



**AN EVALUATION OF THE DEVOLUTION
OF EDUCATION WELFARE SERVICES
TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS:
The First Year**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Methodology

This 12-month study was commissioned by the DfES in August 2000, and involved working with all 16 of the self-selected LEAs that were part of the pilot. The methodology included two phases of data collection, during the autumn term 2000 and spring/summer terms 2001. Questionnaires and follow-up interviews with Principal Education Welfare Officers (PEWOs) in all 16 pilot LEAs were undertaken during each phase, and the current and previous attendance data for the autumn and spring terms were also requested. In addition, in both phases, case-study work was undertaken in seven of the pilot LEAs, involving two randomly selected secondary schools and one each of their feeder primaries (a total of 28 schools). In each school, interviews were undertaken with senior managers, pastoral staff, Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) and those with financial management responsibilities. Three 'control' LEAs were also included in the study, representing examples of centralised and school-based deployment of EWOs, and researchers collected exactly the same data here as in the pilot areas. Telephone interviews were also undertaken with heads of other relevant services (such as Educational Psychology, Social Services) in the seven case-study LEAs. Finally, annual authorised and unauthorised absence returns to the DfES for the years 1998/9, 1999/2000 and 2000/1 were accessed, for all the 16 pilot and three 'control' LEAs.

Consultation with schools

Concerns were still expressed over the lack of time for consultation and planning which preceded devolution. Phase One had shown some variation in the amount of consultation undertaken and who was consulted. Only a minority of case-study LEAs consulted with school staff as well as headteachers.

Allocation of resources

In hindsight, two EWS managers with 50–60 per cent of staffing devolved stated that they would now like to reduce the level of devolvement to ensure sufficient resources for the primary sector and some central functions, such as children out of school. Whilst a division of primary and secondary school EWOs was considered beneficial by three EWS managers as it enabled EWOs to concentrate solely on primary school issues, two managers highlighted the large number of primary schools which EWOs were expected

to cover. The way in which EWOs were allocated to schools also varied. Thirteen of the 16 EWS managers indicated that their service had adopted a needs-based approach to the allocation of EWOs prior to the pilot and retained the same or a similar formula for devolution (usually using FSM, NOR and an attendance or absence factor). In contrast, within three authorities, this was a new approach.

Management of EWOs by schools

It appeared that, as EWOs became more settled in schools, the number of management meetings with school staff decreased and the time spent on liaison with pastoral staff increased. Whilst the transfer of management was reported to have led some schools to take more responsibility for, and be more proactive in, their attendance work, EWO supervision and professional development were key challenges cited by both EWS and school staff, as well as heads of other services.

Financial management issues

Financial managers in the case-study schools were concerned as to whether devolved funding would meet actual costs. At the same time, however, they highlighted that schools now had the flexibility to either enhance or reduce resources.

Effect on central functions

Initially 11 of the 16 EWS managers reported no effect on central functions. Where specific difficulties later emerged, issues to do with child protection and pupils out of school, for example, were resolved by appointing a designated officer, building in protected central time or schools buying in more time. However, in two LEAs, the management of court work reportedly remained difficult and, in one case, where funding had been devolved to primary and secondary schools, the LEA's ability to carry out its statutory duties was questioned.

Sharing EWOs between schools

Whilst half of the EWS managers felt that sharing EWOs between schools posed no particular difficulties, EWOs themselves reported finding this difficult to manage due to heavy workloads, ensuring schools received their designated hours and schools questioning EWOs who worked on other schools' cases in their time.

Positive impact on working practice

Accessibility, communication and relationships between the key players regarding attendance (EWOs, school staff, pupils and families) were all reported to have improved. EWOs were said to be better integrated into the school and able to offer a more responsive service, with attendance problems identified earlier and dealt with faster.

Negative impact on working practice

The allegiance and school control engendered by a school-managed service were believed by some to threaten EWO independence and thus hamper their ability to provide impartial support to pupils and families. Removal from a central base was thought to compound matters further, as EWOs were no longer as able to discuss issues with colleagues, leading to a sense of isolation. Other interviewees identified a constriction of the EWO role, with a tighter focus on attendance, at the expense of the social work/welfare dimension. Consequently, they feared that the profession would become deskilled, underused and that EWOs would be perceived as attendance officers only.

Outcomes for pupils, families and schools

Pupils were reported to have gained improved access to EWO support and families to have benefited from closer liaison and consequently a raised awareness of attendance issues. Schools meanwhile welcomed more EWO time, greater control and access to on-site support and advice. Through closer working relationships, EWS managers reported that some schools now had a better understanding and therefore a more positive attitude towards the service. Others saw a disadvantage if pupils and families perceived EWOs to be acting in the interests of the school.

Effect on interagency working

In some cases, interagency liaison was reported to have improved, particularly through an on-site location. Conversely, in other cases, it was thought to have suffered because EWOs were now sited away from a central location previously shared with other agencies. Confusion of the EWO role with that of other agencies was also raised as a key issue.

Impact on attendance

The request for termly attendance figures raised a number of issues about the validity and consistency of data collected by different LEAs and even by different schools within the same authority. Hence, any changes that were evident would need to be substantiated by collection of further data.

Nevertheless, the valid quantitative data from the pilot LEAs did indicate that there was no immediate and universally positive impact on attendance figures accruing from devolution and, in fact, a deterioration in attendance statistics overall was more common. Notwithstanding this, an improvement in unauthorised absence figures in the second term was intimated in some devolved schools by the termly figures, and this was supported by the annual data. Whilst seven EWS managers implicated devolution in an improvement in individual school attendance figures, equally seven implicated devolution in a deterioration in school figures. Despite this, nine managers felt that devolution had enabled them to provide a better service and they therefore expected attendance to improve in the future. Where managers were less positive, concerns were expressed about EWOs' ability to challenge school practices.

Effect on the service to primary schools

Although allocated hours were reported to have given clarity to the service received and in some primary schools the service was thought to have improved, the most frequent impact, reportedly, for primary headteachers was a perceived reduction in the service. This was supported by half of all the EWS managers, who in some cases reported a concomitant drop in the overall level of primary attendance. Whilst in some cases more preventative and more family work was reported, the increased workload of primary EWOs was emerging as a particular problem.

Key factors for success

Consultation and exchange of information between the LEA and schools was considered to be a key factor in the overall successful implementation of devolution, alongside ensuring suitable accommodation for EWOs in schools, clear responsibilities, and appropriate allocation and funding. The need for a monitoring, quality assurance role for the LEA was noted should the devolved model be implemented to ensure an equitable service for all pupils and schools.

Interviewee preferences

All secondary school staff held positive views on devolution throughout the course of the pilot. Whilst some EWOs became more positive as the pilot year progressed and they settled into schools, other EWS staff still held reservations. Where a preference was expressed, the majority of EWS staff, secondary school staff and primary headteachers were in favour of a school-based (or school-managed) rather than fully devolved model. This was not only thought to be the most influential factor in determining a positive impact, but was also thought to safeguard EWO independence and professional development, as well as ensuring that primary schools' needs were not overlooked. In contrast, however, secondary headteachers and

others with financial responsibility in secondary schools favoured the fully devolved model because of the control over resources and the sense of EWO loyalty that this engendered. Other interviewees highlighted the danger that schools may economise and appoint cheaper, less skilled staff or use the money for non-personnel resources.

Recommendations

Given that the evaluation is based mainly on data collected during the first two terms of devolution, it is recommended that some caution is exercised in judging the overall efficacy of the pilot at this stage. Further longitudinal investigation of attendance figures and the factors underpinning any change is recommended, together with greater standardisation of the mechanics for collating attendance statistics at school and LEA level. The need for rigorous monitoring and quality assurance for any school-devolved model, which has financial and LEA staff/time resource implications, is highlighted. Careful consideration should be given to the role of primary EWOs and, overall, it is recommended that the responsibilities of an EWS/O may need more precise clarification.

INTRODUCTION

This is the final report from the first phase of the NFER evaluation of the pilot devolution of Education Welfare Services to secondary schools, commissioned by the DfES, involving 16 self-selected LEAs. It summarises initial findings on the process of devolution and its immediate impact, and also highlights issues of EWO management, the outcomes and effects of devolution and key factors in success. Finally, the implications of having a school-based service, a school-managed service and a service in which funding is fully devolved to secondary schools are addressed.

This report incorporates data collected throughout the research project, the details of which can be found in Appendix 1a. Three control LEAs were selected to match pilot LEAs in terms of the type and size of LEA, and they provided examples of two centralised and one school-based service. Within the control LEAs, exactly the same data was collected as in the pilot areas.

In total, 121 interviews were conducted in the 16 pilot LEAs. Appendix 1b shows a detailed breakdown of interviewee professional status. In summary, 21 EWOs were interviewed, along with 16 EWS managers, 14 primary and 33 secondary school staff and 37 heads of other services. In the three control LEAs, 34 additional interviews were completed comprising three EWS managers, eight EWOs, six primary headteachers and 17 secondary school staff.

1. BACKGROUND

The 16 LEAs involved comprised mainly 'new' LEAs and London boroughs and they presented varying rationales for involvement in the pilot, such as poor OFSTED reports, the inevitability of devolution and the desire for a more school-centred service. The representative nature of such a sample may therefore be questioned.

For the purposes of the pilot, half of the LEAs had retained the same basic service structure, usually in the form of area teams, whilst three had shifted from areas into separate central and secondary school teams. Two had undergone more significant restructuring, e.g. into multi-disciplinary teams, although in these cases this change had been instigated by factors outside of the pilot (for examples see Appendix 2).

As a baseline for the pilot, staff resources within the LEAs varied considerably. The numbers of staff ranged from seven to 54, whilst the number of pupils to one EWO, where comparable, ranged from 1,700 to 3,665 after devolution. In half of the LEAs, this ratio was the same before and after devolution, whilst in the other half, an improved ratio had been achieved following devolution. In three LEAs, the numbers of staff had increased, either because schools had bought in more EWO time (2) or the LEA had provided more resources (1), whilst in four of the pilot LEAs, the numbers of managers or senior staff had been reduced to provide more operational-level staff (a full list of numbers of staff and EWO/pupil ratios is presented in Appendix 3).

Again, as a baseline for the pilot, EWS staff qualifications varied considerably between LEAs, ranging from one service with no qualified staff to one in which all staff had a social work qualification. In 14 out of the 16 LEAs, staff qualifications had remained the same as previously, whilst in two, additional unqualified staff had been recruited. This was felt by one manager to have implications for devolution as s/he felt that these staff might require extra central support.

In ten out of the 16 LEAs, specialist posts within the service appeared to have remained the same following devolution. In four cases, additional specialist posts, such as those with a SEN or PRU focus, a court, or a monitoring officer, had been created. In two cases, specialisms had been lost, such as an out-of-school and a child protection post.

Overall, the issue of the representativeness of the sample, particularly in terms of the type of authority and previous standard of service, may be worth considering.

KEY POINTS

Background

- ◆ The representative nature of the sample of pilot LEAs was questioned, since many were new authorities or London boroughs and they presented varying rationales for involvement in the pilot, including a poor OFSTED report prior to devolution.
- ◆ The LEA baseline for the pilot, such as the structure of the service, the number of staff, their qualifications and the number of specialist posts, varied considerably, again raising questions about the representative nature of the sample.

2. CONSULTATION WITH SCHOOLS AND ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

In Phase One of the evaluation, within the seven case studies, LEAs appeared to undertake varying degrees of consultation with secondary schools, and comments were made about the lack of time for planning and consultation. This was reiterated again in Phase Two, with adequate consultation and information exchange being raised as a key factor in the overall success of devolution.

In Phase One, it was noted that the extent of devolution in the 16 LEAs varied from 31 to 60 per cent (a table showing the full range of devolution within the pilot LEAs is presented in Appendix 4) and that the extent of devolution appeared to be linked to the size of the authority. In Phase Two, experience of the pilot year led two EWS managers to comment that the extent of devolution within their authority would need to be reduced. In one small LEA, for example, devolution of 50 per cent of EWS staffing was not considered to have left adequate resources at the centre for primary schools. In another medium-sized authority, devolution of 60 per cent of staffing was now thought to be inappropriate, since this had been found to leave insufficient resources centrally to work with pupils out of school. Concerns were also raised in one of the two LEAs where funding was fully devolved to both primary and secondary schools about the LEA's ability to carry out its statutory functions.

In Phase One, 13 of the 16 EWS managers indicated that their service had adopted a needs-based approach to the allocation of EWOs prior to the pilot and retained the same or a similar formula for devolution (usually using FSM, NOR and an attendance or absence factor). In contrast, within three authorities, this was a new approach. Illustrations of the formulae used by services are provided in Appendix 5. In Phase One, it was also evident that the way in which EWOs were allocated to schools differed in the pilot authorities. In Phase Two, where EWOs were appointed solely to primary or secondary schools, this division was reported by three EWS managers to be beneficial, since EWOs attached to primary schools were now able to focus solely on primary issues. One manager emphasised the different skills which were required. However, in contrast, two managers felt that such a division had adversely affected primary schools, since individual EWOs had to cover a large number of primary schools and, in one case, a heavy workload for secondary EWOs was noted as well. These EWS managers advocated a return to the allocation of EWOs to secondary schools and their feeder primaries. In addition, in two LEAs, one which

allocated EWOs to secondary schools and their feeder primaries and one which had allocated EWOs to either primary or secondary schools, adaptation of the allocation formula to allow more time for primary schools was also advocated.

KEY POINTS

Consultation with schools and allocation of resources

- ◆ Some concerns were still expressed over the lack of time for consultation and planning which preceded devolution.
- ◆ In hindsight, two EWS managers with 50–60 per cent of staffing devolved stated that they would now like to reduce the level of devolvement to ensure sufficient resources for the primary sector and children out of school.
- ◆ A division into primary and secondary school EWOs was considered beneficial by three EWS managers as it enabled EWOs to concentrate solely on primary school issues. Two managers, though, highlighted the large number of primary schools which EWOs were expected to cover.

3. MANAGEMENT OF EWOs BY SCHOOLS

This section considers various aspects of EWO management in devolved, school-based and centralised services. Issues of direct line management by schools are discussed, followed by the associated opportunities and challenges. Lastly, in the authorities where funding had been devolved, interviewees were asked to consider issues of financial management.

3.1 Line management issues

The management of EWOs in the case-study secondary schools was approached in a variety of ways, ranging from no formal management to direct supervision by SENCOs, senior managers or a management group. Appendix 6 offers illustrations of these management styles.

From Phase Two visits, it was evident that no dramatic changes in management had taken place over the course of the two terms. In most schools, the system of management had simply evolved as school staff and EWOs became more comfortable with the arrangements. For example, data collected through the time-use mapping exercise showed that time spent meeting with senior managers decreased over the year (perhaps as the EWO settled into school), whilst meetings with pastoral staff increased (see Appendix 7). In one particular school, the EWO did not meet formally with the school manager, but instead liaised predominantly with pastoral staff. This arrangement was seen by school staff as one of negotiation between the parties, rather than management. The concept of EWO 'supervision', therefore, would seem to be absent in this case. It is also noteworthy that a trend emerged when looking at the time spent on meetings with pastoral staff – it was highest in the devolved authorities, followed by the school-based control, and lowest in the centralised services. This would suggest that the closer an EWO is to a school, the greater the amount of school staff–EWO liaison. Examples of developments in management included an EWO who took on greater autonomy as s/he grew into the role and an EWO who was to become full-time from the start of the summer term, with the school funding the extra two days. At this point, it was thought the deputy headteacher might well take on a greater management role because the EWO would be *'to all intents and purposes working for us'*.

In all three control LEAs, direct line management was provided from a central service, with supervision available on a monthly basis, or in one case, every eight weeks. In the main, these control EWOs were happy with their supervision arrangements, although one EWO from a centralised service commented that supervision had to be requested (rather than

automatically scheduled). Communications with school staff generally took place through heads of year, but, in three schools, an attendance officer assumed a key liaison role. In one school, this was seen to be a more effective way of working, eliminating the need to see several members of staff. However, from an EWO perspective, two interviewees stated that they would prefer to see heads of year because they ultimately knew the children better and were more able to follow up action points.

KEY POINTS

Line management issues

School devolved

- ◆ Although a variety of management styles existed, during the pilot period there were no major changes in management. Time-use mapping showed that whilst meetings with senior managers decreased over the year, time spent on meetings with pastoral staff increased. This may have implications for EWO supervision.

Centralised/school based

- ◆ In the control LEAs, supervision took place on a monthly or two-monthly basis with a central manager and, in general, these meetings were guaranteed, although, in one instance, the EWO had to request supervision. Most EWOs in the control LEAs were very satisfied with their supervision arrangements.

3.2 Opportunities associated with different management arrangements

Since devolving the management of EWOs to schools, many EWOs and school staff reported that schools were now being more proactive in their attendance work. For example, attendance procedures were being formalised, time was set aside for EWOs, and schools were becoming more open to suggestions made by the EWO. Better liaison with school staff was also identified as a new opportunity created out of the changes in management. One EWS manager considered the EWO role to have been enhanced through devolution, since it had given them more 'clout' in schools, as well as facilitating school ownership of attendance problems.

In the control authorities with central services, the major opportunities relating to the management arrangements were having guaranteed access to quality supervision and the chance to share concerns with fellow EWOs

(see Cameo 1, Appendix 11). Access to a central pool of staff was believed to enhance the overall flexibility of the service. It ensured a confidential administration service, cases could be swapped (e.g. if a certain gender worker was required) and, should the EWO feel concerned about visiting potentially threatening families, they could be accompanied by a colleague. Interviewees (both EWOs and school staff) also valued the autonomy engendered by a centralised service, which permitted the EWO to undertake a range of tasks and to work in the best interests of the child. For the school-based service, retaining central management enabled EWOs to operate independently, to maintain contact with EWS colleagues through weekly team meetings and to discuss difficult cases with their manager.

KEY POINTS

Opportunities associated with different management arrangements

School devolved

- ◆ A transfer of management was said to have resulted in many schools taking greater responsibility and ownership of attendance, through which a more proactive approach surfaced. Greater liaison between school staff and EWOs was also reported.

Centralised/school based

- ◆ Management through a central base was seen as advantageous because of the opportunities for team support, access to quality supervision, the guarantee of independence and the freedom to provide unconditional support for young people.

3.3 Challenges associated with different management approaches

When asked to identify the challenges associated with the devolved management arrangements, EWS staff, school staff and other service interviewees identified the lack of supervision, training and general professional development of EWOs as key concerns. In particular, EWS and school ideas on what constituted appropriate supervision were felt by EWOs to differ markedly. EWOs noted that school managers were often busy with other commitments and simply could not provide the same level or type of supervision. EWOs cited the loss of opportunities to share

expertise and discuss issues with EWS colleagues as particular shortcomings. Initially, though, most of the 16 EWS managers felt that the professional development of EWOs might improve, or at least stay the same, following devolution because of their access to school-based INSET. At the same time, some expressed concern that variable access might lead to inequality of service. As a result, EWS managers stressed the importance of the LEA in monitoring and providing strategic direction.

The other major implication noted by EWOs, EWS managers and other service interviewees concerned the possible impact on the EWO's role. They repeated their concerns about the impact on EWO independence and how this would affect their ability to challenge schools, whether EWOs would be asked to undertake inappropriate activities (there were example of EWOs being asked to undertake exam invigilation and taking pupils home when they were sick) and about the decline in the social work role of EWOs. In one LEA, where funding had been devolved and schools were becoming increasingly reluctant to fulfil LEA duties, maintaining a balance between statutory duties and local needs was considered the main challenge. However, it was felt that such issues could be addressed by establishing clear guidelines for schools.

Other challenges raised specifically by EWOs included sharing offices, which posed problems for concentration and confidentiality, and being asked to take on extra work. Five out of 16 EWS managers felt that dealing with staff anxiety or negativity was a particular difficulty. Lack of planning time, establishing EWOs in schools, maintaining a team identity and helping schools cope with their new management responsibilities were highlighted by more than one EWS manager. Individual managers also mentioned the increasing complexity of the work, maintaining work done during school holidays, having to negotiate recruitment with more than one school and coping with the stress created by an increased workload. Meanwhile, school staff also identified the following as challenges: funding the equipment needed; illness of the EWO, which had resulted in a loss of continuity in the contact with families; some residual difficulties with finding accommodation, which, in most cases, had been successfully resolved; and a narrowing of the EWO role through the loss of some aspects of work, such as child protection.

In the school-based control LEA, there were no reported challenges in relation to supervision arrangements or the liaison between EWOs and school staff (see Cameo 2, Appendix 11). However, in both centralised services, EWOs commented that finding space in school to conduct interviews or meet with staff could be problematic. Where attendance officers acted as the prime source of information, communication was sometimes hampered as the individual concerned was less aware of pupil matters, in comparison to members of the teaching staff.

KEY POINTS

Challenges associated with different management approaches

School devolved

- ◆ Lack of access to quality supervision, training and professional development for EWOs consistently emerged as key challenges. The exact role of EWOs was also an issue of concern, with specific reference to a reduction in social work activities, involvement in inappropriate tasks and the degree to which EWOs could challenge schools when under their direct management.

School based/centralised

- ◆ Interviewees were unable to nominate any challenges associated with their supervision arrangements, although, in terms of school liaison, there were some problems with accommodation in school for EWOs from centralised services.

3.4 Financial management issues

In Phase One of the evaluation, when asked to speculate on the financial implications of devolution, financial managers in the case-study schools raised concerns about funding meeting actual costs, as well as highlighting the flexibility this might give schools to either enhance or reduce resources, by choosing to invest or not invest in EWS personnel. In Phase Two, most had no further implications to add, since funding had only actually been fully devolved in two of the 16 LEAs.

However, comments from the EWS managers in the two LEAs where funding had been devolved supported the implications raised earlier by others. In one of the LEAs, for example, the EWS manager reported that funding was being retained centrally because of the uncertainty over devolution but that it was insufficient to cover the actual running costs. In the other LEA, one school's financial manager reinforced the view that having the funding devolved to the school gave them greater control over spending. In this LEA, the devolved funding had initially been planned for the first year of the pilot only; after that, it was to become delegated funding, subsumed within the schools' general budget. Financial managers in both schools felt that this would cause problems as it would be difficult to ensure set amounts for set purposes. However, the decision had subsequently been made to devolve the funding for a further year.

KEY POINTS

Financial management issues

- ◆ Financial managers in the case-study schools were concerned as to whether devolved funding would meet actual costs.
- ◆ At the same time, however, they highlighted that schools now had the flexibility to either enhance or reduce resources.

4. OUTCOMES AND EFFECTS OF DEVOLUTION

This section documents the range of outcomes arising from devolution. In the first instance, the effect on EWS central functions is considered, followed by the implications of EWOs being managed by more than one secondary school. The section then concentrates specifically on the working practice of EWOs, discussing both positive and negative outcomes. Taking a broader view, outcomes for pupils, families and schools are presented, followed by the impact for other agencies and interagency liaison in general. The section concludes by examining attendance figures for the 16 pilot LEAs. Appendix 12 includes a summary of outcomes.

4.1 Effect on central functions

Initially, 11 out of the 16 EWS managers reported no effect on their service's ability to carry out central functions, such as child employment, child protection and legal proceedings. Where difficulties with central functions later emerged, in the majority of cases, they had been overcome, either by appointing a designated officer for specialist areas of work, building more protected central time into the devolution formula, or by schools buying in more time. The management of court work, however, was still thought to be hindered in one LEA, as cases were hard to follow and evidence for court difficult to obtain. In another, the loss of a court officer meant that EWOs were now having to be responsible for court reports themselves and were therefore less able to take on a supportive role in school with such cases. Interestingly, whilst one manager reported an increase in court work and consequently having to change procedures, another reported fewer court cases and the consequent introduction of a more focused approach to casework. In an authority where funding for both primary and secondary schools had been fully devolved, central functions were reported to be becoming more difficult to ensure, as it was felt that schools failed to see the importance of some, such as child employment. Similarly, in a small LEA, the manager reported finding it hard to keep information updated and to ensure that their truancy watch scheme functioned effectively, as schools were only interested in covering local areas.

From the perspective of the control LEAs, there was consensus amongst EWOs that a centrally managed service ensured the maintenance of central functions, such as work focused on excluded pupils and pupils off roll, and monitoring home tuition.

KEY POINTS

Effect on central functions

School devolved

- ◆ In the main, EWS managers reported no major impact on central functions and, where problems did arise, these were solved by appointing a designated officer for specialist areas of work, building more protected central time into the devolution formula, or by schools buying in more time. However, some difficulties with court work remained and, in an authority where funding for both primary and secondary schools had been fully devolved, central functions were reported to be becoming more difficult to ensure, as schools did not always appreciate their importance.

Centralised/school based

- ◆ In control LEAs, EWOs felt that a centrally managed service guaranteed that central functions, such as working with excluded pupils and pupils off roll, could continue.

4.2 Sharing EWOs between schools

EWOs who were managed by two or more secondary schools often reported difficulties with this arrangement, in particular ensuring that schools received appropriate time allocation. During Phase Two interviews, EWOs described their shared responsibilities as stressful, labour intensive and over-demanding of their time. Further complications arose from schools having different expectations, systems and styles, with information about pupils kept in different places.

Half of the EWS managers, despite noting some organisational problems, such as the location of files, stated that sharing EWOs between schools posed no particular difficulties. However, in three LEAs, some problems had arisen. In one case, having two secondary schools was felt to have resulted in EWOs being burdened with a high caseload, including many intractable cases. In another, an EWO was felt to be giving an unfair share of time to his/her base school, mainly because s/he was being drawn into activities that were not part of his/her core business. This had also resulted in him/her being overloaded with work. In both cases, the EWS managers felt that the issue could be resolved by adopting a secondary and feeder primary allocation, although one manager also felt that it would help if

casework files were retained centrally. In the remaining LEA, the manager referred to an incident where a headteacher had complained about an EWO attending a case conference for a pupil at another school in their time and, whilst the schools were encouraged to negotiate between themselves, it was felt that they still relied on the LEA to sort out such issues.

In the school-based control LEA, where an EWO worked in more than one school, no difficulties were reported with this arrangement. The EWO felt s/he had regular contact with both schools. However, in a centralised control, two school interviewees, from different schools, commented that, because the EWO had to share their workload with other schools, it could sometimes be hard to contact them. By comparison, an EWO in the other centralised control considered that schools had good access to the service, as s/he always responded to any messages immediately.

KEY POINTS

Sharing EWOs between schools

School devolved

- ◆ Those EWOs who were managed by more than one secondary school found they had to deal with heavy workloads, which were compounded further by the different expectations, styles and systems of schools. Half of the EWS managers, however, felt that sharing EWOs between schools was not particularly problematic.

Centralised/school based

- ◆ Two school interviewees in a centralised control LEA reported difficulties in contacting their EWOs, because of the shared workload. Meanwhile, two EWOs from a centralised and a school-based service considered that school contact and access were unaffected by working in more than one school.

4.3 Positive impact on working practice

Overall, interviewees identified the following types of positive impact on working practice:

- EWOs' greater accessibility to school staff, pupils and their families
- improved relationships with schools and families
- more guaranteed EWO time for schools
- EWOs becoming part of the school team

- a faster response to attendance problems
- better targeting of pupils with low attendance
- schools having control over the EWO's time
- EWOs being more conscious of attendance figures and the need to '*evidence results*'.

Additional outcomes noted specifically in Phase Two by school and EWO interviewees included: more information coming through from primary schools; a formalisation of working practices (e.g. allocated hours, structured meetings); and EWOs taking a more proactive approach. Individually, interviewees also noted that, since devolution, EWOs were looking more at whole-school procedures, had a better understanding of school systems and, now that they had settled into schools, felt they had the support and backing of the school. The changes in management were generally thought to have facilitated a widening of the EWO's role, with specific references to increasing involvement in pastoral support and taking more of a lead role, for instance with a small team of attendance staff or other support staff (see Appendix 11, Cameo 4). Although two EWS managers felt that working practice had not changed at all, most EWS managers focused on the same outcomes mentioned above. In addition, they highlighted clarity about what was expected of EWOs, an increased focus on attendance, an improved service to primary schools and the raised profile of the EWS generally. Whilst four EWS managers felt that preventative and developmental work had increased, two also mentioned that this was an aspect they felt had been lost to the service (see next section on negative impact). More than one manager also mentioned an increase in prosecutions since devolution, although one interviewee viewed this positively and another saw it as a negative development.

As noted in the introduction, 37 heads of other services offered an external perspective on the impact of devolution. When asked to consider the major advantages, their responses corresponded to those voiced by those directly involved. Seven interviewees (three from Behaviour Support Services) cited better relations between EWOs and schools/pupils, six interviewees (from a range of agencies) reported improved access to EWOs for school staff and pupils, four interviewees noted schools' greater control of the EWS and individual interviewees reported a more responsive EWS service, as well as the increasing amount of time spent in secondary schools by EWOs.

Some of the above outcomes were also identified by interviewees in the school-based control LEA, where an on-site location improved accessibility to staff, pupils and parents, which in turn strengthened communications and relationships and, ultimately, improved the speed of intervention (see Cameo 2, Appendix 11). By comparison, the opposite was thought to be the case for centralised services (see next section on negative impact). In support of a centralised service, however, guaranteed independence, support from colleagues and contact with other agencies were all identified as

positive impacts, and, ultimately, a justification for its continuation. In terms of implications for working practices, EWOs also commented that a centralised service enabled them to deal with children not on a school roll, ensured confidentiality and, in a rural area, meant that families had good access to the service because of its central location.

KEY POINTS

Positive impact on working practice

School devolved

- ◆ The impact of a devolved service related to the EWO being on the school premises (e.g. accessibility, speed of intervention). Additionally, interviewees highlighted more guaranteed EWO time for schools, and a widening of the EWO role to encompass more pastoral support and preventative work.

School based

- ◆ An on-site location was considered to improve accessibility to staff, pupils and parents, with positive repercussions for information exchange and relationships. The proximity to attendance problems was also thought to increase the overall speed of intervention.

Centralised

- ◆ A centralised service tended to be favoured by EWOs operating within it since it was thought to guarantee independence and confidentiality, enable EWOs to deal with all the children in a community (including those not on a school roll) and provide a setting for EWOs to share good practice with colleagues and discuss potential problems.

4.4 Negative impact on working practice

Interviewees also identified negative implications for the working practice of devolved EWOs. During Phase One of the evaluation, interviewees spoke of less contact with individual pupils due to the number of referrals; an overlap of roles with designated behaviour support staff in school; underuse of EWS skills (being perceived as only ‘an attendance officer’) and, concomitantly, loss of the ‘social work’ aspects of the job. Interestingly, time-use mapping showed that EWOs spent more time on first-day response (with its focus on attendance figures) in the devolved authorities, compared to both school-based or centralised services. New concerns raised later in

the year included the lack of relief staff in the event of illness; longer working hours and a heavier workload for EWOs (and in one case, also for their manager); and less contact with other education welfare staff, as well as LEA support services.

Interviewees were asked to consider whether any aspects of their work had been lost since devolution. Interviewees cited a loss of flexibility due to allocated school hours; a loss of independence and perceived impartiality; and a lack of access to professional expertise (e.g. consulting with PEWOs on legal issues). Other changes were detected through the time-use mapping exercise, which showed that time spent on behaviour support activities by EWOs declined over the year, perhaps due to schools requiring a greater focus on attendance (see Appendix 7). For two EWOs, changes to working practice may have taken their toll, as when asked to consider the main impact of devolution, both suggested it was the demoralisation of the service.

EWS managers, with their more strategic focus, identified additional losses. Two felt, in contrast to others, that preventative work was no longer possible, and another two highlighted the reduced level of service to primary schools. Other individual managers felt that systems for conducting legal proceedings and dealing with out-of-borough pupils were now lacking and that the remoteness of the service meant that it was now harder to monitor attendance. One manager, overseeing a behaviour and attendance service, felt that a wide range of EWO activities had been lost, but that this had been necessary for the service to focus on attendance. Another felt that, in some schools, EWOs had become entrenched in the negative ethos of schools and that lack of contact with other workers had resulted in new EWOs not acquiring the necessary skills such that, in both cases, they had difficulty functioning effectively.

Some of the above outcomes also surfaced in the school-based control LEA, pointing perhaps to those negative impacts which are linked to a school-based location, rather than a school-managed arrangement. One EWO, for example, cited fewer opportunities to offload concerns to colleagues and felt that certain pupils may be less willing to disclose information to someone they saw as a member of the school staff. In the centralised services, whilst EWOs highlighted the advantages for working practice, school staff tended to underline the disadvantages. In one LEA, both schools considered the current level of service inadequate and wanted more EWO time (they felt unable, however, to influence time allocation). In one particular school, staff also criticised the speed of response and felt that intervention was purely reactive. Interviewees (an EWO and school staff) believed a central service was less accessible for pupils, parents and staff and, in one authority, travel between the central office and schools was highlighted as a particular issue by the EWOs (see Cameo 1, Appendix 11).

KEY POINTS

Negative impact on working practice

School devolved

- ◆ Negative effects of devolution on working practice centred on loss of EWO independence and impartiality, underuse of EWS skills, loss of social work aspects and an overlap of roles with other support staff. Furthermore, with a focus on secondary schools, the primary school service was also thought to suffer by two EWS managers.

School based

- ◆ Detachment from a central support base was highlighted as a potential downside of a school-based service. It was suggested that some pupils may also perceive school-based EWOs as part of the school and therefore feel less inclined to discuss their problems.

Centralised

- ◆ School personnel were sometimes dissatisfied with a centralised service, criticising its accessibility and the speed of response. Travel time between the central base and schools was also considered a hindrance.

4.5 Outcomes for pupils, families and schools

In Phase One, a range of benefits for **pupils** was identified. In addition to success with particular cases, interviewees highlighted that: pupils with attendance problems felt more supported; pupils were more likely to contact the EWO because s/he was in school; there were closer relationships between EWOs and pupils; pupils' needs were identified earlier; and they had better access to strategies operating within the school. Phase Two interviews substantiated a continuation of this kind of impact, with additional references to a faster response to attendance problems, which then facilitated a more preventative style of intervention (e.g. issuing pagers to Year 10 students). Positive progress with specific pupils was identified in five LEAs. Thus, whilst attendance figures had not necessarily improved overall, it was felt that, at the level of the individual pupil, some significant gains had been made.

The main outcomes for **families**, in both Phases One and Two of the evaluation, were reported as: improved relationships between EWOs and families; raised awareness amongst parents of the importance of attendance; increased liaison with parents; and greater accessibility of the EWO to parents. School staff noted that EWOs were able to meet with parents more easily. Indeed, time-use mapping showed that the time spent meeting families in school was greatest in the devolved authorities, followed by school-based and then centralised services (see Appendix 7). Additionally, interviewees observed that parents felt happier dealing with an EWO (as opposed to a teacher), EWOs were receiving more referrals from parents and, now that the profile of attendance had been raised, parents were more inclined to send letters in following an absence.

A number of major outcomes for **schools** were initially identified. Interviewees highlighted that: there was more advice available to pastoral staff; school staff felt more supported; there was a better understanding of the EWO's role; ways in which school systems could be improved were identified; and school staff were taking more responsibility for attendance. As the year progressed, school interviewees in five LEAs described a much closer interface developing between EWOs and school staff, such as attendance officers and SENCOs, such that EWOs were becoming more integrated into the school structure. Interestingly, time-use mapping revealed that, during Phase One of the evaluation, just two EWOs allocated time to training school staff, but, by Phase Two, this had increased to five. By comparison, just two EWOs in the control LEAs (one centralised and one school based) recorded time spent on training school staff. Individual references were also made to a new willingness on the part of schools to bring families in for discussions, EWOs providing schools with background information on families and a school manager who was better informed on the training and supervision needs of his/her EWO. Notably, EWS managers described the improved attitudes of schools towards their service as a major impact of devolution. Other service interviewees also identified the increase in school control.

Again, whether or not these outcomes were the products of a school-based or school-managed service is uncertain, given that interviewees in the school-based control LEA also reported increased access to pupils, families and school staff and a speedier response to attendance problems. Furthermore, being school based was also thought to facilitate the general integration of the EWO into the school environment. Positive outcomes generated by operating a centralised service, in contrast, centred on its independence, which empowered EWOs to challenge schools more easily on attendance issues and to work on behalf of the child, as opposed to following a school-driven agenda. A school interviewee also noted that accessing a centralised service might be useful for parents who felt uncomfortable coming into school.

KEY POINTS

Outcomes for pupils, families and schools

School devolved

- ◆ Pupils and families benefited from a faster response to attendance problems, along with better access to the EWO and, for parents, a greater awareness of the importance of attendance. In addition to the outcomes derived from a school-based arrangement (accessibility etc.), school staff were said to have benefited from greater control over EWOs and were reported to take more responsibility for attendance issues. EWS managers deemed schools' improved attitudes towards the EWS a major outcome of devolution. The number of EWOs providing training for school staff was also seen to increase slightly during the pilot.

School based

- ◆ A school-based service gave pupils, school staff and families better access to EWOs, which enhanced relationships as well as the speed of intervention. This arrangement was also thought to encourage the integration of EWOs into the school community.

Centralised

- ◆ Interviewees again highlighted the independent status of EWOs and the way in which this enabled them to challenge schools on attendance matters and to work in pupils' best interests. A centralised service was also felt to facilitate engagement with parents who might feel uncomfortable in the school environment.

4.6 Work with other agencies

In Phase Two, interviewees were asked whether EWO work with other agencies had been affected by devolution. Whilst more EWOs and school staff tended to report incidences of enhanced interagency liaison, more heads of other agencies perceived adverse effects. This was substantiated in the time-use mapping exercise, which showed that liaison with other agencies was seen to drop more than any other activity between Phases One and Two of the evaluation (see Appendix 7).

In six out of the seven LEAs, seven EWOs and five school staff considered that work with other agencies had been enhanced. They mentioned specifically increased liaison with police, learning mentors, Social Services and Connexions staff. Half of the EWS managers now reported positive links with Connexions or EiC staff where they were in place. These

improvements were attributed to EWOs having more time to deal with other agencies and EWOs sharing offices with other professionals in school and thus forging closer links. In a school where improved police liaison had arisen, this was again related to the EWO being school based. This was particularly the case in LEAs where funding had been fully devolved.

Of the 37 heads of other services interviewed, nine were unable to identify any significant implications for their services, but seven, from a range of services, stated that, since devolution, they did in fact have more contact with EWOs. One interviewee noted that EWOs now had a better awareness of his/her service and, for two service heads, communication with EWOs was thought to have improved. When asked to comment on the main impact overall, six of these 37 interviewees highlighted improved access to, and communication with, EWOs (this was especially so for those from the Educational Psychology Service). The school-based control LEA provided further affirmation that an on-site location enhanced work with other agencies. All interviewees spoke positively about interagency liaison, citing regular contact, and, in one case, this was aided by a close geographical location.

Conversely, in three schools in two authorities, EWOs spoke of ways in which interagency liaison had been adversely affected. For instance, prior to devolution, one EWO explained how they would receive reports direct from the Youth Offending Team, but this information had now been rerouted to the school manager. Another EWO regretted the decline in Social Services contact, commenting that the school simply perceived EWOs as attendance officers. Ten other service interviewees (three from Educational Psychology) reported less contact with EWOs as the major implication of devolution for their service. Meanwhile, interviewees within the control centralised LEAs tended to envisage a decline in interagency liaison if the service were to be school based. In particular, they made the point that, currently, other services were situated in the same central building, which, in itself, facilitated communication. Furthermore, efficient administrative support ensured that messages would always be passed on to an EWO (schools were thought to be less reliable), and one school interviewee recognised that school-based EWOs may find it harder to remain independent when dealing with other agencies.

The issue of role clarification was also raised in relation to interagency working. Two EWS managers, in particular, noted the overlapping of roles between agencies, and described instances where individual children received support from a number of different initiatives without reference to each other. Effectively coordinating the work of those operating under the umbrella of 'social inclusion' (e.g. behaviour support specialists, Connexions staff, learning mentors, EWOs, etc.) was seen as a particular challenge by EWOs and school staff (see Cameos 3 and 4, Appendix 11). Furthermore, two heads of other services, from a Behaviour Support Service and a Connexions service, saw confusion over the EWO role as the main outcome of devolution. They explained that, whilst EWOs were managed by schools, they were still carrying out LEA duties and so to whom the EWO was ultimately responsible was sometimes unclear.

KEY POINTS

Work with other agencies

School devolved

- ◆ Seven EWOs, five school staff and seven heads of other services reported enhanced interagency working. This was attributed to EWOs having more time to liaise, being school based and sharing offices with other professionals. At the same time, ten heads of other services and three EWOs cited a decline in interagency work. Time-use mapping revealed that this activity declined more than any other between Phases One and Two of the evaluation. A particular concern linked to devolution was the efficient coordination of agencies in schools to avoid the overlapping of roles.

School based

- ◆ All comments in relation to EWOs working with other agencies were positive, with references to regular contact, assisted by a close geographical location.

Centralised

- ◆ A centralised service was considered advantageous in terms of interagency liaison, because, very often, agencies were located in the same vicinity, whereas a school-based location would increase the distance between them. In addition, a centralised service was felt to allow EWOs to function independently when dealing with other agencies.

4.7 Impact on attendance

The 16 pilot LEAs were each asked to provide secondary absence data for the autumn terms 1999 and 2000 and spring terms 2000 and 2001. This was intended to allow the identification of any change in attendance at school as well as LEA level. However, the data provided by LEAs proved to be of varying quality resulting in ten pilot LEAs' figures having to be excluded from further analysis. The main problem was the level of missing data, as seven LEAs were unable to provide termly data for both years. When examining the termly data provided by other LEAs, three had a significant number of schools' data missing. There also appeared to be discrepancies in the periods of time over which school data had been collected and how sessions were calculated. Some schools provided data split by half term, and one LEA provided cumulative data with no data on

pupil sessions or number of pupils, thus making the calculation of a school- or LEA-level figure for attendance unreliable. This varied data perhaps illustrates the difficulty some LEAs have in tracking and evaluating attendance within their own LEA and the greater difficulty of undertaking termly analysis at LEA level. Similar problems arose with the three control LEAs, making comparison with control data impossible.

In addition, initial (i.e. not finalised by LEAs) figures for the annual authorised and unauthorised absence returns to the DfES for all secondary schools in the 16 pilot and the three control LEAs were accessed and analysed. Firstly, the termly data is discussed, followed by EWS managers' specific comments on this data. Finally the annual data is presented.

4.7.1 Impact on termly attendance figures

The six LEAs that provided usable data resulted in a sample of 101 schools for the autumn term and 102 schools for the spring term. For these schools, attendance figures were calculated using 100 per cent – (authorised absence + unauthorised absence). Changes in attendance between autumn term 1999 and autumn term 2000 and between spring term 2000 and spring term 2001 were then calculated, and schools categorised as either: attendance improved, attendance declined or attendance remained the same. Table 4.1 identifies these changes for the sample of schools.

Table 4.1 Changes in attendance between autumn term 1999 and autumn term 2000 and between spring term 2000 and spring term 2001

Category of school	Autumn term		Spring term	
	No. (N=101)	%	No. (N=102)	%
Attendance improved	42	41.6	22	21.6
Attendance remained the same	2	2.0	0	0
Attendance declined	57	56.4	80	78.4

Source: Data provided by pilot LEAs

Overall, given the limited amount of data and the short period of data collection, any changes documented could be due to a cohort effect, and data would therefore need to be collected over a longer period to substantiate any findings.

Nevertheless, Table 4.1 shows that, in both terms, attendance declined in more schools than it improved, although in the spring term this was the case for many more schools (over three-quarters) than in the autumn term (just over a half). In the autumn term, all LEAs bar one, in which funding had been devolved, saw more schools' attendance decline than improve, whilst in the spring term, this was the case for all LEAs. In addition, it is notable that the LEA which devolved funding to both primary and secondary

schools saw a higher percentage of its secondary schools' attendance improve than any other LEA in each of the terms. It is important to note, however, that, where the number of schools in an LEA is small, a change in just one school could have a significant effect overall.

Changes in authorised and unauthorised absence were also examined (see Appendix 8). In the autumn term, the average change in unauthorised absence was slightly worse than the change in authorised absence, whereas in the spring term there was only a negligible change in unauthorised absence and a large change in authorised absence. In addition, in the autumn term, for schools where attendance had declined, there was a similar change in authorised and unauthorised absence, whilst for those that improved, there was, on average, a greater change in the authorised absence rate. In contrast, in the spring term, where attendance improved, a change in unauthorised absence was largely responsible and, where attendance declined, the change in unauthorised absence was less than the change in authorised absence. This might suggest that some impact on unauthorised absence was occurring during the second term of devolution in a minority of schools.

In addition, whether schools had maintained any improvement or halted any decline from the autumn term to the spring term was examined. These results are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Maintenance of improvements or halts to decline in attendance from the autumn term to the spring term

Autumn term attendance	No. of schools	Spring term attendance					
		Improved		Declined		No data	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Improved	42	14	33.3	24	57.1	4	9.5
Remained the same	2	0	0	2	100.0	0	0
Declined	57	8	14.0	46	80.7	3	5.3

Source: Data provided by pilot LEAs

Of the 42 schools that saw an improvement in attendance between autumn 1999 and autumn 2000, only a third (14 in total) were able to repeat that improvement in the spring term. Four-fifths of those where attendance declined in the autumn showed further deterioration. However, it may be significant that ten of the 14 schools that consistently improved term on term were from two of the highest devolving authorities (59 and 60 per cent), although they also had a higher number of schools overall than some of the other LEAs.

KEY POINTS

Impact on termly attendance figures

- ◆ Overall, in both the first and second term of devolution, attendance declined in more schools than it improved, and only a third of the schools that made improvements in the first term were able to maintain this in the second term. However, it may be significant that ten out of these 14 schools were from two of the highest devolving authorities.
- ◆ In contrast to term one of devolution, in the second term, where attendance improved, a change in unauthorised absence was largely responsible and, where it declined, the change in unauthorised absence was less than the change in authorised absence, intimating perhaps some impact on unauthorised absence in the second term.
- ◆ However, further data collection would be required to substantiate these findings.

4.7.2 EWS manager comments on attendance data

When asked to comment on the overall impact of devolution on attendance figures, six out of the 16 EWS managers felt that it was too early to tell and nine stated that it was difficult to say what the impact had been. This was either because there were many complex influential factors, because of the lack, or inconsistency, of data, because there had been difficulties implementing devolution in some schools or because small variations were expected anyway. The complexity of the factors affecting absence figures was also stressed within the controls. One manager, in an LEA where funding had been devolved, commented on the increased difficulty of obtaining attendance data from schools since devolution.

Overall, nine of the 16 EWS managers felt that, following devolution, they were now offering a better service to schools and, for this reason, they expected a positive impact on attendance in the future, although two stressed they felt a school-based rather than a devolved service more appropriate. The ability of school-based or school-devolved EWOs to ensure that schools followed appropriate procedures was thought to be particularly influential in addressing unauthorised absence.

Where managers were less positive about the future impact of devolution on attendance, a number of issues were raised. These included EWOs being less able to challenge schools specifically about categorisation of absence and their working practices, especially the difficulty in dealing with long-term absence where this may not be in schools' interests. Within the control LEAs, a school-based service, on the other hand, was felt to positively influence attendance by allowing the EWO to become more involved in the school, whilst at the same time maintaining the ability to challenge school practices, such as unofficial exclusions and inappropriate categorisation of absences. Having a centralised service was considered to positively influence attendance figures by enabling a flexible use of staff resources and thus being able to adapt to schools' needs and to ensure that EWOs were not inappropriately taken away from their central focus on attendance. One pilot manager also referred to some schools' reluctance to take devolution on board and the limited ability of EWOs to effect change where they were only devolved to schools for a few days a week.

When asked about specific individual school improvements in attendance, EWS managers in the pilot LEAs responded with a variety of rationales, and a full list of responses, in rank order, is shown in Appendix 9. The main reasons given for an improvement in attendance were increased EWO time and the introduction of first-day response. Overall, seven of the 16 managers felt that devolution had been in some way influential in improving school attendance or unauthorised absence figures. This was linked to the EWO being on the school site, having a good school manager, an increased focus on school systems and greater clarity of the EWO role. Devolution, in some instances, had also led to increased resources.

When asked about improved attendance figures, EWS managers within the control LEAs raised many of the same issues. However, first-day response was not cited, suggesting less of an ongoing attendance role in schools for non-devolved EWOs. In addition, one manager from a centralised service mentioned the use of college placement or work-related learning for severe truants as a source of improved attendance figures, perhaps exemplifying the greater involvement of these services with youngsters experiencing serious attendance problems. Another control manager referred to the use of a separate register for pupils who were 'unofficially' excluded as a cause of improved figures. Thus overall, in contrast to the pilot LEAs, an awareness of pupils who may be increasingly marginalised was evident and one control manager raised this later as an important reason for EWOs to be able to challenge schools and therefore not to be employed by schools.

Rationales presented by EWS managers for any deterioration of the figures were also various, and a full list, in rank order, is presented in Appendix 10. Overall, seven EWS managers referred to specific aspects concerning devolution when offering a rationale for a deterioration in attendance. These were linked to correct categorisation of absences with the EWO being on site, inappropriate use of EWO time, the inability of the EWO to challenge schools and lack of accommodation.

In the control LEAs, the issue of unofficial exclusions was again raised as a source of declining figures, since this was felt to lead to a high authorised absence. The categorisation of unauthorised absence as authorised was also raised, although, in one centralised service, an overall decrease in authorised absence was reported to be due to clear direction from the authority to unauthorise the figures. In contrast to the pilots, other factors cited included a difficult year group and a poor area where a core of families affected the figures significantly (both noted by two managers).

KEY POINTS

EWS manager comments on attendance data

School devolved

- ◆ EWS managers referred to a range of factors which influenced attendance figures and, whilst devolution was implicated in improvements, it was also implicated in a deterioration of the figures. Despite this, nine EWS managers felt that, through devolution, they were able to offer a better service and therefore they envisaged improvements in attendance in the future. Others expressed concerns about EWOs' ability to challenge school practices and how this might negatively impact on attendance figures.

School based/centralised

- ◆ Rationales presented for changes in attendance figures suggested less of an ongoing role in attendance and more awareness of marginalised pupils in non-devolved services. Whilst a school-based service was felt to preserve the ability of EWOs to challenge school practices, a centralised service was thought to ensure that EWS staff were not diverted from their central focus on attendance.

4.7.3 Annual attendance data

With regard to annual attendance data, analysis was completed on 399 schools – 331 from the 16 pilot LEAs and 68 from the three control LEAs. Table 4.3 summarises the changes in attendance in the pilot and the control LEAs from 1999 to 2000 and from 2000 to 2001.

Table 4.3 shows that the changes in attendance across control and pilot schools are fairly similar, with no significant differences, although, in both years, slightly more schools improved their attendance in the control LEAs than in the pilot LEAs.

Table 4.3 Changes in attendance from 1999–2000 and 2000–2001 in the pilot and control LEAs

	Category of school	1999–2000		2000–2001	
		No. (N=331)	%	No. (N=331)	%
Pilots LEAs	Attendance improved	195	58.9	86	26.0
	Attendance remained the same	20	6.0	9	2.7
	Attendance declined	116	35.0	236	71.3
	Category of school	No. (N=68)	%	No. (N=68)	%
Control LEAs	Attendance improved	41	60.3	23	33.8
	Attendance remained the same	4	5.9	1	1.5
	Attendance declined	23	33.8	44	64.7

Source: Data provided by the DfES

Examining the data to see whether changes in attendance between 98/99 and 99/00 were maintained for the year 00/01 showed that again there were many similarities between pilot and control LEAs. However, for those schools who saw an improvement in attendance between 99/00 and 00/01, there was a significant difference in the change to unauthorised absence. Schools in the pilot LEAs had an average change to unauthorised absence of +0.47 (i.e. an improvement), whilst schools in the control group had an average change to unauthorised absence of –0.20 (i.e. a slight deterioration). This would therefore perhaps corroborate findings from the termly data, which begin to intimate that unauthorised absence might have been affected in the second term of devolution. Again, however, further data would need to be collected to substantiate such findings.

KEY POINTS

Annual attendance data

- ◆ Changes in attendance from 1999 to 2000 and from 2000 to 2001 in the control and the pilot LEAs were similar, although, in both years, slightly more schools improved their attendance in the control LEAs than in the pilot LEAs.
- ◆ For those schools that saw an improvement in attendance between 99/00 and 00/01, there was a significant difference in the change to unauthorised absence, which supported termly findings intimating that unauthorised absence may have been affected in the second term of devolution.
- ◆ However, further data would need to be collected to substantiate any findings.

5. DEVOLUTION AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

This section is based mainly on interviews with a headteacher or SENCO (referred to collectively as headteachers, except where relevant) and one EWO in 14 primary schools within the seven case-study LEAs. The section also incorporates the views of headteachers and EWOs from the six primary schools in the three control LEAs, and, where relevant, draws on information from the initial questionnaires sent out to EWS managers and the follow-up telephone interviews.

5.1 Consultation with schools and allocation of resources

During Phase One visits, primary school staff generally appeared much less aware of devolution than their secondary school colleagues, and primary headteachers reported having little involvement in the process. Interviewees identified a general lack of consultation and information about devolution.

In Phase One, four of the 16 EWS managers noted that, in contrast to before, they now allocated staff on a needs basis. In five of the case-study LEAs, EWOs still worked with at least one secondary school as well as primary schools, and the number of primary schools worked with varied from two (with one secondary school) in one small LEA to 26 (with four secondary schools) in a large rural authority. In the control LEAs, two out of the six EWOs (in a small unitary authority) worked only in primary schools, while the other EWOs worked in either one or two secondary schools and their feeder primary schools. The number of primary schools worked with varied from four (with two secondary schools) to 30 (with no secondary schools). During Phase One, concerns were raised in the case-study LEAs about the lack of equity in the allocation of hours and the logistical difficulties inherent in allocating such large numbers of primary schools to EWOs (e.g. arranging meetings and developing relationships with headteachers). Where services had chosen to split into primary and secondary teams, some managers reported that EWOs were having to cover from 17 up to 28 primary schools.

Regular meetings between the headteacher and the EWO took place in 11 of the 14 primary schools, ranging from weekly meetings to termly ones, depending on the level of need. In two of the other three schools, headteachers reported having no meetings, as yet, with their EWO. In the control LEAs, regular meetings between the headteacher and the EWO took place in five of the primary schools, ranging from weekly meetings to termly ones, according to the level of need. Headteachers stressed that they could make telephone contact between meetings should any urgent matters arise. In the remaining school, where support was from a centralised service, contact was by telephone on a needs basis. There were no major concerns raised in the control LEAs about these arrangements.

KEY POINTS

Consultation with schools and allocation of resources

School devolved

- ◆ Interviewees spoke of limited consultation and information prior to devolution. Concerns were expressed about the hours allocated to primary schools and the large number of primary schools that EWOs sometimes had to deal with. There was a move towards allocation on a needs basis, with regular meetings in most schools. Two headteachers, though, reported having had no meetings yet with their EWOs.

School based/centralised

- ◆ There were regular meetings scheduled according to the level of need. Telephone contact was also available in most schools, although, in one instance, telephone contact was the only means of communication. No concerns were voiced about these arrangements.

5.2 Outcomes and effects of devolution

This section compiles the various outcomes of devolution (see Appendix 12 for a summary). It begins by presenting the impact on EWO working practice, followed by outcomes for pupils, parents and schools. Lastly, it considers the impact on primary school attendance figures.

5.2.1 Impact on working practice

In Phase Two, eight of the 14 primary school headteachers and three EWOs commented that there had been no significant change in the working practice of EWOs since devolution had taken place, either because the EWO had remained the same or because the amount of contact had not changed.

In other instances, in both Phase One and Phase Two, the most significant effect was felt to be the increased workload for primary EWOs, and this was deemed to be the main challenge of devolution. In Phase Two, some headteachers felt that the onus was now more on schools to contact the service and, as such, schools were being expected to do more themselves in terms of attendance. One headteacher noted the loss of preventative work due to a prioritising of time and resources for secondary schools. In contrast, for two interviewees, a perceived increase in the support to primary schools had affected the type of work EWOs were being asked to take on, many adopting a wider brief than had been possible previously, for example becoming more involved in developmental and preventative work.

When asked about the effect on working practice of having either a centralised or a school-based service, interviewees in both school-based and centralised services nominated regular contact, independence and accessibility, as well as enhanced contact with other agencies, as the main advantages of these systems. Primary headteachers in the centralised LEAs also commended the flexibility of EWOs; networking between EWOs and the sharing of good practice; having a named individual with whom to build a relationship; and less work for schools in terms of organisation of EWOs' time. In the small LEA with a centralised service and in the LEA where the service was school based within a pyramid system, ease of access and effective liaison with secondary schools were particularly highlighted. The proximity of the schools to each other was felt to aid this. Equally, working in a pyramid was felt to result in the EWO building up a 'huge' knowledge of local families.

Negative outcomes for EWOs' working practice within one of the centralised services and the school-based service included concerns about EWOs working in isolation. In the latter, EWOs also referred to an increased amount of paperwork and the fact that this had to be handled by the central office rather than from their school bases. Negative outcomes for EWOs in the case-study authorities included the loss of specific work with groups of young people (e.g. buddying schemes and nurture groups), which could result in a loss of skills, the loss of contact with colleagues with whom to share good practice and the loss of some involvement in transition work.

KEY POINTS

Impacts on working practice in primary schools

School devolved

- ◆ The most significant impact for working practice was an increased workload for primary EWOs. Also mentioned were reduced opportunities to share good practice with colleagues and less involvement in transition work. However, two interviewees described a wider remit for EWOs, with an increase in developmental and preventative work.

School based/centralised

- ◆ Interviewees in both the school-based and centralised controls referred to enhanced interagency contact, as well as the advantages of independence and accessibility. Again, concerns were expressed about EWOs working in isolation and the inconvenience of having paperwork processed at a central office, rather than the school base.

5.2.2 Outcomes for pupils, families and primary schools

In terms of pupils, no real impact was identified in Phase One or Two, although two interviewees (one headteacher and one EWO) felt that pupils now had less contact with the EWO and another headteacher reported improved punctuality and attendance in individual cases.

Initially, families were considered by four interviewees to be losing out as a result of devolution, due to a lack of time for home visits. In Phase Two, however, interviewees noted an enhancement in family work, in terms of increased home visits, long-term work and/or meetings. Having the same EWO working in the link secondary was also considered beneficial since families could seek help where siblings were concerned. Equally, it was felt to provide a useful link for schools in terms of continuity and enhancing the transfer process. Two headteachers confirmed a greater awareness on the part of parents of the need for good attendance.

Interviewees in the three control LEAs all felt that access to, and support for, pupils and families had been enhanced through the service being either centralised or school based. In the centralised services, the independence of EWOs from school was again noted as an important factor in this, whilst in the LEA with the school-based service, the pyramid system was felt to increase knowledge of local families and help smooth the transition process.

In terms of the impact on schools, three of the 14 headteachers identified a reduced level of service – either they were unable to access the EWO as regularly as before, or they received less EWO time, or the EWO was now dealing with fewer in-depth issues. One felt that there was now less understanding of the need for early intervention, and another headteacher, where the onus was on schools to contact the service, reported having had no contact at all with the EWO and seeking alternative sources of support. EWOs shared similar concerns, namely a reduction in time they were able to give to primary schools, with a consequent slower response to attendance problems. They also mentioned a lack of communication with high school EWOs and school concerns about personnel changes. These implications for primary schools were also highlighted as anticipated negative outcomes of devolution in the responses to the EWS manager questionnaire. Half of the EWS managers referred to a negative impact on the service to primary schools. Three other service interviewees also nominated the reduced primary school service as the major drawback of devolution.

However, some managers noted an improvement in the primary service, either because it was more focused, or because secondary schools were no longer able to encroach on primary school time, or because allocation had been done on a needs-led basis. Indeed, case-study interviewees in Phases One and Two noted that there were now a set number of hours allocated to each school, whereas previously there had been no set entitlement. They stated that this allowed for more regular EWO visits, more proactive work and greater continuity, as staff changes had been a significant problem before. When asked to reflect overall on the main impact of devolution, three primary headteachers in the case-study schools felt that they actually

received an improved service. Other positive impacts on primary schools included: improved staff attitudes towards the EWO; the raised profile of attendance; and more focus on the needs of the school.

In the control LEAs, all interviewees felt that the current systems worked well, referring to the ease of access to the EWO and, in most cases, regular visits. In one of the schools in an LEA with a centralised service, the headteacher noted that the support to schools could be affected if other local issues began to take priority. There were also problems of primary/secondary continuity in a centralised service (where the EWO only covered primary schools). In one of the schools where the service was school based, the headteacher felt that EWS support, though good, could be even better and, whilst preferable to being centrally based, felt it was still too remote for primary schools.

KEY POINTS

Outcomes for pupils, families and primary schools

School devolved

- ◆ The most significant impact of devolution for primary headteachers was the perceived reduction in service. Whilst half the EWS managers agreed, some felt the service had improved because allocation was on a needs basis and there was now clarity concerning the entitlement of hours. Despite early indications that home visits had declined following devolution, later in the year, the frequency of family work was reported to have improved. Furthermore, there was evidence of greater awareness amongst parents regarding the importance of good attendance.

School based

- ◆ A school-based service was considered beneficial for access and support, aided in part by the pyramid system. Interviewees were generally happy with the nature and level of EWO support, although it was suggested that the service was still too distanced from primary schools.

Centralised

- ◆ The access and support for both pupils and families were thought to be enhanced by operating a centralised service, with the added factor of independence. Again, interviewees were, on the whole, pleased with the service provided, although one headteacher noted that, because the service was centrally organised, their allocation may be altered depending on other needs in the local area.

5.2.3 Impact on attendance

In Phase Two, four of the 14 primary headteachers reported devolution having no identifiable impact on their attendance levels. Five other headteachers and two EWOs reported an improvement in their figures, although the majority of these stressed that the improvement was more as a result of a whole raft of strategies in place in school, rather than of devolution *per se*. In contrast, four EWS managers reported a deterioration in primary attendance overall, and this was considered to be a direct consequence of devolution, with its focus on secondary schools. Allocation of EWOs to secondary schools and feeder primaries and adaptation of the allocation formula to accommodate more primary time were therefore suggested. Interestingly, in one LEA where funding had been devolved, the opposite was reported to be the case, and a significant improvement in unauthorised absence in primary schools was felt to be due to the focus on primary intervention that devolution had facilitated.

The two headteachers in one of the control LEAs with a centralised service considered that this system had a positive impact on attendance because of the advice and support they received. One headteacher, though, stressed the importance of regular EWO involvement and felt this could not always be guaranteed if a service was centrally provided. In the LEA with the school-based service, one headteacher reported an improvement in attendance, which had then resulted in a reduced number of EWO visits.

KEY POINTS

Impact on attendance at primary level

School devolved

- ◆ Five headteachers and two EWOs reported an improvement in attendance figures, although not directly related to devolution. Four EWS managers, however, felt a drop in attendance overall at primary level was a direct consequence.

School based

- ◆ One headteacher reported an improvement in attendance, the result of which was a reduction in the time allocated to the school.

Centralised

- ◆ Access to support and advice from a central service was deemed to positively influence attendance figures, although the fact that guaranteed EWO involvement could not be ensured was also raised.

6. KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Interviewees were asked to consider the key factors for ensuring that devolution worked well. Five distinct success factors were singled out:

- consultation and communication
- accommodation for the EWO
- supportive school management
- clarification of roles and responsibilities
- appropriate allocation of EWOs to schools.

All interviewees (school staff, EWOs and EWS managers) noted the value of consultation and negotiation between schools and LEAs prior to devolution. Equally, it was considered important that effective communication continue once devolution was in place.

The factor most frequently noted by secondary school staff and their EWOs was having suitable office space for the EWO within school. For EWOs, this was linked to feeling valued by the school. EWOs felt that school staff required knowledge of the EWO role, that school management needed to be supportive and that the role of manager needed to be given sufficient time and preparation. The need for adequate supervision was also raised by more than one EWO. Interestingly, school managers considered the skills required for managing EWOs in school to be much the same as those required for managing other school staff (e.g. interpersonal skills, communication skills, negotiation and diplomacy). School staff singled out the quality and skills of the EWO as important, as well as good school-EWO relationships and, in the case of secondary school staff, having appropriate funding.

Almost half of all the EWS managers considered clear boundaries about the role of the EWO and responsibilities for schools as critical, and this was particularly stressed in the two LEAs where funding had been devolved. Appropriate allocation of EWOs to schools was also raised by more than one EWS manager (in one case, cluster allocation was specified), whilst primary headteachers were concerned about the equity in allocation. In addition, a primary EWO stressed that EWOs should be matched to the ethos of the school. One manager felt that individual EWO accountability for raising attendance was a key factor in ensuring that devolution worked well, although another raised concerns about this issue. S/he felt that school systems and practices also influenced attendance levels.

KEY POINTS

Key factors in success

- ◆ All interviewees stressed the importance of communication and consultation during the devolution process and throughout its implementation.
- ◆ Secondary school staff and their EWOs most frequently identified having a suitable office for EWOs as vital for the success of devolution, but also emphasised the need for effective management in schools.
- ◆ The demarcation of both EWO and school responsibilities was considered important by EWS managers.
- ◆ Both primary and secondary school staff highlighted the appropriate allocation of quality EWS staff as critical to the success of devolution.

7. OPINIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF DEVOLUTION

It was notable, in Phase One of the research, that many of the implications, effects and outcomes described might actually correlate with having school-based EWOs where this had not been the case before. Distinguishing between the merits of a school-devolved, rather than school-based, EWS service was therefore a major focus in Phase Two of the research. Interviewees were specifically asked what they felt were the implications of having a school-based service, a school-based and school-managed service, and a service where the funding was devolved completely to secondary schools. Appendix 13 presents a summary of interviewees' responses, whilst Appendix 14 offers a diagrammatic representation of the implications. It should be noted that, very often, primary and secondary interviewees identified the same implications. For this reason, in relaying the responses of primary interviewees, only those comments unique to the primary sector have been presented. The section begins by presenting interviewees' general views on the issue of devolution.

7.1 Opinions of devolution

Seven secondary EWOs held consistently favourable views throughout the pilot period, but two EWOs were negative because of the perceived threat to independence, supervision and support from colleagues. Three EWOs, however, described how their initial anxieties or mixed feelings proved to be unfounded, and pointed out that, by Phase Two of the evaluation, they felt much less apprehensive. Two EWOs, within the same authority, where EWOs were already school based and where funding had been devolved, stated that they would argue strongly for not going back to a centrally managed and funded service. When primary EWOs were asked for their initial opinions of devolution, one EWO stated that they could not see the point as things were going quite well as they were, but welcomed the separation of primary and secondary sectors as the needs in each were very different. In Phase Two, however, one EWO remained apprehensive about the growing divide between primary and secondary EWOs. The fact that the primary EWOs could still meet at a central base was generally felt to encourage cohesion, the standardisation of work, and the sharing of professional knowledge, although the loss of contact with secondary colleagues was raised as a possible source of concern *re* transition work.

Secondary school staff were united in their attitudes towards devolution. All were positive from the outset, with staff in three schools stating that, having seen devolution in practice, they now felt even more optimistic. Staff in two schools, in different authorities, also stated that they would argue strongly not to go back to a centralised service.

Amongst primary school staff, in one LEA, the two primary headteachers interviewed were more in favour of a centralised service, while in another, they welcomed the change because of dissatisfaction with the service previously. In other LEAs, initial reservations had been eased by a smooth transition to the new system, or because things had not changed to any great extent. Although recognising the benefits for secondary schools, some concern was raised that large EWO caseloads would result in little impact on primary attendance, which would in turn impact on secondary schools. One primary headteacher was unhappy that the school now had to contact the service rather than receiving a regular visit and felt they were getting 'a raw deal'. Lastly, two headteachers stated, even in Phase Two, that they still felt they knew very little about devolution and were confused about what it might mean for them.

Seven of the 16 EWS managers felt that devolution was '*still the way to go*', and three of these had become more committed to devolution as the pilot proceeded. Two managers (both from reputedly understaffed services) noted that they could see some positive aspects, such as the raised profile of the service. In contrast, three EWS managers remained negative despite their experiences, and the remaining managers continued to express some reservations. Whilst the pilot had enabled the service in one LEA to move forward, the manager felt that the resources to be devolved required greater clarification and that devolution had been beneficial for attendance, but not for the wider role of the EWS. Another, whilst seeing the virtue of a school-based model, felt that involvement in the pilot had illuminated some disadvantages, and s/he consequently now felt that EWOs should not be school based for all of their time. Involvement in the pilot had confirmed another manager's reservations about their LEA being involved, since devolution had taken valuable resources away from where they were most needed, in the primary sector. In the remaining authority, which had devolved a high percentage of funding to schools, the EWS manager felt there were both advantages and disadvantages but that the responsibilities of schools would need to be made explicit through DfES guidance.

KEY POINTS

Opinions of devolution

- ◆ Secondary school staff held positive views on devolution throughout the pilot period, as did seven EWOs and seven EWS managers.
- ◆ Amongst primary school staff, two headteachers favoured a return to a centralised service and concerns were raised about the large caseloads for primary EWOs.
- ◆ Seven of the 16 EWS managers remained committed to devolution, three were negative and the remaining managers voiced some reservations, namely implications for the wider EWO role and the impact on the primary service.

7.2 Implications of a school-based service

In half of the secondary schools visited and amongst almost half of their EWOs, being located within the school was cited as the most important factor in determining the impact of the service. Over half of the 16 EWS managers agreed that a school base was responsible for the impacts observed since devolution, coupled with the raised profile of attendance. In a large rural LEA, however, it was felt to be the set allocation of hours that was the crucial element. With a large number of schools to cover and limited accommodation, it was felt that the majority of EWOs could not be considered to be school based.

For secondary school staff, the main implications of being school based were, on the positive side, increased accessibility of the EWO, improved communication, close working with school staff and the EWO being more integrated into the school. School interviewees in the control 'centralised' LEAs responded similarly when asked to identify the implications of a school-based service, adding that a school-based EWO would help elevate the general profile of attendance. Primary school headteachers in the case-study LEAs and one in the control LEAs noted that a school-based service may aid continuity across the transition phase. They stressed, however, the need for good communication and for primary schools to be involved in discussing EWO allocations to schools.

Positive aspects raised by EWS staff included those mentioned by secondary school staff, as well as being able to respond quickly to attendance issues, greater loyalty to the school, improved attendance, flexible use of staff resources and the increased profile on attendance and the EWS service. A few EWS managers highlighted the need to encourage schools to work cooperatively to implement some central functions. In two LEAs (one where funding was devolved), schools, for example, had cooperated to provide an emergency response and to ensure safety by allowing EWOs to go on home visits together.

On the negative side, EWS staff mentioned the potential for isolation, lack of support, loss of focus for their work, difficulties with training and therefore inconsistent levels of service to schools, lack of clarity about where responsibilities lay and '*being sucked in by the school*'. In a rural LEA with a high pupil/EWO ratio, a reduction in the service to primary schools was a major cause for concern for the EWS manager. The only negative point raised by one school staff member was the issue of finding accommodation. Again, many of these implications were raised by EWOs in the centralised control LEAs.

KEY POINTS

Implications of a school-based service

- ◆ Secondary school staff identified the main implications of being school based as increased accessibility to the EWO, improved communication, close working with school staff and the EWO being better integrated into the school. Primary school headteachers also noted that a school-based EWO may improve continuity across the transition phase.
- ◆ EWOs and EWS managers saw both negative and positive implications of a school-based service. They reiterated those positive aspects listed above, adding that a school-based location increased the speed of response and loyalty to the school, raised the profile of attendance and improved attendance. On the downside, they mentioned isolation and lack of support for EWOs, their loss of independence, a possible reduction in the primary service and a loss of focus.

7.3 Implications of a school-managed service

At least one member of staff in four of the 14 schools felt that school management had not influenced the impact of devolution. In contrast, in three schools, a member of staff felt that management by the school was in fact fundamental or that the outcomes and effects highlighted were a result of the EWO being internally managed. When asked to consider the implications of a school-managed service, a split in opinion was evident in both the case-study and control LEAs, with school staff tending to highlight the advantages of a greater management role and EWOs voicing the possible pitfalls.

Overwhelmingly, the main positive implications of school management highlighted by school staff were the school having more control over what the EWO did and the EWO being more fully integrated into the school. EWS managers also mentioned greater ownership by schools, the raised profile of attendance and the flexibility to respond to changing schools' needs. One manager felt that it was important for schools to have day-to-day management of EWOs within their schools, but that they also needed to provide information to the LEA for monitoring purposes.

For primary headteachers and their EWOs, in both the case-study and control LEAs, most concern was voiced over whether the priorities of secondary schools would take precedence over those of primary schools and that links

between them may be lost. One headteacher, in a control LEA, felt that resources would be better directed towards the primary schools where problems originated, in order to work preventatively. In connection with being school managed, EWOs raised only negative factors. Isolation or lack of support and the conflict of interest that may be involved, since the interests of the child or the family may not be the same as the interests of the school, were raised. Also mentioned were school staff's lack of understanding of the job (as they too acknowledged), and EWS managers, in particular, questioned the expertise and knowledge of schools for taking on an EWO management role. One manager felt that there would be '*anarchy*' as schools in his/her LEA were extremely reluctant to take on this task, and over half the EWS managers commented that, in reality, schools were very reluctant to take on management responsibilities. EWOs identified additional implications, namely loss of objectivity, obstacles to communication with the LEA and lack of adequate supervision. Other comments made by EWS managers included concerns about maintaining links with the LEA for support and training, EWOs being given inappropriate work, confused responsibilities and, in a small authority, that the increased funding required by schools would lead to a non-viable central service. It should be noted that, in the school-based control LEA, more negative consequences were associated with having a devolved service, by both EWOs and school staff. Interviewees appeared to place greatest value on the fact that EWOs were on-site, and this alone was sufficient to enhance working practice.

KEY POINTS

Implications of a school-managed service

- ◆ School staff cited increased control of the EWO and better integration as the main implications of a school-managed service. Primary headteachers and their EWOs highlighted the danger that the priorities of secondary schools may override those of primary schools.
- ◆ EWOs were uniformly negative when considering the implications of a school-managed service, citing conflicts of interests, isolation, lack of support and inadequate supervision, loss of objectivity and schools' lack of understanding of the job as potential difficulties.
- ◆ EWS managers questioned the expertise and knowledge of school staff to take on an EWO management role, as well as those implications identified by EWOs.

7.4 Implications of devolved funding

At least one member of staff in just over half of the secondary schools visited and two of their EWOs stated that they felt that funding was not the key issue. In contrast, however, in LEAs where funding had been devolved, EWO managers considered the funding aspect to be the most influential factor in terms of impact, since schools were able to provide additional funding for the service and they were therefore considered to have more investment in making it work successfully. Increased control and the ability of the school to enhance the level of service (as indicated by some school staff in Phase One) were the most frequent positive implications raised by secondary school staff. Other implications raised by school staff included EWOs being more fully integrated into school, having a vested interest in the work and, ultimately, becoming more proactive (see Cameo 5, Appendix 11).

Whilst school and EWS interviewees noted the potential to increase the level of service, they also recognised that some schools might reduce the level of service, with the result that attendance could eventually slip. Also, school staff were concerned that funding might not be appropriate to meet costs, and two felt that management costs should be included, reinforcing concerns raised in Phase One regarding funding levels and ‘additionality’ costs, such as travel, telephones, etc. A number of staff also noted that the funding may be used for different things, other than providing EWO support. Over half the EWS managers also thought that devolving funding may lead to the money not being used for the EWS, but to purchase less qualified staff or targeted only at certain pupils, so that the EWO role may be lost (a concern shared by EWOs). One manager, in a small city authority, feared that this would be the demise of their central service, and pointed out that sharing EWOs between schools might be problematic since some schools may not be good at working together. However, if specifications were provided or funding was devolved rather than delegated, three EWS managers felt that they were generally in favour of this. Primary headteachers in both case-study and control LEAs noted the danger that primary schools might receive less money, with many headteachers stating that the system would be dependent on trust between the schools and that this would require close monitoring. The need to increase resources for early intervention in primary schools, rather than reduce them, was emphasised by some.

The main implications raised by EWOs of having funding devolved centred on the loss of independent support for children and families and the impact on EWOs’ professional development or career structure. School staff also acknowledged these potential difficulties. EWS managers added additional implications in terms of the need for recognition of LEA expertise and the role that it would adopt in support, appointment of staff, sharing experiences and monitoring. Two managers felt that devolved funding would result in little change from present practice and that, in effect, this was only a paper exercise.

Interviewees in the control LEAs were also asked to speculate on the implications of a devolved service, and their responses corresponded to those above.

KEY POINTS

Implications of devolved funding

- ◆ School staff noted increased control and the possibility of contributing additional funds as the major implications of devolved funding. However, staff also suggested that, with control of the funding, schools may decide to use it for other purposes.
- ◆ For EWOs, implications tended to be negative, with reference to the loss of independent support for children and families and concerns about the professional development and supervision needs of EWOs.
- ◆ Primary headteachers noted the possibility that funding for the primary school service may be reduced.

7.5 Interviewee preferences

Not all interviewees indicated their preferences in terms of what service they would ideally like, but, of those who did, Table 7.1 provides a summary.

Table 7.1 Interviewee preferences (where these were expressed)

Preference	Centralised	School based	School managed	Funding devolved
Secondary headteachers/ budget holders	0	0	0	6
Secondary school staff	0	6	8	5
Primary headteachers	0	5	1	0
EWS managers	2	8	2	4
EWOs	3	8	0	1
Total	5	27	11	16

Source: *NFER evaluation Phase Two interviews*

It would appear, therefore, that EWS managers and EWOs who expressed a preference were mainly in favour of the school-based option, largely because they felt that the EWO role, independence, training and recruitment of qualified staff were more likely to be preserved within this model. In addition, of the four EWS managers who were in favour of funding being devolved, two came from LEAs where funding had already been devolved, clearly suggesting a strong commitment to devolution from the outset, and two from LEAs in which a poor OFSTED report appeared to be the motivation for involvement in the pilot. Primary headteachers who expressed a preference were also more in favour of a school-based service because of the threat to primary resources that devolution of funding might pose. Whilst the majority of school staff also favoured a school-based or school-managed model, headteachers and budget holders, perhaps not surprisingly, favoured more a model in which funding was fully devolved because of the control over resources and the sense of EWO loyalty that this engendered.

In the school-based control LEA, all bar one interviewee (a headteacher) wished to retain a school-based service, as they felt the current system worked very well and it was easier to build relationships with pupils, families and schools whilst still retaining an element of independence. The remaining headteacher, whilst commending the existing service, opted for devolved funding because '*money is power*'.

In the centralised control LEAs, three secondary EWOs expressed a strong desire to remain centralised, as did also primary EWOs, and one preferred school based, but still with central line management. School interviewees voiced opposing preferences, however, with most calling for total devolution (just one head of year expressed a need for some central support for the purposes of supervision and training). A primary headteacher, in an LEA with a centralised service, stated that s/he would prefer to have a school-based service because s/he felt it was a simpler system. Another headteacher commented that they could see potential benefits in terms of the increased flexibility of money being devolved within a cluster of schools.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study, commissioned by DfES in August 2000, had a remit to evaluate the piloting of devolution of EWOs to secondary schools in 16 self-selecting LEAs during the first year of implementation. Its timing, therefore, allowed only immediate outcomes and reactions to be garnered, and this in itself perhaps suggests **a recommendation that some caution is exercised in judging the overall efficacy of the experiment at this stage**, particularly in relation to data concerning any impact on attendance statistics. In addition, the LEAs that participated in the pilot could not be considered representative of local authorities in general, as a higher than average proportion were 'new' or London boroughs, and the LEAs became involved in the pilot for a range of different reasons, including having a 'failing' EWS or a desire for an LEA to devolve more of its services.

The DfES brief required the incorporation of quantitative and qualitative data, including that from 'control' LEAs (one with school-based EWOs, the others having centralised services), in order to ensure some degree of comparison. Perhaps one of the major findings to emerge from the study has been the lack of robust termly school data concerning attendance, as only six of the 16 pilot LEAs and one of the three 'controls' managed to offer sufficiently valid termly figures for the current and previous year to include in statistical analysis.

Nevertheless, this valid quantitative data from the pilot LEAs did indicate that there was no immediate and universally positive impact on attendance figures accruing from devolution across all pilot LEAs. Indeed, a deterioration in attendance statistics overall was more common, with only 14 of the 100 or so schools included in the analysis showing sustained improvement term on term. It is important to note that many different reasons for the general decline, not always associated with devolution, were offered. However, there was also some intimation that the average unauthorised absence figures were showing some improvement by the second term in those minority of schools that managed to effect positive change on attendance rates. It may also be significant that most of the schools consistently showing improvement term on term were from authorities where the extent of devolution was greatest. Equally, one fully devolved LEA did have the lowest decline in attendance rates. **Thus, the need for further longitudinal investigation of attendance figures, and the factors underpinning any change, can be recommended. In addition, some greater standardisation of the mechanics for collating attendance statistics at school and LEA level may be advisable.**

Qualitative data suggested alternative viewpoints on positive and negative implications of devolvement (see Appendix 14). Many participants could

identify a range of positive features. These mostly related to an EWO's ongoing presence in school, resulting in a higher profile for attendance matters generally, closer liaison with school staff and a greater focus on early intervention. How far this type of outcome was unique to school-devolved, as opposed to school-based, models was hard to ascertain, and although the advantages of 'ownership' and 'control' of the EWO by schools were mentioned, half of the EWS managers in the pilot LEAs preferred a school-based model.

Detractors saw these closer links and school control as potentially damaging to certain established principles of the EWS, such as independence, acting in the interests of the child, and supporting pupils and families marginalised from mainstream. As well as that, the future capacity to perform EWS central or statutory duties in a devolved model was questioned (particularly where funding was devolved), as was the ability of schools to provide proper professional supervision, induction and training. All of these predicted outcomes obviously could not be fully evidenced in the first months of devolution, but the evaluation highlighted that significant changes might be unfolding. There were, for instance, intimations that, in a devolved model, the phenomenon and discourse of 'staff liaison' was replacing that of 'supervision'; that EWOs could be asked to perform non-attendance duties; and that, in future, delegated EWS funding might be diverted by schools to non-personnel resources. On the other hand, it is important not to forget there were examples of a school's willingness to augment the cost of an EWO to create a full-time post. **Overall, recommendations must therefore be offered in the area of rigorous monitoring and quality assurance procedures for any school-devolved model, which in turn has financial and LEA staff/time resource implications.**

EWS support for primary schools in a devolved model was also queried. Involvement in transition work and knowledge of local families were cited as losses in 'primary only' (as opposed to 'school pyramid') EWO deployment. In addition, the large numbers of primary schools covered by one EWO were noted. **Careful consideration of primary EWO roles is therefore recommended.**

Finally, the pilot has perhaps raised fundamental questions about the future role and very function of the EWS. As the social inclusion agenda unfolds and new professional personnel, such as personal advisers, learning mentors and LSU managers enter our school communities, **it is recommended that the responsibilities of an EWS/O may need more precise clarification.** Such clarification could include standardised job descriptions and entitlements regarding accommodation, ongoing supervision, training and induction. These would be an important component of any consultation with school staff if devolvement were to be introduced in other LEAs. 'Good practice' guides may also help prevent inappropriate activities for school-devolved EWOs. Ultimately devolution perhaps raises issues regarding the existence of a distinct skill base and professional identity for the EWS in the future.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Appendix 1a: Data collection and research timetable

Timescale	Data collected	Source of data
September 2000	Pilot LEA devolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submitted by the 16 pilot LEAs to the DfEE prior to devolution.
September 2000	Questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed by the 16 EWS managers.
October 2000	Follow-up telephone interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed by the 16 EWS managers.
December 2000	Phase One interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two secondary schools in each of seven case-study LEAs (14 schools in total) were visited. Interviews with school managers, pastoral staff, those with financial responsibility and the EWO. Feeder primary for each school also visited. Primary headteacher, or SENCO, and the EWO were interviewed.
May 2001	Phase Two interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return visits to secondary and primary schools.
May–July 2001	Telephone interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heads of other relevant services, such as the Educational Psychology Service and the Behaviour Support Service, within each of the seven case-study LEAs.
June–July 2001	Final telephone interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed by the 16 EWS managers.
December 2000 and May 2001	Time-use mapping data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary EWOs in the 14 case-study schools were asked to estimate the percentage of time spent on different activities during an average week.
July 2001	Statistical data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All 16 pilot LEAs were asked to provide authorised and unauthorised absence data for each of the following terms, where this was available: autumn 1999, spring 2000, autumn 2000 and spring 2000.
August 2001		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual authorised and unauthorised absence returns to the DfES for the years 1998/99, 1999/2000 and 2000/01 for all 16 pilot LEAs and the three control LEAs were also accessed.

Appendix 1b: The number of interviewees and their professional status

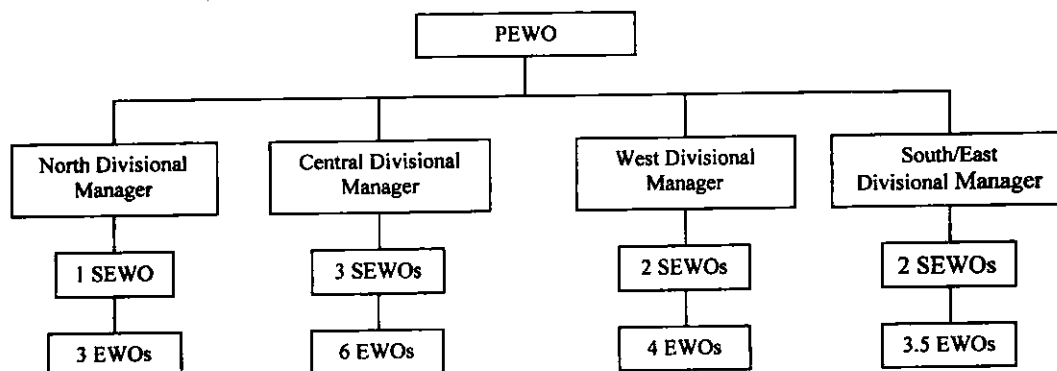
Professional status	Number of interviews in 16 pilot LEAs	Number of interviews in three control LEAs
Primary only EWOs	7 (includes two Education Welfare Assistants)	2
Secondary and primary EWOs	6	4
Secondary only EWOs	8	2
EWS managers	16	3
Primary headteachers	12	6
Primary SENCOs	2	0
Secondary heads	8	2
Secondary deputy/assistant headteachers	8	3
Secondary heads of year	10	7
Secondary SENCOs	3	0
Learning support manager	1	0
Senior tutor	0	1
Attendance officers	0	3
Finance	3	1
Heads of other services*	37	0
TOTALS	121	34

* includes Admissions, the Advisory Service, the Behaviour Support Service, Connexions, the Education Psychology Service, the SEN Support Service, Excellence in Cities, Social Services and the Youth Service

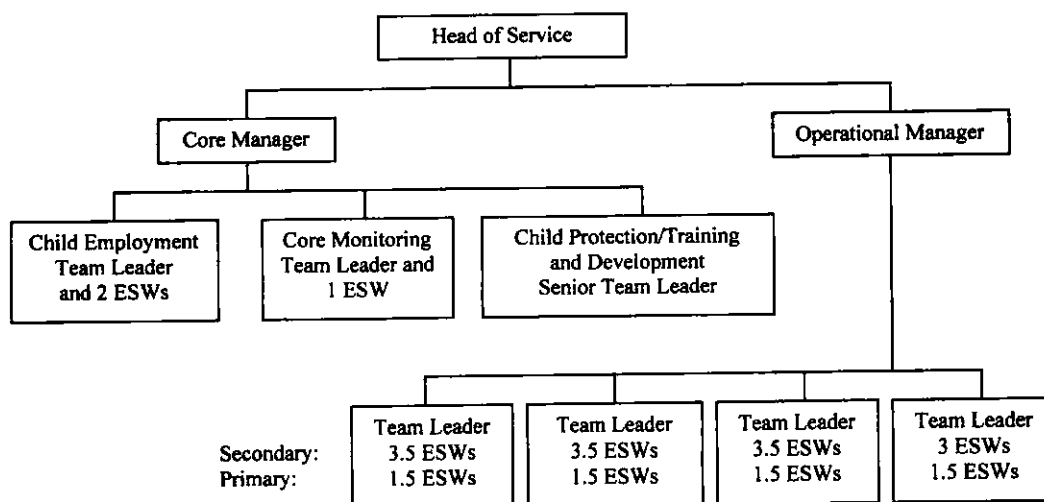
Appendix 2 Illustrations of the different structures of services within the pilot LEAs

LEA 1 A large county authority

Before pilot devolution



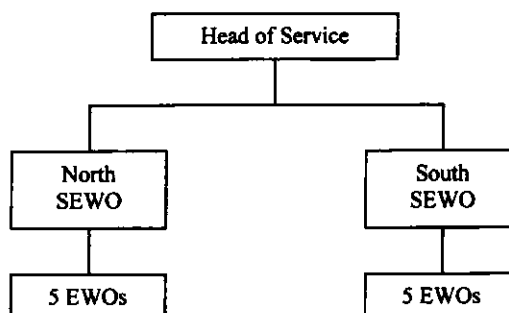
After pilot devolution



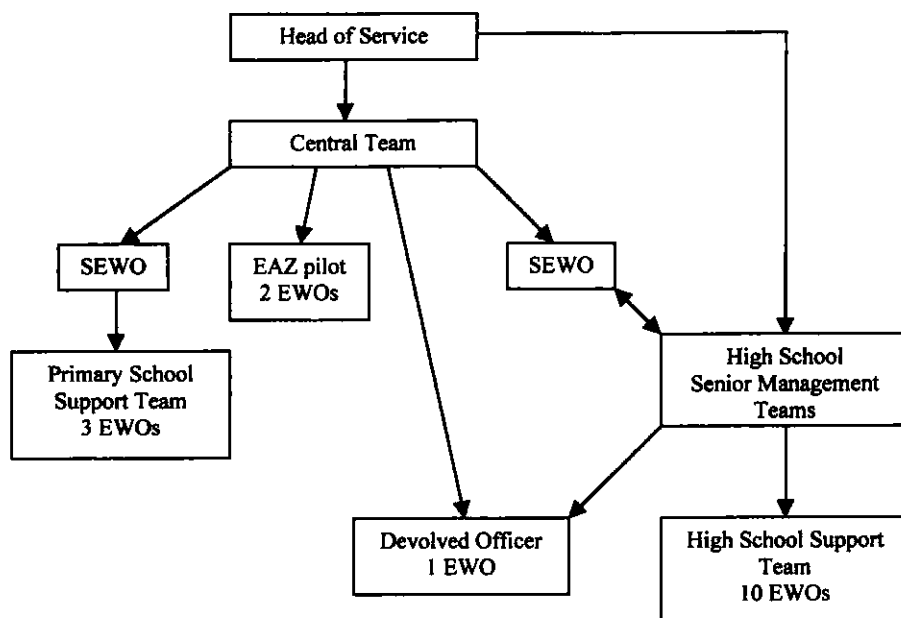
- shift from area-based teams into core and operational sections, each with their own manager
- operational section includes four teams, each with some secondary and some primary sector ESWs

LEA 2 A medium-sized new authority with a city focus

Before pilot devolution



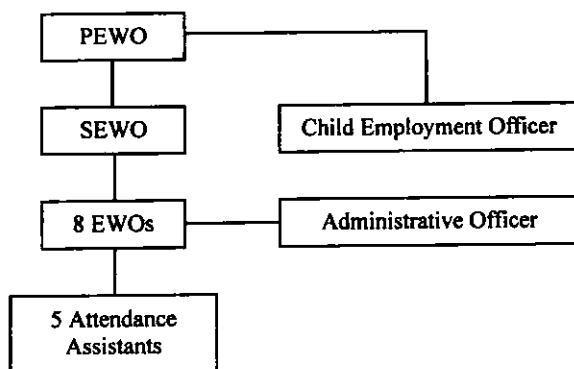
After pilot devolution



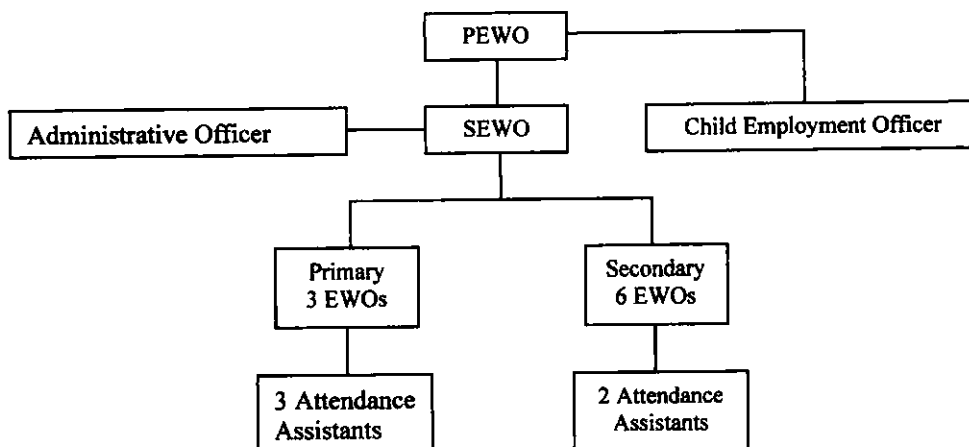
- simple area based structure before pilot devolution
- following pilot devolution, a split into central and high school teams, with central including EAZ pilot EWOs, as well as the primary school support team
- one devolved officer – as part of the central team

LEA 3 A small new authority with a city focus

Before pilot devolution



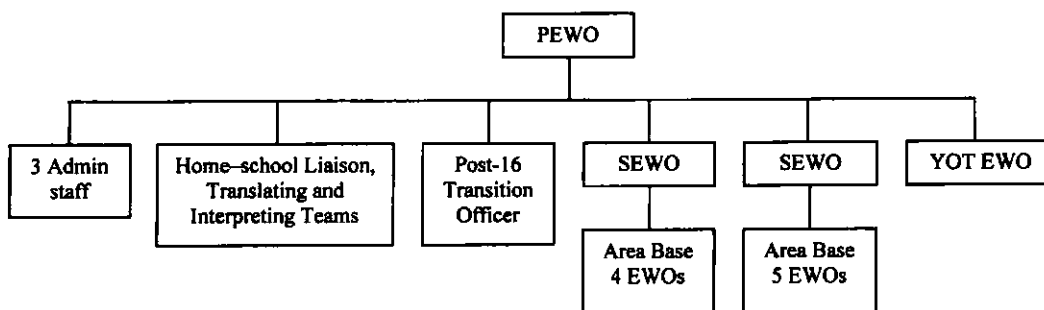
After pilot devolution



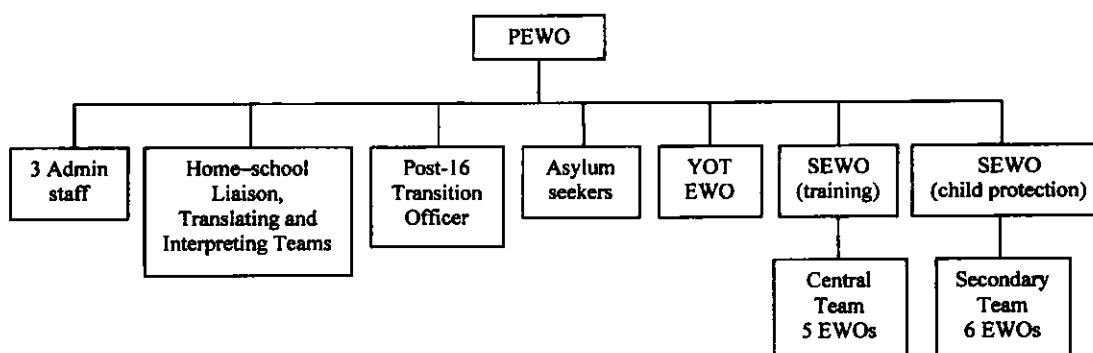
- one team of EWOs and attendance assistants before pilot devolution split into a primary and a secondary team after devolution

LEA 4 A medium-sized new authority with a city focus

Before pilot devolution



After pilot devolution



- retained a similar structure, but with a division into central and secondary teams instead of area-based teams

Appendix 3 The type, size and staffing in each of the pilot LEAs after devolution

LEA	Type	Size	No. of secondary schools	No. of staff to one EWO	No. of pupils
1	County	Small	5 (plus 16 middle)	7 (plus 5 EWAs)	3,500
2	Inner London	Small	7	12.6	35 cases
3	New city	Large	16	23.5	2,700
4	Metropolitan	Large	43	54	2,306
5	New city	Small	10	13	1,915
6	New city	Small	9	12	30,000 [<i>sic</i>]
7	County	Large	52	27.5	3,665
8	London	Large	21	19	3,239
9	New city	Large	20	25.5	2,100
10	Inner London	Small	10	19	1,700
11	London	Medium	11	11	50 cases
12	London	Medium	18	12	3,213
13	New city	Medium	17	20	2,119
14	New city	Medium	12	18.7	1,926
15	New city	Small	12	19	3,266
16	New city	Medium	13	10.5	2,500

Appendix 4 The extent of devolution, together with significant other features in the 16 pilot LEAs

Extent (%)	LEA size	LEA type	Other significant features
60	Large	Metropolitan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● allocated to EiC wedge partnerships ● implementation groups set up ● new Behaviour and Attendance Service
60	Large	New city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● pilot area for Connexions and EiC ● all schools get a lump sum and then allocated according to need
59.3	Small	County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● money devolved ● primary and secondary schools devolved through clusters ● strategy groups set up ● three-tier system ● EWOs already school based ● pilot area for Connexions
52	Medium-sized	New city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● all schools get lump sum then allocated according to need
50	Small	New city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● minimum level of service agreed in consultation with schools
50	Large	London borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1999 reorganised into an attendance and a casework team
50	Medium-sized	London borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● working party of school staff and EWOs
50	Large	New city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● wanting to give schools as much responsibility as possible ● wanting EWOs to work alongside EiC and Connexions staff
50	Medium-sized	New city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● steering group of heads and other services and agencies ● support services moving into multi-disciplinary teams
50	Medium-sized	New city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● piloting three different approaches to devolution ● EiC operational in September ● schools used additional money to raise amount of EWO time
47	Large	County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● additional 20 per cent resources allocated to cluster primaries ● reorganisation through best value review
45	Small	London borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● restructuring into multi-disciplinary inclusive education service ● coordination with other support staff, e.g. learning mentors for EiC ● Connexions pilot area
40	Small	New city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EWOs already school based ● some schools already buying in EWO time
35	Small	New city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● devolved the money ● part of a multi-disciplinary children's support service ● EiC learning mentors already established ● already a distinct primary and secondary team
31	Small	London borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● part of multi-disciplinary teams based in school ● already a distinct primary and secondary team
No data	Medium-sized	London borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● steering group with heads on ● schools with option of increasing their money through EiC

Appendix 5 Illustrations of formulae used for allocation of EWS staff resources

Examples were provided of formulae that were based on the following factors:

1. NOR, FSM, UA, number of referrals
2. FSM, NOR, attendance levels
3. NOR, FSM, percentage of absence
4. NOR, FSM, non-attendance, exclusions
5. NOR, FSM, SEN
6. FSM, percentage of resident pupils
7. NOR, UA, referral rate, consultation rate
8. NOR, AEN, LAC, exclusions, turnover, absences
9. Absence rate, UA, benefits, GCSE grades A–G
10. NOR, AA, UA

* Note that some services gave schools a core allocation before allocating the remainder of their resources on a formula basis and that in different services, the different factors were given various weightings.

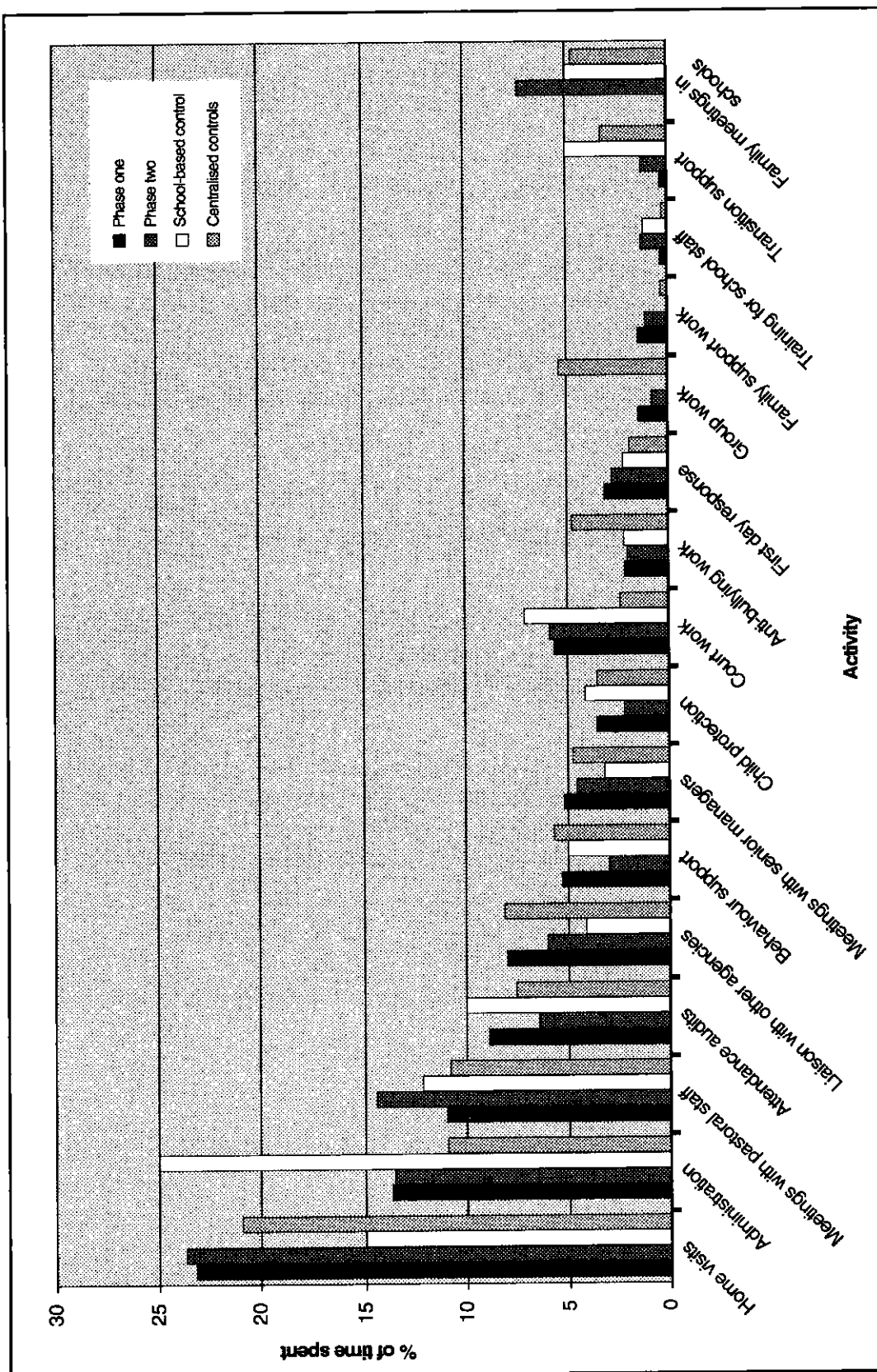
Abbreviations used:

NOR	number on roll
FSM	free school meals
UA	unauthorised absence
AA	authorised absence
AEN	additional educational needs
SEN	special educational needs
LAC	looked-after children

Appendix 6 Management styles within the 14 case-study secondary schools

- Style A** Where the EWO appeared to have no formal meetings with the school manager and managed and prioritised their own work, though met regularly with heads of year or school (five schools).
- Style B** Where the EWO met formally with their school manager, the deputy headteacher, on a regular basis, and also met regularly, or when required, with heads of year. Priorities were set by the school, though the EWO tended to manage their own workload (five schools).
- Style C** Where the EWO was directly supervised by the SENCO with the headteacher or head of faculty as line manager. Regular meetings with the SENCO took place and the EWO also met regularly with house staff or key stage coordinators (two schools).
- Style D** Where a management group including representatives from middle and primary schools decided the priorities for the EWO. The EWO then met twice a week with their school manager (one school).
- Style E** Where the EWO had been working in the school in another role for some time though new to this role. They met weekly with their school manager and each half term went through statistics to prioritise cases. The EWO also met with year coordinators each half term (one school).

Appendix 7 Average time spent on EWO activities (results of time-use mapping)



Appendix 8 Changes in authorised and unauthorised absence rates

Autumn term

Across all schools, the average change in:

Authorised absence = -0.10
 Unauthorised absence = -0.22

Schools where:	Average change in attendance rate	Average change in authorised absence	Average change in unauthorised absence	Number of schools
Attendance improved	+0.94	+0.59	+0.35	42
Attendance remained the same	0	-0.35	+0.35	2
Attendance declined	-1.25	-0.60	-0.65	57

Spring term

Across all schools, the average change in:

Authorised absence = -0.86
 Unauthorised absence = -0.06

Schools where:	Average change in attendance rate	Average change in authorised absence	Average change in unauthorised absence	Number of schools
Attendance improved	+1.91	+0.20	+1.72	22
Attendance declined	-1.69	-1.15	-0.54	80

* It should be noted that, throughout, a positive number indicates an improvement whilst a negative number indicates a deterioration.

Appendix 9 EWS manager rationales for improvements in attendance, in rank order

- increased EWO time (7)
- introduction of first-day response (6)
- other initiatives focusing on attendance (4)
- installation of electronic registration (4)
- good school systems in place (4)
- new EWO (3)
- EWO on site (3)
- school focus on attendance (2)
- new headteacher/key school staff (2)
- good school manager (2)
- unauthorised absence categorised as authorised (2)
- extension of registration time (1)
- school selection (1)
- a yearly trend (1)
- good school–EWO relationship (1)
- increasingly focused work of service (1)
- commitment of key school staff (1)

Appendix 10 EWS manager rationales for a deterioration in attendance, in rank order

- categorisation of unauthorised absence as authorised (7)
- installation of electronic registration* (7)
- EWO vacancy/off sick (5)
- poor school systems in place (5)
- in special measures/serious weaknesses or of concern (4)
- new headteacher or key staff (4)
- inappropriate use of EWO time (3)
- change of intake (3)
- key school staff off sick or vacancy (3)
- increased number of out-of-borough pupils (2)
- flu epidemic/illness (2)
- pupils educated off site (2)
- school not taking attendance seriously (2)
- resistance to LEA input (1)
- money for EWO given to the school (1)
- location in a deprived area (1)
- split site location (1)
- high school staff turnover (1)
- lack of accommodation for the EWO (1)
- EWO overworked (1)
- headteacher trying to get more EWO time (1)
- EWS input only on referral (1)
- one pupil with high authorised absence (1)
- inability of EWO to challenge the school (1)

* either due to initial problems with installation or greater accuracy in reporting figures

Appendix 11 Illustrative cameos

Cameo 1. A school in a control authority with a centralised service

School context

A school located in a small new city LEA with a centralised EWS, in which the majority of EWOs serviced either primary or two or three secondary schools. This school was in the upper half of all schools in the authority in terms of attendance. The EWO worked in three secondary schools, and time was allocated on a needs basis.

Management

Weekly meetings with heads of year were reported, but regular telephone contact and meetings with the head of pastoral care were also described. In addition, the EWO also had regular supervision with the principal education social worker every two or three weeks.

Working practice

The EWO dealt with welfare issues, as well as cases focused solely on attendance. Although the EWO was considered responsive, school staff expressed a preference for him/her to be school based because they felt that it was difficult for him/her to deal with problems immediately when s/he had responsibility for other schools. However, they also recognised that a centralised system enabled the EWO to be independent and, therefore, better equipped to deal with parents who were dissatisfied with school, as well as facilitating work with other agencies. The EWO supported the school staff's view since s/he felt that a lot of her/his time was spent travelling between schools and the office base.

Outcomes

Comparison of annual figures for 99/00 and 00/01 showed that both authorised and unauthorised absence had deteriorated. However, school staff felt that they had become more stringent in the categorisation of absence as unauthorised when pupils took holidays. Both school staff and the EWO speculated that the location of the EWO in the school was likely to have a positive impact on attendance figures. The EWO stated that s/he felt unable to keep on top of absence, particularly unauthorised absence, when spending so much of her/his time at the office, and that this made her/him less accessible to school staff, pupils and parents.

Cameo 2. A school in a control authority with school-based EWOs

School context

A mixed secondary school within a pyramid system in a metropolitan authority where the EWS had not been devolved, but was school based. The EWO worked with two secondary schools and their feeder primary schools, visiting the latter on a termly basis. S/he was school based, with an office in one of the secondary schools. Staff from the other secondary school and the associated primary schools contacted him/her at his/her host school. Contact with schools was felt to be good, especially as they were all within easy travelling distance of each other.

Management

At the host school, the EWO met with all five heads of year for an hour each week and liaised with school office staff handling first-day calling. There were not felt to be any challenges with this arrangement. The EWO attended an EWS team meeting once a week and had supervision every eight weeks from a senior EWO, although they talked on a weekly basis.

Working practice

For school staff, having the EWO based in the school had increased accessibility and face-to-face contact, and it was easier for him/her to attend meetings in school. Working within the pyramid system was felt to enhance work with, and knowledge of, families in the local area. The fact that the EWO still had a measure of independence from the school was believed to facilitate his/her work with pupils and families.

Outcomes

Comparing this year's attendance figures with last year's, both authorised absence and unauthorised absence had increased. However, the fact that the EWO was in school so much meant that attendance issues could be picked up more quickly and, as a result, in individual cases, unauthorised absence was believed to have improved. In addition, contact with staff, pupils and families was also reported to have improved. Overall, the EWO being school based was considered to have had a very positive impact on the school.

Cameo 3. A school in a pilot LEA where the EWO was school managed

School context

An all-boys' school in a small, new authority with a city focus, which had devolved 50 per cent of the EWS budget to secondary schools. The EWO worked in the case-study school for three days of the week and in another secondary school for the other two days.

Management

The EWO was line managed by the assistant head. Although most of the year heads had access to the EWO, there were no formal meetings (management style A, see Appendix 6), and the EWO felt that the amount of contact with year heads was variable.

Working practice

School staff felt that working practice had developed over the course of devolution, that the EWO was now more accepted by school staff and that the contribution that the EWO made had become increasingly valuable. The EWO's involvement in meetings with parents, for example, was thought to have been particularly useful. However, there was a large team of support staff, such as Connexions staff and Behaviour Support staff, working in the school and the EWO felt that, whilst all the support staff were, supposedly, working in the same area, they each had their own agenda. Although initial conflicts due to confused roles were considered by school staff to have been resolved, the EWO felt that some confusion remained. In addition, the EWO felt that his/her skills were still being under-utilised and that s/he was still seen as more of an attendance officer or a '*doorknocker*'.

Outcomes

Comparison of annual figures for the year 99/00 with those for the year 00/01 showed that both authorised absence and unauthorised absence had increased. However, school staff felt that recent improvements in unauthorised absence had, at least in part, been due to the devolved EWO, as well as other work going on within the school. The EWO had received positive feedback from parents and his/her work was thought by school staff to have had a positive effect on links with families, but the EWO commented that lack of feedback from staff meant that s/he was less aware of pupils' situations.

Cameo 4. A school in a pilot authority where the EWO was school managed**School context**

A school in a small inner London borough with a relatively low attendance rate compared to other schools within the borough. At the same time as devolution was taking place a multi-disciplinary team approach to supporting schools had been introduced. The EWO worked for three days in the case-study secondary school and attended college for the other two days.

Management

The EWO met regularly with the deputy head and heads of year (management style B, see Appendix 6), although the EWO did not consider him/herself to be managed by the school. S/he saw the new management arrangements as an opportunity to broaden his/her role to a wider social inclusion agenda.

Working practice

The EWO had established protocols for working with school staff, but had no office base and therefore felt there were limited opportunities for working directly with pupils and families. He/she was trying to introduce a framework for all support workers in the school, including learning mentors, who s/he felt were not coordinated. Since the start of the pilot, school staff felt that the EWO was working more closely with other school support staff, such as learning support and the home-school liaison officer, as well as outside agencies, such as Social Services. S/he was also thought to have developed more intervention strategies for pupils and to have engaged more frequently with parents. However, the EWO felt that there should be a lot more focus on prevention and that, once pupils had been referred, school staff often relinquished responsibility. Bromcom had been introduced towards the beginning of devolution to assist in identifying patterns of absence.

Outcomes

Comparison of annual figures for the year 99/00 with those for the year 00/01 showed that authorised absence had decreased by a small percentage, whilst unauthorised absence had increased by a small percentage. However, previous figures were reported to have been inaccurate, and school staff expected greater improvements in the future. The work of the EWO was reported by school staff as having had a positive impact on individual pupils and was felt to have resulted in clear structures being established. Pastoral staff felt that communication with the EWO had improved and, as a consequence, they felt more supported. School staff reported that the profile of attendance had been raised throughout the school. Alongside this, however, the EWO felt that s/he had issued a high number of court warnings since the start of the pilot and linked this to the lack of preventative work.

Cameo 5. A school in a pilot authority where funding had been devolved

School context

A secondary school in a small, new authority with a city focus, which had devolved 35 per cent of the total EWS budget to secondary schools, and one which had devolved the money rather than the staff. The EWS formed part of a multi-disciplinary Children's Support Service. The EWO worked in the case-study school for two-and-a-half days and centrally within the LEA for the other two-and-a-half days.

Management

The EWO was line managed within school by the deputy head (management style B, see Appendix 6) but had joint supervision once a month at the EWS central base. S/he attended pastoral management group meetings and worked closely with the heads of year and the administration assistant. The EWO felt it was useful still being able to link with the PEWO for advice and support. School staff felt that, following devolution, everyone was aware of the EWO in school and how to access their services.

Working practice

As devolution progressed, the system had become more structured, with meetings between the EWO and the heads of year scheduled for each Friday afternoon. The EWO worked with a wider range of staff than before. As a result of working more closely with staff and having more time in school, the response to attendance issues had become more immediate. Work with pupils and families had improved, and the EWO was now more proactive in contacting them. Support for the EWO within the school was felt to be good.

Outcomes

Comparing last year's attendance figures with this year's, authorised absence had increased, whilst unauthorised absence had declined. School staff felt that attendance continued to be good, but also reported increased awareness amongst staff and pupils of attendance issues. Devolution was felt to have had a positive impact on pupils and their families. In contrast to before, families, reportedly, now requested support from the EWO. The school was using the EWO more and more.

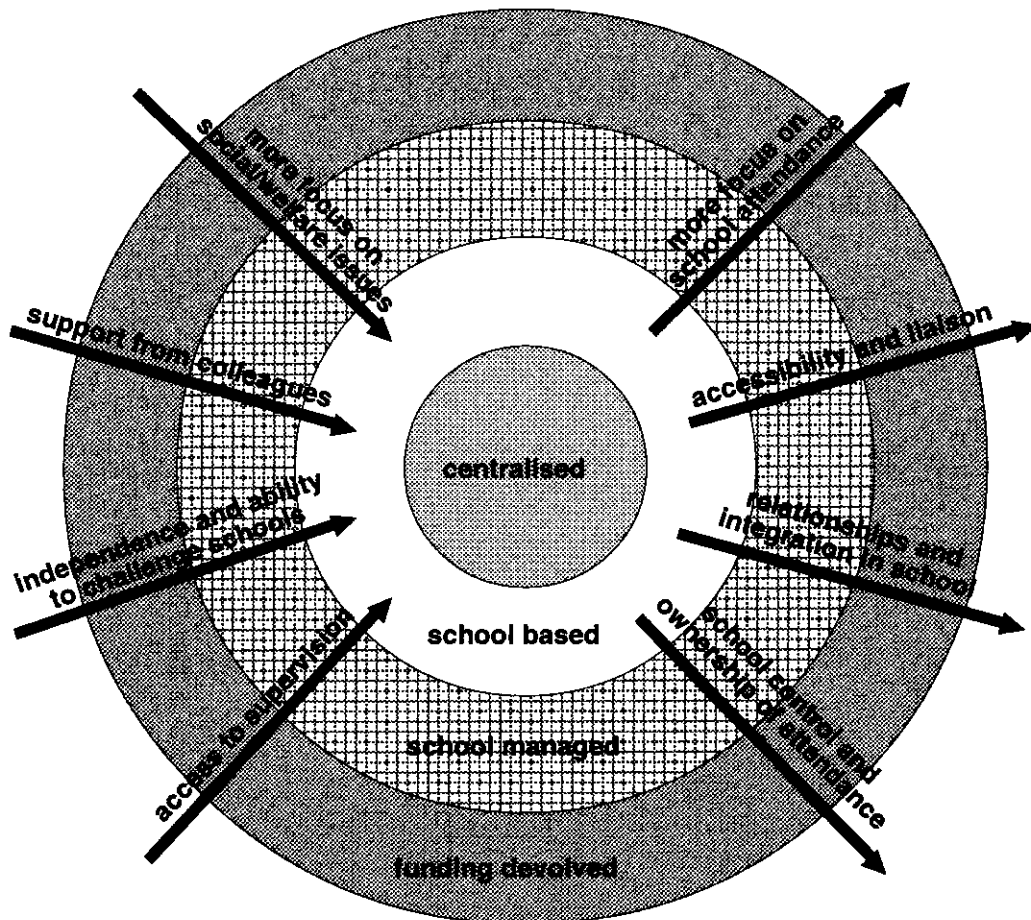
Appendix 12 Summary of the positive and negative outcomes of devolution

POSITIVE OUTCOMES	NEGATIVE OUTCOMES
<p>For schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School staff are more proactive in attendance matters ● the profile of attendance is raised ● schools have greater control over the EWO ● improved liaison with school staff ● greater accessibility to school staff ● improved relationships with school staff ● guaranteed EWO time in school ● school staff have a better understanding of the EWO role ● school staff are able to access advice and feel more supported ● schools have a more positive attitude towards the EWS ● EWOs focusing more on whole-school procedures ● EWOs are more responsive to school requests ● greater clarity of the EWO allocation to primary schools <p>For pupils and families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● greater EWO accessibility ● a faster response to attendance problems ● attendance problems identified earlier ● improved relationships <p>For EWOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● greater accessibility to school staff, pupils and families ● better integration into the school system ● the formalisation of working practice ● an increasing focus on preventative work ● a better understanding of school systems ● improved interagency liaison ● widening of the EWOs role (e.g. to include pastoral support) 	<p>For schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● finding time to manage the EWO ● finding adequate accommodation for the EWO ● a reduced primary service ● difficulties in effectively coordinating the work of different agencies working in the same area (e.g. Behaviour Support Services, Connexions, Learning Mentors) <p>For pupils and families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● children not on a school roll may not receive a service ● families may not see the EWO as independent, which in turn could affect family work <p>For EWOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● reduced access to supervision and training ● fewer opportunities to discuss problems with colleagues ● a sense of isolation ● finding time to talk to school managers ● loss of independence ● inappropriate use of EWO time ● conflicts with the EWO role ● overlap of the EWO role with the work of other agencies ● a narrowing of the EWO role (loss of social work aspects) ● loss of some central functions (e.g. monitoring) ● a decline in interagency liaison and contact ● demoralisation of EWOs ● increased workload for primary EWOs

Appendix 13 Summary of the implications of different service models

	POSITIVE OUTCOMES	NEGATIVE OUTCOMES
Devolved funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has total control over EWO time the school may be able to enhance the service, by adding additional funding the EWO becomes a member of the school staff there is clarity as to where EWO responsibilities lie (with the school) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the money may be used to purchase cheaper, less qualified staff the funding may be used for activities other than EWO input concerns that funding may not cover other costs (management, travel, etc.) primary schools may receive less money professional development needs of EWO may be overlooked recruitment problems for schools with poor attendance loss of EWO objectivity/independence EWOs may become isolated may lead to the demise of the central service loss of independent support for pupils and families
School managed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has more control over EWO time the EWO is better integrated into the school the EWO and the school have shared aims the school has more ownership of attendance issues the profile of attendance is raised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> priorities of the secondary school may take precedence over primary schools lack of support for EWOs EWOs may feel isolated conflict of interest between the EWO and the school loss of EWO objectivity/independence lack of adequate supervision liaison with other agencies may suffer EWOs may be given inappropriate tasks
School based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improved accessibility to staff, pupils and parents the location of EWO in school assists communication improved relationships with staff/school faster intervention the EWO is better integrated into the school the profile of attendance is raised better continuity across the transition phase the EWO is more loyal to the school enhanced contact with other agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EWOs may feel isolated lack of support from EWS colleague lack of independence the gap between primary and secondary may widen loss of the broad EWO role (e.g. social work aspects) lack of clarity in terms of where responsibilities lie (school or LEA) ensuring the effective implementation of central functions a reduction in the primary service
Centralised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> guaranteed access to quality supervision the chance to share concerns and workload with colleagues the independence of EWO is ensured, allowing them to undertake a range of tasks independence from the school assists work with families and enables the EWO to work in best interests of child the EWO is more able to challenge the school over attendance procedures enhanced contact with other agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> arranging administration through a central office finding accommodation for EWOs in school not having enough EWO time the service is less accessible for pupils, parents and staff time spent travelling between the central office and the school a slower response time

Appendix 14 Diagrammatic representation of the implications of devolution



MULTI-AGENCY WORKING: An Audit of Activity

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Mary Atkinson, Karen Halsey, Anne Wilkin and Kay Kinder

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AN EVALUATION OF THE DEVOLUTION OF EDUCATION WELFARE SERVICES TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS: The First Year

This report relays the findings from the first year of the NFER evaluation of the pilot devolution of Education Welfare Services (EWS) to secondary schools, involving 16 self-selected and three 'control' LEAs.

The research involved questionnaires and telephone interviews with EWS managers, case-study visits to primary and secondary schools and analysis of attendance data at school and LEA level.

The report includes analysis and discussion of:

- ◆ initial findings on the process of devolution and its immediate impact
- ◆ issues of Education Welfare Officer (EWO) management
- ◆ the outcomes and effects of devolution
- ◆ key factors in success
- ◆ the implications of EWS devolution to secondary schools compared to school-based or school-managed services.

The report should be of interest to both EWS and LEA staff.