs' main task was targeted work with individual pupils, although several schools reported that they worked with specific groups, and/or offered drop-in access.

It was reported that LMs had a positive impact on the pupils mentored, in terms of self-esteem and confidence, behaviour, attendance and educational improvements. Mentees felt supported, and appreciated having someone to turn to. The majority of respondents felt that the LMs had a positive impact on the school as a whole, either because of the drop-in provision available to all, or because the LMs' work with difficult pupils meant that there was less disruption elsewhere.

### 9.1.4 The Tailored Strand

The Tailored Strand is defined by individual Clusters in accordance with local needs. Schools appreciated this flexibility, and were positive about the potential of the Tailored Strand to meet their schools' needs; however, some felt that the lack of an overall management structure made it *'hard to get to grips with'*. The Tailored Strand was therefore relatively slow to get underway, as noted in our previous report.

Reflecting this slow start, the range of activities reported by primary and secondary schools included staff appointments and training, presumably in preparation for future work. Most other activities were within the broad areas of curriculum enrichment, cultural enrichment and family/community links.

Twelve primary schools felt that it was too early to assess the impact of the Tailored Strand. Other respondents spoke in terms of greater improvement opportunities, improved transition and motivation. Primary schools noted improvements in home-

school links, thinking skills and behaviour, while secondary teachers emphasised the impact on schools strategies and attainment.

## 9.2    Cross-Strand Issues

### 9.2.1  Staffing and pupils

There were fewer staffing vacancies in 2003 than in 2002, suggesting that recruitment had become less problematic, although in both primary and secondary schools the number of teachers said to have left during the past school year was higher than the number said to have joined.  Most secondary schools felt that retention was becoming more difficult, at least in some subjects; some primary schools agreed, but the majority reported that it had stayed the same.

With particular reference to the Clusters initiative, staffing was a problem for some primary schools, who found it difficult to recruit staff for specific roles (e.g. Responsible Teacher for Gifted and Talented) and to release staff to participate in Cluster activities or meetings.

In both primary and secondary schools, the average number of pupils admitted was below the Standard Number for those schools.  There was a high degree of turbulence, with substantial numbers entering or leaving during the school year; this seemed to affect primary schools particularly, in terms of the proportion of the school roll affected.

### 9.2.2  Partnerships

In case-study work, increased liaison between schools was identified as a key benefit of the Clusters initiative.  This was confirmed by the 2003 survey results: in response to an open-ended question about the advantages of EC, the most frequent response was in terms of liaison with other schools, sharing expertise and good practice.

Two other types of partnership were specifically addressed in the questionnaire: links with Beacon and Specialist Schools, and with parents and the community.

### Beacon and Specialist Schools

The number of reported links with (or as) Beacon and Specialist Schools was much higher in 2003 than in 2002, particularly for primary schools.  When the analysis was restricted to the schools participating in both surveys, the number of primary schools involved in Beacon partnerships had increased from ten to 20, and those involved

with specialist schools had increased from four to ten. It does not necessarily follow that all of the reported links were within Clusters (i.e. between two schools which were both in the Cluster) but at the least it is reasonable to assume that the Cluster initiative has helped to foster a culture of collaboration.

Schools working with specialist schools reported a range of activities, including extra provision for pupils (such as classes for low attainers, or for Gifted and Talented pupils) and training opportunities for staff.

## Home-school links

Many Clusters chose parent and/or community links as a theme of their Tailored Strand. In case-study work, it was reported that the work of the Learning Mentors was also helping to make links with parents and increase their involvement in school life.

Unfortunately, the relevant questions on the questionnaire did not provide evidence of increasing home-school links. The proportion of schools with an active Parent Teacher Association was about the same in 2002 and 2003. The proportion of parents reported to complete home-school agreements was higher for secondary schools and lower for primary schools. A more detailed analysis of attendance at parents' events suggested a small increase in attendance at parents' evenings (for discussion with staff about individual children) but a decrease in attendance at other events.

## 9.3    Funding

Schools welcomed the funding provided by the Clusters initiative, and the fact that this could be used innovatively to address particular needs.

An examination of the use of EC resources at school level showed that the largest proportion of funds for the three core strands (Gifted and Talented, Learning Mentor and Learning Support Unit) was reported to be used for staff salaries.

Few schools reported that Cluster funding had freed resources to be used elsewhere in the school. Conversely, using other resources to supplement an EC strand was reported relatively frequently. A third of the surveyed secondary schools and about a quarter of the primary schools reported that they had supplemented the Gifted and Talented, Learning Mentor and Tailored Strands. A high proportion of schools with an LSU on site reported that they had used other resources to supplement the unit (12

out of 17 secondary schools).  The amount of money used to supplement Excellence Clusters was least for the Gifted and Talented Strand and greatest for the LSU Strand.

**Pupil Learning Credits**

Eight of the 29 secondary schools responding to the 2003 survey were in receipt of PLCs.  The funding was used to benefit some 60 per cent of key stage 3 pupils, and a smaller but considerable proportion of key stage 4.  Funding was used to pay salary costs, for pupil activities and for equipment/resources to use in school.  Three schools had used funds from the main school budget to help fund PLC activities.

Schools welcomed funding which could be used flexibly to support disadvantaged students and provide enhanced learning opportunities.  They believed that it would improve motivation, academic performance and teacher-student relations.

## 9.4     The Next Stage of the Evaluation

The next (and final) phase of the evaluation is already under way.  We are continuing our strand studies, focusing on those Clusters which have parental and/or community links as a theme of their Tailored Strand work.

We felt it important to focus on the Tailored Strand, since that is the unique feature of Excellence Clusters (the three core strands will be covered comprehensively in the evaluation of Excellence in Cities Policy).  Although the overarching theme is raising attainment, Clusters are addressing this objective in different ways.  Developing parental and/or community links is one path that a number of Clusters have chosen, and one that we felt would be worthwhile exploring it in depth.

We therefore plan to visit two or three schools in each of six Clusters.  Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with headteachers, teachers with responsibility for the Tailored Strand, and external staff involved (e.g. neighbourhood enrichment officers).  While the interviews will focus on the Tailored Strand work, interviewees will also be questioned on broader issues relating to Cluster work and partnerships.

Some of the case-study visits have already been carried out, and the remaining visits will be undertaken in the first half of the autumn term.  During this period, we will also carry our the third and final interviews with Cluster chairs (face-to-face or by

telephone). We shall then write a final report, for submission to DfES at the end of December.

# REFERENCES

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