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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation, and on discussions with members, staff in the education and other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of its work was circulated to all but one of the LEA's schools. The response rate was 82 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one pupil referral unit, 11 primary, one special and four secondary schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other key staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools in the LEA was also included. The inspection considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in schools, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Torbay LEA was set up in 1998, following local government reorganisation in Devon. Although relatively new, it performs most of its functions satisfactorily and some well. Some inherited challenges, particularly in relation to funding and the supply of school places, have proved difficult to overcome. There are also doubts about the LEA's capacity to implement some of the recommendations in this report, and to improve.

5. Attainment of pupils on entry and eligibility for school meals are close to national figures. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) is above average for primary aged pupils and broadly in line for secondary. The percentage of minority ethnic pupils is well below the national figure. The pupil population is growing and pupil mobility and the availability of school places are becoming important issues in an increasing number of schools.

6. Strategic management by the council is weak. Many members are inexperienced, the authority has no clear and agreed vision for education and there is a lack of leadership. Too little priority is given to educational issues, and in several key areas the authority does not fully understand its statutory duties, including its responsibility to secure education for all children. There is also little evidence of members' understanding the LEA's responsibilities in helping to raise standards or monitoring the impact of LEA services on schools and pupils.

7. The allocation of funding at corporate level lacks transparency and the effects of this are only being mitigated by the considerable effort of education officers. It was not, for example, possible during the inspection to establish with certainty how much the council spends on education, and a degree of mistrust has built up between officers and members. The LEA has been reluctant to embrace Best Value methodology and slow to conduct Best Value reviews. There are difficulties in relations with the secondary school sector, arising in part from the diverse pattern of provision, but also reflecting problems encountered by the LEA in engaging with some of the schools. The response to the school survey from secondary schools was very critical and antagonism towards the LEA was also evident during interviews with headteachers and governors. The council's approach to school places and admissions is inadequate. As a further complication, at the time of the inspection, the director of education services was also absent on long-term sick leave.

8. Despite these impediments, Torbay schools perform at least in line with those nationally. Support for school improvement in primary and special schools, and for individual pupils generally, is mostly effective. LEA officers and advisers have embraced the national agenda of challenging schools to improve and are making every effort to support schools in inverse proportion to success. After an uncertain start, support for schools causing concern has also generally developed well. Senior officers are committed to school improvement and the dedication of officers in encouraging schools to improve has been an important factor in the progress made.

9. The majority of functions are discharged at least adequately and the following functions are performed well:

- support for numeracy;
- support for information communication and technology in the curriculum;
- intervention in schools during short-term temporary crises;
- support for financial matters;
- development of a strategy for Special educational needs;
- asset management planning;
- support for attendance; and
- support for behaviour.

10. The delivery of a few functions is unsatisfactory:

- allocation of resources to priorities;
- provision of secondary school places;
- pupil admissions; and
- combating racism.

11. On balance, strengths outweigh weaknesses and the LEA's support for schools is satisfactory. However, there is less confidence about the LEA's capacity to improve.

12. The following are potential obstacles to future progress:

- the poor relations with the secondary school sector;
- the current uncertainty surrounding both political and professional leadership;
- members' lack of knowledge of their proper roles, responsibilities and accountabilities in relation to education;
- the relatively low priority given to education by members;
- the council's lack of commitment to the methodology of Best Value;
- weaknesses in corporate plans, monitoring arrangements and the council's approach to deploying resources to meet priorities; and
- some low staff morale and the vulnerability to losing key staff.

13. Taken together, these raise doubts that the LEA will be able to effectively implement some of the recommendations in this report in a timely way. However, the council has appointed an experienced acting director of education and a corporate governance review has begun and will be completed within six months. These developments make sense but it remains to be seen whether they will bring about the significant changes which this report has found to be necessary.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

14. Torbay LEA was created in 1998, following local government reorganisation. Torbay is situated on the south Devon coast and includes the three towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham. It is one of the largest resort areas in the country and the population of 124,000 doubles in the summer. The local economy is dominated by the service sector and much of the employment is seasonal and part-time. A quarter of the wards is among the worst ten per cent in England for employment deprivation, with up to 24 per cent of the population that wants to work unable to do so through unemployment, sickness or disability (DETR 2000 figures). Although Torbay is a popular retirement area, the pupil population is growing and the availability of school places is an important issue. Planning is complicated further by high levels of pupil transience. Last year, 55 per cent of primary schools had pupil mobility of over 20 per cent and a quarter had at least one year group where over a fifth of pupils had been late starters.

15. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national figure for both primary and secondary schools. The percentage of pupils with statements for special education needs (SEN) is above the national figure for primary aged pupils and broadly in line with that for secondary. The percentage of minority ethnic pupils is well below the national figure. Attainment on entry is broadly in line with the national average.

16. Within the relatively small number of 45 schools there is much diversity of provision. Of the 33 primary schools 19 are community or controlled, nine are aided (Roman Catholic and Church of England), one is foundation, three are infant and two are junior. Of the eight secondary schools, two are 11-16 community colleges. The other secondary schools comprise: an 11-18 community college, an 11-18 aided joint Roman Catholic/Church of England school; an 11-18 community school with part selection; a selective co-educational grammar school, a selective girls' grammar school and a foundation selective boys' grammar school. The three special schools are currently undergoing reorganisation. There is also one pupil referral unit (PRU).

17. The size of Torbay's primary schools varies from under 100 to over 650 pupils, with most being in the 200-450 pupils range. Seven of the secondary schools have between 800 and 1,260 pupils, while the other has over 1,750 pupils.

Performance of schools

18. Performance varies between schools and is influenced by catchment areas and selection. In 2000, standards achieved in the national primary end-of-key stage tests were broadly in line with the averages both nationally and for statistical neighbours in all core areas. At Key Stage 2, however, the gender gap in writing increased against the national trend. At Key Stage 3, standards in mathematics were average, while those in English and science were above average.

19. At Key Stage 4, the percentages for pupils achieving one or more GCSE grades A*-G and five or more GCSE grades A*-C were above national averages and similar to

those of statistical neighbours. The average points score of pupils at GCSE was above average. At A-level, the average points score of pupils was well above the national average and above that for statistical neighbours.

20. The progress of pupils during Key Stages 2 and 4 is broadly average, but at Key Stage 3 is well above average. Overall, the percentage of primary and secondary schools judged to be 'good' or 'very good' in their last inspection is similar to both the national average and that for statistical neighbours.

21. Pupil attendance in both primary and secondary schools is in line with national figures. Unauthorised absence is below the national average for primary schools and broadly in line with that for secondary schools. The pupil exclusion rate is well above the national figure for primary schools but below that for secondary schools. Since 1998/9, permanent exclusions have reduced year on year, reversing the trend of the previous three years before reorganisation.

22. The proportion of schools requiring special measures or with serious weaknesses is below average. Currently, the LEA has one secondary school subject to special measures, two schools designated as otherwise causing concern and one further school 'under review'. Together, these make up less than ten per cent of the LEA's schools overall.

Funding

23. During the last financial year, Torbay's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), at £2,800 per pupil, was below the national and unitary average of £2,890 but higher than the average for statistical neighbours of £2,698. Although expenditure on education was at SSA, overall council spending was around three per cent above SSA, with spending on social services and capital projects nine and five per cent above SSA respectively. The Fire Service levy is also 18 per cent above SSA. In order to maximize the funds available for the Local Schools Budget (LSB), spending on the main areas of non-school expenditure, for example, on provision for under-fives and on adult and youth education was less than the unitary average.

24. This resulted in the LSB being £2,739, or £52 per pupil less than the unitary average. Although most centrally retained funds were in line with national averages, the LEA retained higher than average amounts under Fair Funding regulations for school improvement and special educational needs. As a result, the LEA only delegated 81.5 per cent of the LSB, compared to the average 84.2 per cent. This equated in the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to an average per pupil funding of £2,232, around £120 less than the unitary average of which £90 could be attributed to the difference in SSA. In the current year, however, by delegating a large part of the budget for special educational needs, the LEA has met the Government's 85 per cent delegation target. Other Government financial targets have also been met.

25. Recoupment of fees for pupils educated in special provision outside Torbay has a significant bearing on overall resources. It costs the LEA £17 per pupil, compared to the unitary average of £4. Significant work has been done to identify, validate, and

control this expenditure and as the reorganisation of special schools is implemented, this budget will reduce.

26. Capital expenditure, mainly through Government grants, has increased dramatically from £1.3 million in 1998/99 to around £20 million currently. It will increase further, as a Private Finance Initiative scheme is implemented. Other grant related income has also been accessed. Although much of it is in relatively small amounts, the estimated total income from 1998 to 2003 is an impressive £9.1 million.

Council structure

27. From vesting as a unitary authority in April 1998 until May 2000, the council had a Liberal Democrat administration. The current council consists of 31 Conservative members, 22 of whom are new to local government, and five Liberal Democrats. The council is moving towards modernisation, with a leader and cabinet as the preferred option.

28. The council currently operates to a traditional model with five main service committees, each with twelve members. The education committee has 11 elected Conservative members and one Liberal Democrat. The influx in 2000 of such a large number of inexperienced councillors has impacted on the ability of the committee to formulate a convincing vision or clear priorities for education within the LEA. The education committee also has 13 co-opted members. Of these, two diocesan representatives and two parent governors have full statutory voting rights.

29. The education directorate is headed by the director of education services (who is currently on long-term sick leave) backed up by two officers heading, respectively, strategy and quality assurance, and personal and community services. The director sits on the corporate directorate management team.

The Education Development Plan

30. The Educational Development Plan (EDP) provides a sound basis for the school improvement work of the education directorate. It is based on a thorough and detailed audit of both the context in which schools operate and the achievement of their pupils. It identifies local issues and offers appropriate priorities to address these, while also reflecting national priorities. It also links appropriately with the lifelong learning, behaviour support and early years plans.

31. The LEA inherited inadequate data on its schools. In the absence of such data, the targets originally set were insufficiently challenging. Those now in force are realistic, have been agreed with schools and represent a more appropriate degree of challenge.

32. The plan sets out seven priorities:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- ICT

- Pupils and parents support for learning
- School governance, management and resourcing
- Promoting effective learning
- Continuity, transition and progression.

33. These are discrete priorities, each of which is being pursued via a number of clear activities that are broken down into detailed actions, with success criteria. The activities are mostly logically compatible and some, though not all, of the weaknesses in success criteria in the first version of the EDP have been addressed in the revised 2000-2001 version. Some evaluation measures are under-developed and some weaknesses in specific success criteria remain. Overall though, the plan is coherent, grounded in reality and feasible.

34. The initial consultation on the EDP was thorough and the plan has the full support of primary schools, who see it as relevant, in some cases highly so. The view from the secondary sector is much more varied, ranging from one school where it is thought to be completely irrelevant to another where it is seen as focusing on appropriate key issues.

35. Progress in implementing the EDP has been good, with some evidence of its having contributed to raising standards provided in the key stage results and the outcomes of OFSTED school inspections. In several primary schools, the EDP has informed development planning and is clearly helping to raise standards. In other schools, however, including in much of the secondary school sector, while links with school plans can be identified, definite impact of the EDP on pupil progress is difficult to prove. EDP implementation is mostly on target and within budget, although there has been slippage in a few activities.

36. Officers carried out a detailed review of the progress made in implementing the EDP in 1999-2000. The results were presented to members and approved shortly after the new administration gained control in May 2000. A further review has recently been completed.

37. Progress towards most EDP targets is on track. The LEA exceeded its Key Stage 2 literacy targets in 1999 and 2000 by six and four per cent. The aggregated schools' target for 2001 is lower than the LEA's but, if current performance is maintained, the LEA will meet its target. The Key Stage 2 numeracy target for 2000 was exceeded by six per cent and the LEA is likely to meet its 2002 target. All Key Stage 4 targets were exceeded in 2000 and the LEA is on track to achieve those set for 2001 and 2002.

Allocation of resources to priorities

38. The overall allocation of resources to priorities is unsatisfactory, although the effects of major shortcomings at corporate level are lessened by good work of officers in the education directorate. In the absence of an overall strategic plan and with no clearly defined priorities, budget planning at corporate level is reactive and incremental. Although there is a medium term financial forecast, the current administration has yet to

resolve the tensions between its need to resource its statutory responsibilities and its desire to meet other commitments made prior to its being elected.

39. Published data suggest that members have fulfilled their pledge to increase spending to at least the SSA for education. However, a lack of transparency over two important issues prevents sound judgements being made about this. Firstly, information on central recharges is not available to members at their budget-setting meetings. Efforts to clarify this issue have met with limited success and schools and officers are concerned that some of the £2.2 million identified as recharges may not in reality be valid charges against the education budget. Given that there are no service level agreements between departments, the council is unable to demonstrate value for money. Secondly, £200,000 charged this year against the education budget has been transferred to social services to support children in public care. The decision to do this was taken late and was not fully consulted upon or explained. It has resulted in officer time being spent in trying to establish which young people are being supported, and how. At the time of the inspection, the issue had not been satisfactorily resolved.

40. Members are kept well informed of the current and future financial pressures in the education budget. The formula for distributing the budget is well consulted upon, transparent and regularly reviewed by a joint officer/headteacher working group. Schools generally report high levels of satisfaction with this aspect. Budget monitoring and control at departmental and school level are good. Schools' financial positions are sound, with few and only minimal deficits and reasonable balances. Officers take swift action to anticipate or respond to schools' budget issues.

Best Value

41. Arrangements, generally, to meet Best Value requirements are poor. The district auditor has expressed concerns about implementation of the performance plan and the council's commitment to Best Value methodology is low. A 'toolkit' has been produced, but the three reviews relating to education have all suffered slippage and none has been completed on time. Schools have only a slight understanding of Best Value. Although there has been some consultation on the Best Value review of school meals, they have had little involvement in the continuing reviews of other education services.

42. Client responses, service reviews, and employee target-setting are leading to improvement plans that are impacting on performance. Unfortunately, however, the appraisal system is not operated consistently and there is no council-wide approach to assessing individual performance.

Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- improve corporate budget planning and resource management by establishing a strategic plan, clarifying priorities and making the approach to funding these robust; and

- demonstrate a commitment to Best Value principles by ensuring that:
 - any funding charged to education is identified and managed via clear service agreements between departments and fully and accurately reported to members; and
 - ensuring that Best Value reviews are completed on time.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

43. The arrangements to support attendance and behaviour are effective and contribute significantly to raising standards of attainment, improving arrangements for inclusion, and thereby contributing to school improvement. The quality of asset management planning is contributing positively to schools' capacity to provide a better learning environment for pupils. The LEA has also been successful in securing external grants.

44. Members' failure to contribute effectively to the strategic management of the LEA is hampering schools' ability to improve, and the LEA's capacity to support this process. There is insufficient vision and leadership and there are serious shortcomings in the transparency of corporate decision-making, especially in relation to funding. There are major weaknesses in arrangements for providing school places and admissions, and the LEA has failed to put in place measures to combat racism as a priority.

Monitoring, challenge, intervention and support

45. The LEA's approach to monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in primary schools is good and some of the strategies have been particularly effective in helping schools to improve. For secondary schools the approach has been more uneven, with difficulties in relations with some schools limiting overall effectiveness. The LEA has defined its role in working with schools, the definitions are clear and schools are aware of the processes. Schools are categorised as performing well, improving, having serious weaknesses, needing to be kept under review and or requiring special measures. They are clear about the category in which they are placed.

46. Monitoring of schools is informed by the extensive range of data which the LEA has developed. Access to the data has enabled the LEA to get to know its schools, particularly the primary schools, well. Each school is allocated a nominal 1.5 days of link adviser time for visits, as per the annual cycle for 'shared review' which has been clearly set out for schools. In practice, schools which perform well are visited less by their link advisers, while those with greater needs receive more support. In three schools, allocated link adviser time has rightly been sharply reduced to reflect the good progress each school is now making. Thus, a conscious effort has been made to provide support in inverse proportion to schools' success - in line with the intention in the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations to promote self-managing schools. The annual reports produced by link advisers following discussion with the schools are mostly seen as helpful, especially in informing governors.

47. All link advisers have encouraged schools to develop linkages between the EDP and their own development plans. Most advisers adopt a highly rigorous and very effective approach while in a minority of cases schools are not challenged sufficiently. Advisers are most effective when focusing a school's attention on possible areas of pupil underachievement, and helping it to draw on its own good practice to address these, for example, through study of value-added data. Recent LEA training to support

school self-evaluation has contributed positively to the process and is helping to overcome residual attitudes in a few schools where 'challenge' is viewed as a threat or where a dependency culture remains. Advisers' notes of visit vary in quality, with the majority good and helpful to schools, but a minority too descriptive in nature and with too little attention paid to intended action points and priorities. Some headteachers copy the notes to their chairs of governors, although the LEA does not require this.

48. Intervention to help schools overcome temporary crises is excellent. In particular, the LEA is making very good use of secondments to cover for sudden long-term absences of headteachers and other key staff. Headteachers commented that increasing stress is affecting their number and the task of intervening in schools to bolster senior management and governors is unlikely to diminish.

49. Support for primary schools is good and the schools especially value specialist inputs by their link advisers. The support for secondary schools has been hampered by the diversity of their needs and difficulties in engaging with the schools. Development, for example, to further raise standards as part of the national Key Stage 3 strategy is at an early stage and there are few signs that the LEA and the secondary schools are intending to work together to secure improvement. In both sectors, a minority of schools has unreasonable expectations of the support a small LEA might provide. The school review group provides a useful tool by which the LEA can monitor overall support for a school from the various LEA services and highlight any emerging concerns or patterns.

50. In-service training provided by the LEA is mostly good, although schools' confidence in the programme is undermined at times by late cancellations. The new Professional Development Centre, based at South Devon College, is an excellent venue for training and is rightly highly regarded by those who attend courses there. As a small team, the advisory service lacks capacity to support aspects of the curriculum, including disseminating good practice between schools. This is, however, compensated for, in part, by involving practising teachers as training providers, through brokerage of outside consultants and trainers and by encouraging links with other south-west LEAs and higher education institutions. The service has recruited a small team of enthusiastic advisory teachers to cover key curriculum areas and provides a good range of subject networks to support the primary curriculum more generally.

51. The LEA has recruited a strong advisory team, with expertise covering under-five through to post-16 across a range of subjects and cross-curricular themes. In particular, good priority has been given to recruiting former headteachers. The pressure of work, however, does have a negative impact on the service in some respects. Training and development of advisers is largely reactive and driven by national demands. Individual advisers have no time set aside for personal professional development and this is a weakness. Induction of new advisers is also inadequate. Lack of overall capacity limits the LEA's ability to support secondary schools, although a register of other consultants and providers has been created to help address this.

52. Overall, the advisory service is well managed, efficiently run and mostly effective. Costs are above average, but the service provides satisfactory value for money. The

service performance target for generating income was reached during the last year, but there are no performance targets for individual advisers. Visit notes and feedback comments from schools provide useful data on service performance and these are used fairly effectively to inform further planning. Nevertheless, the service has yet to fully embrace Best Value methodology. Although it has identified, for example, the need for research and development and the need to develop appropriate performance indicators, these issues have yet to be addressed. Despite these weaknesses, the service plan has many good features.

The use of performance data

53. Support for schools in providing performance data and helping schools to set targets is good. The LEA provides a comprehensive range of data and offers useful advice to schools on how to use it effectively to challenge their own performance and help raise standards. The establishment of the LEA pupil database has enabled the LEA to use statistical predictions to provide schools with comparative data against which they can plan and monitor pupil progress and set targets. The school profiles are particularly impressive.

54. The data provided by the LEA challenges schools to identify any relatively poor performance against a range of indicators. The research and information team provides useful commentaries and briefings to help schools interpret the data. These in turn are supplemented by discussions with link advisers who, in most cases, successfully help schools in identifying routes to improvement. Some schools are uncomfortable with the data and a minority resents the data as intrusive. There are some inaccuracies in the data supplied by the LEA, although in most cases these are easily resolved.

55. Schools expressed concern that the LEA's data analysis does not take into account the effects of pupil transience. The LEA has shared some transience data with schools at a recent conference and accepts that further work is required. Pupil level matched data has recently enabled the development of value added analyses and these have been made available to schools and advisers. This material has enabled link advisers to engage in useful discussions with schools and is already contributing to further improvement in standards. The LEA currently presents comparative data in a way that protects the anonymity of schools. It is justified in planning to discontinue this practice. The recent data on children in public care covers both attendance and individual attainment, although no reliable information is currently available on the small number of minority ethnic children. The LEA is well placed to move to electronic transfer of data from 2002.

56. Target-setting is now part of the culture in many Torbay schools, with benchmark targets informing those of individual pupils. Review of school targets and the progress against these are a key part of discussion with link advisers. In the case of primary schools, this activity is generally robust. With secondary and special schools, the quality of the activity is uneven. In one special school, discussion of data and targets for numeracy has focused attention on the quality of teaching and has thereby provided an important route to school improvement.

Literacy

57. Support for literacy in primary and special schools is good and implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has been effectively managed. The literacy team is experienced, training to support the NLS has been of good quality and follow-up support has been mostly good, enhanced by the collaboration between the literacy team and link advisers. Consultants have also provided good in-school advice, for example, to assist literacy co-ordinators in developing strategies to identify and address priorities. In schools receiving intensive literacy support, the standards of pupils have generally improved. The additional input has improved the targeting of work for individual pupils and link advisers have contributed purposefully to classroom observations.

58. Until shortly before the inspection, LEA support for literacy had been jointly provided with Devon LEA. Since April 2001, the LEA has had its own literacy support team. The joint arrangement with Devon is felt by schools and the LEA to have worked well and concern was expressed by a few schools that the level of support might not now be sustained.

59. Both the Grammar for Writing training and the Reading Recovery programmes have been helpful. In contrast, the LEA has failed to challenge a few schools to address under-performance of various groups of pupils. However, a successful secondary project on boys' underachievement is being extended into primary schools in its second year. A helpful 'Lads and Dads' scheme has also been set up to aid boys' literacy.

60. Primary schools have welcomed the resource bank that has been set up at the Professional Development Centre. The English/literacy teams in Devon have produced an extensive range of publications and videos for schools that are available to Torbay. Six expert literacy teachers have been identified within the LEA. The LEA has been part of a Department of Education and Skills pilot project focusing on early intervention in literacy in Year 1. This work has begun well and is due to be used across the whole LEA when the Early Literacy Support programme is implemented nationally in September. A support group for literacy co-ordinators has been established and is already providing good support. Feedback is collected from schools on how LEA support for literacy is perceived, however follow-up investigations into the impact of support are not consistently robust.

61. Support for secondary schools is at an early stage. Some training for literacy co-ordinators has been provided, but there has been little sharing of good practice among schools. The need to secure the agreement of secondary schools to support literacy development at Key Stage 3 is seen by the LEA as a challenge. Improving planning and broadening teaching strategies are seen as two key objectives. Support for special schools has been generally good.

Numeracy

62. Support for numeracy in primary schools is very good. Where provided, it has also been good in secondary schools. Unlike the support for literacy, support for

numeracy has not been part of any formal joint arrangement. This has allowed the LEA to exclusively support Torbay schools and it has managed this well.

63. Training provided to support the National Numeracy Strategy in primary schools has been of high quality, with a special effort made to improve teachers' subject knowledge. The expert consultants provide excellent in-school support and challenge and, in particular, the intensive support has been very effective in raising standards. The schools receiving intensive support have been carefully and appropriately chosen. Schools particularly value the tailoring of advice to their particular needs. Demonstration lessons and support for planning have been especially effective in helping teachers and teaching assistants to develop their skills and knowledge. Leading mathematics teachers have been recruited and a useful network has been established for numeracy co-ordinators. Family numeracy programmes have also been helpful in several schools, enabling parents to contribute better to their children's learning.

64. Link advisers are currently monitoring development of numeracy in primary schools during single half-day visits. These include discussion with the headteacher and observation of a complete lesson. Visit notes are exchanged between link advisers and the numeracy team and are usefully kept on a database. Advisers are regularly updated on the National Numeracy Strategy by the numeracy team.

65. Support to one secondary school has also been effective in preparing staff for the Strategy at Key Stage 3. All secondary schools have been made aware of developments in the primary sector and transition issues have been highlighted. As with literacy, planning and teaching strategies have been highlighted as areas for further development.

Information and communication technology

66. Advice and support to schools on ICT in the curriculum is good. A comprehensive audit has been effectively used as the basis for a clear integrated strategy, with staged implementation linked to the capacity to deliver. A shared vision with schools has produced significant improvements in hardware, software, connectivity, and most important, pupil learning. Recent OFSTED inspections of schools report an increasingly positive picture of performance in ICT throughout Torbay.

67. Headteachers praised the implementation of the National Grid for Learning and commented on the quality of the excellent and challenging advice received. All the secondary schools have 'broadband' internet connectivity a year ahead of the Government target. The proportion of teachers signed up for training under the New Opportunities Fund is in line with the national average. School ICT co-ordinators were particularly enthusiastic about the regular meetings they have with the adviser and their sense of ownership of the strategy is high. Partnerships with schools have been further developed by the recruitment of teacher advisers. Most schools have agreed to part-fund a web development officer for two years. Although too early to judge its effectiveness, the plan to use the web-site as the focus for an integrated approach to curriculum and management information is both sensible and achievable.

68. Development plans are good, with a mix of operational and far-reaching innovations. The use of advanced skills teachers and the development of a school self-evaluation tool will further support schools and provide enhanced data on pupil performance. Training courses for learning support assistants and the start made on discussions about home-school connectivity, also show imaginative flair.

Schools causing concern or likely to do so

69. Support for schools causing concern is satisfactory, with some good features. Only two Torbay schools have been judged to require special measures since 1997 and LEA support for schools requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses has gradually improved and is now satisfactory. The LEA's ability to identify a school giving cause for concern is very good and its general ability to provide appropriate support to address the problems has greatly improved. The LEA's ability to support a school facing a temporary crisis is excellent.

70. Faced with the challenge of supporting a secondary school identified as requiring special measures, the LEA initially struggled to respond effectively. Lack of experience meant that the LEA only very slowly focused on the substantive leadership and management issues needing to be addressed. Eventually, appropriate action was taken and the school concerned is now much improved. Some anomalies in the LEA's approach still, however, remain. Despite often good support from senior officers, in areas such as planning and monitoring, the LEA has been unable to distinguish those areas in which the school is able to improve from those where it lacks capacity. As a result, the LEA has sometimes been slow to provide the necessary sharp and well-targeted programmes of training the school needs.

71. LEA support for a primary school with serious weaknesses has been much more systematic and effective. There has been good management support and targeted advice, for example in literacy, has improved monitoring, assessment and the quality of teaching, and has already had a positive impact on pupils' end-of-key stage results.

72. The LEA's ability to identify schools giving cause for concern is now very good. Critical to this is the LEA's improved performance data and its determination to scrutinise the data to root out examples of under-performance. Although the LEA's triggers for identifying a school causing concern lack precision, the overall approach is clear and has caused no difficulty.

73. The LEA's ability to support a school facing a temporary crisis is excellent and has been demonstrated recently in both the primary and secondary sectors. The LEA maintains a register of potential acting headteachers and mentors willing and able to support schools in difficulties. Through a mix of secondments and mentors, the LEA has been particularly effective in helping schools to retain or regain stability following a sudden crisis. More general support for schools giving cause for concern is also good in the primary sector, and is much improved and satisfactory overall. In the secondary sector, however, the effectiveness of support has been hampered by the quality of relations with some headteachers and governors.

74. Monitoring by members of the progress of schools causing concern is unsatisfactory. Allocation of resources and monitoring of spending is conducted by senior officers. However, there is no apparent ownership by members of the process by which schools with difficulties improve. Members do receive reports but show very little inclination to scrutinise the link between LEA spending and the progress made. This is a weakness.

School management

75. Support for management in schools is an EDP priority. It is good in primary schools but, due to difficulties in fully engaging with the headteachers, is less well regarded and not so effective in secondary schools. The LEA has promoted school self-evaluation strongly and recent training on this was well received, at least by primary schools. The LEA has also encouraged schools to seek Investors in People status and the Basic Skills Quality Mark, and a number have been successful in doing so.

76. New headteachers are offered a useful induction programme and provided with a mentor during their first year, although two recently appointed headteachers were unaware of these opportunities. Headteachers are encouraged to join working groups and several are members of the influential monitoring and improvement (MIG) and budget and resources (BAR) groups. Headteachers re-entering work after prolonged absence may be offered a mentor. The LEA also supports candidates following the national Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH).

77. Good network support is provided for primary curriculum co-ordinators of core subjects. Similar opportunities are available for secondary heads of department via Devon LEA. A useful network is also provided to support primary deputy heads. To broaden their experience, individual deputies may be offered the opportunity for secondment to other schools. The LEA also supports candidates seeking the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). To address the training needs of middle managers in secondary schools, the LEA recently offered a range of accredited modules through The South West Initiative for Training. This training was mostly well received.

78. Support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) is uneven, although better in primary schools. Arrangements for link advisers to monitor in-school NQT support are in place and support is also provided for NQT mentors. The LEA provides a programme of support for NQTs, but this is only partly effective. While some recent NQTs have valued the sessions, for example, on more able pupils and dealing with parents, a few reported that the courses repeated material that they had covered previously. Primary and secondary NQTs would have preferred courses to be provided for them separately. The current year's programme addresses this issue.

79. Support for teacher recruitment is minimal. The LEA is a member of the South West Consortium of LEAs that employs two recruitment strategy managers/officers. The officers monitor vacancies and the filling of posts, although only about 30 per cent of Torbay schools actually file returns. During autumn 2000, a total of 18 vacant posts in primary and 24 in secondary schools were advertised. Of these, 21 were for part-time

posts. Although staff recruitment is becoming more difficult, it is less of an issue than in other parts of the country. The LEA currently provides no special assistance for housing and travel costs and no other initiatives to improve recruitment were reported. The LEA is keen to support teachers in their first year, but arrangements for doing this are largely informal and ad hoc.

School governance

80. Support for governors is provided by a well-organised service working to a clear and appropriate plan. The support is satisfactory overall, with some good features. The service has sound mechanisms for evaluating its own performance and responding to feedback. In the school survey, primary schools generally identified it as a strength, as did eleven of the schools visited and most of the governors interviewed. Difficulties in the LEA engaging with governors in some secondary schools have caused some problems with relations, but even where such schools considered governor support variable, they also mentioned aspects that they considered to be good. Officers are well known to governors, accessible and responsive. Induction and training for new governors is thorough and effective.

81. The service has been active in supporting governing bodies to undertake their strategic responsibilities through researching needs and providing training for both governors and clerks, including customised in-school courses, most recently on budgeting, committee structures, school self-evaluation and performance management. This training has helped governors to fulfil their roles effectively. In one school experiencing difficulties, support to the governing body has improved its capacity to govern. In a school in special measures, it has been helpful in providing an effective clerk and advising on reorganisation of the committee structure, but variable in other respects.

82. Governor vacancies are currently running at around nine per cent. Most are for co-opted or parent governors. The service has adopted a common application process and published criteria for LEA governors. On occasions, the zeal of the service in trying to ensure that all governors participate in key training has been interpreted as undue pressure. It has, however, resulted in a significant increase in the take up of training from the very low starting point when the service began. Overall, this small service is clearly contributing substantially to the ability of schools both to be effectively self-managing and to improve.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for school improvement:

- improve relations with secondary schools by establishing clearly each partner's role and responsibilities in securing school improvement, in line with the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations;
- improve the focus and effectiveness of the advisory service by:

- developing performance indicators so that the impact of advisory work can be more readily evaluated;
- clarifying for schools and the service the priorities for future support and development;
- giving a greater priority to, and allocating designated time to, the personal professional development of advisers;
- reviewing and managing adviser workloads to prevent them becoming excessive;
- tackling the late cancellation of courses and streamlining course booking arrangements;
- improve support for schools by ensuring that advisers' notes of visit:
 - clearly indicate priorities for action, and time-scales;
 - are copied to chairs of governors;
- make public more comparative data and extend the range of data supplied to schools, for example, to cover information on ethnicity and progress of minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers;
- improve support for literacy by:
 - investigating more consistently the impact of the support and training provided and, following the severing of the link with Devon LEA, by monitoring the extent to which support is meeting schools' needs; and
- improve the quality of support to schools causing concern by:
 - more accurately targeting inputs at areas where schools lack the capacity to improve, in particular focusing on leadership/management and quality of teaching; and
 - enhancing the role of members in monitoring school progress.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

83. Torbay council has no vision statement and its policy framework is minimal. Its modest ambitions are expressed as five discrete priorities. These were agreed five months after the current administration took control. Education is not a central theme, featuring only as one element in a single priority. The five priorities are set out in the Best Value Performance Plan, which details arrangements for consultation with the community and gives performance information. The consultation arrangements do not yet amount to a convincing community strategy incorporating partnership. The lack of a strong vision or policy framework has left a vacuum at the heart of corporate governance. As a result, a whole tier of strategic and financial planning, that should be founded on corporate policy and which should link the Best Value Performance Plan to service plans, is missing.

84. Service plans, which are written to a common corporate format, detail the work to be undertaken by particular services. However, there is no overall agreement on service priorities within or between services and nor are the plans cross-referenced to one another. Budgeting is therefore conducted on a historical basis and financial decision making is ad hoc, leading to hand to mouth management. Forward planning on key issues, such as school places, is severely inhibited. A further consequence is that corporate performance management arrangements do not make clear and explicit links between individual objectives, service objectives and corporate priorities. Arrangements for performance management, which are tied to individual service plans and not linked back to corporate objectives, are therefore currently inadequate. These weaknesses have been recognised by the chief executive and others and a Best Value review of corporate governance is planned and due to be completed by December 2001.

85. The education directorate service plan is focused on operational matters. Committee reports scrutinised by the inspection team were generally clear and succinct and officers meet the chair of education weekly and in advance of meetings to go through the papers. The chair's view is that officers are accessible, responsive and keen to clarify matters but that reports contain a lot of detail and take a lot of reading. Some less experienced members with limited knowledge of education believe that, on occasion, reports are 'slanted', or incomprehensible. They also complain of the tight time-scales for making decisions.

86. The failure of members to agree clearly defined policies and priorities that reflect local circumstances has resulted in decision making by default. It has also meant that members have expended undue energy on issues with minor financial implications, such as uniform grants, whilst key decisions, for instance those concerning school places, are being taken in a short-term and piecemeal way.

87. Members' minimalist view of the council's role fully encompasses education. From discussions with members, it is clear that some indeed would like to do away with their education responsibilities entirely and it is debatable whether as a group they fully

understand or accept the nature of their current responsibilities. It is hardly surprising that neither the schools nor other stakeholders see members as leading education. Nor, indeed, do they themselves. The chair of education works hard but conceives her role chiefly as one of conduit between the public and all those involved in education. Individual members think that the chair has a leadership role but see their own roles as primarily focusing on ward level casework and individual advocacy, rather than broader policy considerations. In the absence of clear policy or leadership, the genuine efforts of officers to proceed with the agenda set out in the various statutory plans are on occasion interpreted by members as obstruction or manipulation. Hence, relations between officers and some members are characterised by mutual distrust. This has potentially serious implications for future officer recruitment and retention.

88. Against the background described, senior officers within education have high expectations of their staff and there is a clear commitment to school improvement. The primary and special school sectors see officers as both accessible and knowledgeable, in contrast to members who are viewed as remote. In the secondary sector, however, schools are critical of certain aspects of the LEA's management style and relations are somewhat strained. Consultation with schools has been extensive, to the point where schools have complained of consultation overload. A prioritisation system has been introduced, but this has only helped to a limited extent.

Partnerships

89. Partnership is not referred to in the council's priorities but does play an important role within the education directorate's operational arrangements. There are close links between education and social services. A range of working groups is effective in promoting useful partnership in action. Officers work well in partnership with the professional associations and the dioceses. The Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) is also a good example of an effective working partnership. The education directorate works closely with the police on child protection issues and through the Youth Offending Team. There are also good links with health agencies, further education and various voluntary bodies.

90. The lack of a strong council policy framework for partnership does inhibit effectiveness. On regeneration matters there is some evidence of duplication in applications for funding to external bodies and a more concerted approach is now being proposed. The chief executive chairs the community safety partnership and the crime and disorder partnership but, even though these important initiatives directly address their stated priorities, elected members are not involved in them at a strategic level.

91. The robust and independent early years partnership is well-supported by LEA officers and policies. Successive partnership plans demonstrate that there has been significant year-on-year improvement in focus, cogency and coherence. After meeting the terms of the guarantee that all four-year-olds should have a place in education, the partnership is continuing to improve provision for three-year-olds.

Support for school infrastructure: management services

92. The management support infrastructure for schools is satisfactory, with more strengths than weaknesses. There is a small core education team, supplemented by both corporate staff and external providers. Service managers are technically sound and appropriately focused on customer service and school improvement. Schools are provided with a well presented choice of services and levels of provision in good time to make planning decisions. Some information is given about alternative providers. Although service level agreements between schools and providers are well set out, it is not possible to judge value for money accurately because of the lack of similar agreements between departments. This also prevents confirmation that services are being traded at full cost. Although feedback on performance is gathered from a variety of sources, this is not done systematically nor reported routinely to committee. Such feedback is, however, used to influence service improvement plans.

93. **Finance** officers provide a good service to schools and the education directorate. Technical support and advice are good and all new administrators undertake an induction visit and are provided with a helpful guidebook. Budget monitoring is good and schools are challenged when budget returns are unsatisfactory. School autonomy in financial management is steadily being improved. Audit, creditor payments and financial advice are subject to separate service agreements, and schools report high levels of satisfaction with these arrangements. Audit selection is 'risk based' and all financial transactions are electronic.

94. **Personnel services** are variable, with good casework performance but unsatisfactory payroll provision. Developments this year have meant that schools are now offered three levels of casework support and only two schools do not buy the highest level. Headteachers report high levels of satisfaction with this aspect, but complain about the time wasted in rectifying payroll problems. Officers accept the problem, know the cause and were trialling a new system during the inspection. Its effectiveness could not be judged, but the plan to use its capacity to provide more management data is timely.

95. The support for **administrative Information and Communication Technology** is satisfactory and improving. The original ICT strategy was incomplete and failed to include administrative and management elements. This has now been rectified and a range of expertise has been brought together to move things on. A comprehensive policy document on developing information management systems is ready for consultation with schools. Electronic information flow is increasing and a web-site has been launched.

96. All schools have a common commercially produced system for their administration and they regard the associated training, upgrades and technical support they receive very highly. Further advice, training and maintenance are offered to match schools' individual needs. Schools report variable satisfaction with the new help-line arrangements for technical support but officers are aware of this and are exploring ways to improve provision.

97. Support for **property maintenance** is satisfactory. All but two schools contribute to the landlord maintenance pooling scheme. Schools visited were comfortable with the

system. Some dissatisfaction was voiced around instances of poor monitoring of building projects, although this is not widespread.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management:

- institute effective arrangements for corporate governance, by ensuring that the corporate governance Best Value Review is carried out to timetable and implementing its recommendations;
- agree a clear framework of corporate policy priorities, to support clear and consistent decision-making by members;
- in conjunction with all schools, and taking account of the national agenda, establish a clear common vision for education within Torbay that takes account of local circumstances;
- agree clear specifications of the respective roles and responsibilities of officers and members;
- implement a corporate performance management system that links individual objectives to council priorities; and
- promote a programme of development for members, to enable them to better carry out their monitoring functions.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Strategy

98. The strategy for Special educational needs (SEN) is good and well managed. From the inception of the authority in 1998, officers have given a high priority to its development. The focus of the strategy has been steadily sharpened and overall support continues to improve. An initial, wide-ranging and thorough assessment of need was prompted by the recognition that rapid action was required. This process involved all appropriate interests in Torbay and, through the establishment of working parties, produced a comprehensive, if over-heavy, list of priorities. Given admitted shortfalls in provision and a lean central administration, it was decided to focus upon the highest priorities in order to achieve demonstrable progress.

99. Chief of these was the reorganisation of special schools. The purposes of this were threefold: to realign existing provision; to tackle a key weakness in behaviour support (through the building of a specialist school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties); and, to intensify the process of increasing inclusion in mainstream schools. Despite the difficulties inherent in such an approach, with lengthy and sometimes stressful consultation, the sustained pursuit of this agreed priority is now at the point where school staff across the LEA are aware of and support the changes which are approved, funded and ready for implementation.

100. Despite the absence of a separate policy for increasing inclusion in mainstream schools, the LEA's policy for SEN includes the principle to 'ensure childrens and young persons' needs are met through inclusion'. This principle has been translated into an operational plan that is shaping future provision. An inclusion conference was used to set the scene for the developments, by which additional resources in mainstream schools are to be used to help meet the needs of pupils with a range of diverse needs. Inclusion of pupils with frequently occurring but significant needs has already started. Resource bases, for example, are helping to ensure that there is concentrated staff expertise and are well regarded by schools and effective. Plans for further development are clear, with appropriate targets and time-scales, although detailed and comprehensive training to support inclusion has not yet been provided.

Statutory responsibilities

101. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations. All draft statements are processed within 18 weeks. To reach this position, there has been a local arrangement supported by parents by which the LEA and parents reach agreement on a statement, subject to later amendment if needed, even where all relevant advice sought for the statement has not been received. LEA arrangements for statementing are now sufficiently robust that this practice is no longer necessary and should be discontinued.

102. One of the priorities at the inception of the new LEA was to remodel the criteria for assessment. There was wide consultation and considerable input from the local health authority. The criteria were sharpened and their application made more rigorous.

Despite this, the number of statements rose from 702 in January 1999 to 772 in January 2001. The percentage of pupils in special schools is below the national average and all other pupils with statements meet the re-defined criteria.

103. The quality of statements and individual education plans is satisfactory, and review procedures are good. The proformas have been greatly improved. Moderation procedures for pupils at Stages 1-3 of the Code of Practice have been successfully developed and are being implemented. The criteria are appropriately standardised and understood.

104. The provision of information and guidance to parents is satisfactory. The parent partnership officer provides an effective link between the LEA and parents of children recently statemented. The portage service provides effective advice and support to parents of early years children with SEN. Statutory obligations are met and performance is appropriately monitored. The number of registered appeals is at about the national average.

SEN functions to support school improvement

105. The LEA's support to improve schools' capacity to manage SEN is satisfactory, although performance management is underdeveloped. There is a range of suitable specialist provision. Support for SEN co-ordinators (SENCOs) is satisfactory. SENCO involvement in the Stage 3 auditing process of SEN has generated useful information for the LEA and provided an effective training experience for the SENCOs involved.

106. The establishment of the education psychology service is about to be increased through an additional full time permanent appointment. This is much needed, as the current establishment is significantly worse than the national average. The quality of provision is satisfactory and often good, but the quantity is insufficient. Although this will no doubt be rectified by the additional appointment, a review of the service structure, deployment and activities is overdue. Educational psychologists provide much useful support that elsewhere might be provided by an SEN adviser.

107. The behaviour and learning support service is small and fully stretched. The quality of provision is good but sometimes insufficient. The provision for sensory impairment presents a similar picture.

Value for money

108. Value for money is satisfactory. Expenditure is at about the national average. There is careful budgetary control of all aspects of SEN expenditure. Spending on recoupment and attendance at independent/non-maintained schools has been reduced.

109. After a brief pilot project in primary schools, funds for statements of SEN have, from this April, been delegated to all schools. This is already helping schools to provide more effectively for pupils. There has also been significant, detailed consultation about the method by which additional educational needs funding is distributed. Currently, it is based only on eligibility for free school meals. Whilst this has the advantages of

simplicity and transparency, it is perceived by some schools to be unfair. A proposal to modify the arrangement has been rejected by the education committee, although officers are exploring the issue further.

110. Apart from annual reviews of statements, there is no tradition within the service of systematic monitoring of schools' use of SEN resources and associated value for money. However, the LEA is currently advertising a post which does include monitoring the use of statemented and other resources in schools within its remit. The post will also provide information to governors to enable them to report annually to greater effect and specificity. LEA officers are looking at ways of encouraging schools towards earlier intervention to avoid the need for statements. Visits to schools and discussion with school representatives during the inspection revealed that there is no lack of understanding or knowledge about the system of resource allocation even though there are doubts about the sufficiency of the amounts.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for pupils with special education needs:

- in light of the planned expansion of SEN inclusion, review the establishment, function and deployment of all support services including the educational psychology service;
- discontinue the practice of issuing statements prior to all advice relating to a statement having been received;
- produce a more detailed and comprehensive policy and programme of training and support to prepare mainstream schools for SEN inclusion;
- develop the existing SENCO moderation exercise to secure the involvement in the work of all SENCOs who wish to be part of it; and
- review the monitoring mechanisms of schools' use of SEN funds with a view to linking expenditure to the degree of impact on pupil progress and attainment.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

Supply of school places

111. Although Torbay inherited a difficult situation, the failure of successive administrations to develop a strategic approach to integrating admissions and place planning is unsatisfactory, particularly at secondary transfer. Time has been wasted; relationships damaged and minimal progress has been made.

112. Since April 1998, 485 new secondary places have been provided, but the shortage of places in the secondary schools remains a significant issue. The solutions being pursued are unsatisfactory. They are ad hoc with no evidence of any clear funding strategy. Progress is also being impeded by the council decision to limit service committees to a fixed annual capital sum, regardless of need. In contrast, the council has acted strategically in the reorganisation of special schools, so that these schools and parents involved now have a clear basis on which to move forward.

113. Despite the difficulties over secondary places, operational aspects including the production of the school organisation plan are satisfactory or better and provide satisfactory value for money. Pupil prediction methodology in a difficult context is sound and is improving with advice from the district auditor. The school organisation plan is well written, has been modified in response to consultation, sets out the issues very succinctly, and is firmly based on school improvement principles. Sound progress has been made at primary level. Provision is better matched to demand by the provision of 674 new places, and the class size pledge has been achieved by increasing capacity in successful schools.

Asset management

114. Support for asset management is good. Officers from the education and environmental departments have formed productive partnerships with the dioceses and schools to address the insufficient and poor quality of the building stock. Together they are making a significant difference to the learning environment for Torbay pupils. School visits confirmed the positive views expressed in the school survey, where primary school responses in particular rated Torbay in the top quartile of LEAs in this respect.

115. The asset management plan is well written and was approved by the Department for Education and Skills without amendment. The local policy statement, together with the working group involving heads ensures that there is good co-ordination and transparency especially over prioritisation. Condition and suitability data were collected efficiently and have been distributed to schools on time. Although the presentation is very technical, schools' understanding is improved by good working relationships with officers. Sensible systems are in place for the sharing of data between the LEA and schools to ensure congruence between their respective asset management plans and funding streams.

116. There is no corporate capital strategy to address the identified backlog and funding from the council is limited. However, a vigorous approach to accessing

government grants and borrowing approvals have secured substantial resources, including over £9 million for special school reorganisation, and £20 million for the Private Finance Initiative scheme.

Admissions

117. The admissions process is unsatisfactory, particularly at primary/secondary transfer. Long-standing, fundamental issues have been only partially addressed and remain unresolved. Elected members have no clear view of their duty to secure a suitable place for every pupil and fail to appreciate their accountability on admissions; and are occasionally critical of officers for quite properly administering the council's own admissions policies.

118. Members do not offer clear, consistent or purposeful leadership on the issue of secondary admissions, resulting in criteria being changed too frequently. This year, for example, three different sets of admissions criteria were sent for consultation to schools within days of each other. The LEA has a range of tactics but no coherent, well-articulated strategy to improve the acceptability of its school in special measures as a choice for parents. This puts added pressure on places in the other secondary schools.

119. The perpetuation of separate applications to the selective and non-selective streams in one school is unnecessary. Once admitted, students are able to move between streams making the whole process redundant. Elsewhere, although the decision taken against officers' advice to move to a simple rank order for intake to selective schools will assist in improving transparency, it will mean that fewer Torbay primary pupils will gain a place in the LEA's own selective schools. This will not help parents in exercising their preference and will further add to pressure on places.

120. The small, cost effective, officer team is under pressure and suffering from low morale. This in turn is affecting relationships and impeding efficiency. Progress has, however, been made in some important areas. General information for parents is good and improving. The LEA has also helpfully provided a separate parental guide for the significant number of casual admissions that place an added pressure on an already stretched service.

121. Appeals are handled efficiently, and some good work on several fronts is helping to cap the growth in appeals, and reduce resolution times. However, the decision last year to offer a second appeal to some parents was unhelpful. As a result, considerable additional effort has been required this year to ensure that it is not seen as a precedent. Although the admissions forum meets regularly, given the range of issues to be tackled, it is struggling to make significant progress.

Education otherwise than at school

122. Support for pupils educated otherwise than at school is satisfactory overall and strengths outweigh weaknesses. Attendance, the quality of the curriculum and levels of attainment are all satisfactory. The arrangements provide sound value for money. There

is a clear, published policy and an associated strategy for providing alternative education for pupils who need it. There are satisfactory arrangements for pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers and for both home and for hospital tuition. The arrangements for overseeing the educational and welfare arrangements for the 60 or so pupils educated at home by their parents are also effective.

123. Provision for pupils excluded from school has some weaknesses, but these are being appropriately addressed. Overall provision equates to more than 12 hours a week. There is a clear strategy for meeting the Secretary of State's timetable for providing full-time education for excluded pupils by September 2002. This involves further reducing the number of secondary school permanent exclusions, more rapid placement of pupils who are excluded, and the development of alternative provision.

124. The Key Stage 4 PRU makes provision of 12.5 hours for up to 30 pupils, supplemented by joint work with South Devon College. The Key Stage 3 unit also makes half-time provision through eight full-time equivalent places for those permanently excluded, with a 50 per cent rate of return to mainstream within the academic year. The remaining places provide opportunities for temporary respite for pupils who might otherwise be excluded permanently. Although some ten excluded pupils remain on an inadequate level of home tuition, all are awaiting alternative placements. The LEA has established a new post of lead officer for all arrangements for education otherwise than at school, and as a result, the tracking of pupils and monitoring of progress are improving significantly. To assist this process, the LEA is seeking fuller involvement from schools in the work of the pupil placement panel.

Attendance

125. Support for attendance is good and represents good value for money. The education welfare service (EWS) is very well managed. It is tightly knit and focused upon improving attendance. There is good targeting of youngsters with attendance below 90 per cent. Communication within the service is very good and the team works effectively and deliberately to ensure communication of information to schools, including the dissemination of good practice. Provision of service support is based on an assessment of need and agreed with the schools, although there is no general publication of schools' entitlements.

126. Schools understand the prime focus of the service's activity and approve of it. In the school survey, both phases rated the performance of the service good or better. In visits to schools during the inspection the service was rated good or better in all but one school where it was rated satisfactory.

127. Statutory and legal responsibilities are met. The service uses the legal system effectively. By setting targets in pre-court hearings with parents, the service is able to adjust its prosecution strategy in light of parental effectiveness in reducing absence. There is good co-operation with the courts from which all benefit. As a result the service demonstrates clear improvements in children's attendance.

128. Targets for improving attendance are agreed with schools and are based on effective audit arrangements. These reflect the difficulties of individual schools and in particular those that experience problems as a result of high levels of pupil mobility. An education welfare officer has been seconded to the Youth Offending Team and the links with other agencies are good. There is good co-operation with the police on truancy sweeps. The use of Standards Fund and Home Office resources is also effective. The establishment of posts of social inclusion workers in four high schools (and their continued funding through pupil retention grant after Home Office funds expire) has been an effective intervention in tackling absence and disaffection. In turn, capacity has been freed up to enable the small team of welfare officers to also work effectively with primary schools. Overall, this is a good service contributing significantly to raising attainment through its work on reducing absence and tackling and tracking exclusions. It is a key instrument in the policy and practice for enhancing social inclusion.

Behaviour

129. Support for behaviour at school is good and secures good value for money. The behaviour support plan was subject to wide ranging discussion and provides an honest appraisal of strengths and weaknesses as well as a secure basis for the improvements that have followed. Its emphasis on promoting inclusion is good, and it has well judged yet challenging targets for improvement. At the inception of the new LEA there was a general recognition that behaviour was an issue which needed to be tackled early and comprehensively. The behaviour support plan gives clear direction to the work. There is also a clear well-publicised policy to reduce exclusions, improve alternative provision, and secure clearly stated goals for reintegration.

130. Early intervention strategies have helped the rather high levels of primary exclusions to be reduced. The strategy is well formulated and its implementation is closely monitored. Arrangements fully reflect Government policies on inclusion, with the clear aim of maintaining pupils in local mainstream settings. Since the LEA came into existence, permanent exclusions have reduced year-on-year, despite some fluctuation in the primary numbers. Work continues to ensure that this performance is maintained and that the level of fixed term exclusions is stabilised and then reduced.

131. Behaviour and learning support are combined in one team that is well focused on meeting the needs of pupils and schools to secure behaviour modification and management and to minimise exclusions. Service deployment is effective and appropriate training has been provided for teachers and mealtime and learning support assistants. The service has also undertaken particular work with individuals and groups of pupils to develop anger management techniques, tackle bullying and provide supported reintegration into mainstream education.

132. Overall, arrangements for supporting behaviour meet statutory requirements and have justifiably earned the support of schools. In the schools visited, support was rated good or better in over half. The arrangements are effective and contribute significantly to raising standards of attainment and improving arrangements for inclusion.

Health and safety, welfare and child protection

133. Health and safety provision is effective, and both the support for children's welfare and arrangements for child protection are satisfactory. There are clearly defined strategies for health and safety across the education service and both intervention and provision are good. There are effective policies and committees for handling health and safety issues and the LEA takes appropriate steps to meet its legal requirements and provide advice and guidance to all establishments. There are guidelines for schools on outdoor education, visits and off-site activities and a sound emergency plan is in place. The guidelines are backed up by regular visits to schools to audit buildings and equipment as well as to sustain a programme of risk assessment.

134. The previously very high number of children on the child protection register has been considerably reduced. Relationships between education and social services departments on child protection work are close, with joint planning, training and development. The schools have designated child protection officers and these have received appropriate training. The joint departmental work is enhanced by partnership with the police, health authority and social services. Child protection training is provided through a joint committee and the LEA is appropriately represented on the area committee for child protection. The Education welfare service plays a particularly useful role in supporting and representing schools in any individual cases. At school level, there are difficulties of access to social workers and the implementation of the new joint procedures for assessing children has yet to impact upon the schools to any significant degree.

Children in public care

135. Support for children in public care is satisfactory with strengths outweighing weaknesses. The LEA has identified a clear strategy for improving knowledge of the children and for raising their attainment. The strategy has clear targets intended to promote their remaining in education/training beyond the age of 16 and is clearly related to key strands of the LEA's Education Development Plan (EDP) and the Quality Protects management action plan. About 130 children in public care attend Torbay schools and over 100 others in the council's care attend schools outside the LEA. A detailed register of all designated teachers has been circulated to schools, social workers and foster carers. Reporting to members on attainment and progress of individual pupils is at an early stage. Owing to the recent nature of much of the data, it was also not possible to establish whether or not the 2000 EDP target for the performance of children in public care has been met.

136. A teacher with responsibility for children in public care is located within the education directorate and she has visited all schools to compile a list with details of all the children, including those attending school outside the LEA and 16–19 year-olds. Targets and associated data so far collected cover attendance and individual attainment. Pupil movements are now tracked and communicated to schools. Over 45 of the children in public care in Torbay have received behaviour support. The teacher for children in public care has planned and delivered (in co-operation with social services officers) joint training for designated and other teachers, foster carers and social

workers. The training has included guidance on improving and monitoring pupil attainment.

137. Visits to schools during the inspection revealed a broadly satisfactory picture but in three schools difficulties with the development of the personal education programmes for these youngsters had arisen due to the inability to contact social workers. Whilst one child in public care was permanently excluded last year, this year's figure is zero. Overall, progress is sound and continuing.

Minority ethnic children, including Travellers

138. Overall, support for minority ethnic pupils is only just satisfactory. However, the authority adequately supports Traveller children by buying into the Devon Consortium Traveller Education Service.

139. Arrangements for supporting Traveller children are monitored by the education officer for pupil and student services. Around 80 children move in and out of the area and are supported in school or through distance learning. The service knows the children and their families well and is therefore able to target support as and when needed. The Education welfare service works closely with the Traveller education service to ensure equal opportunities for the children and has produced an informative training booklet for schools. This arrangement is cost effective and ensures specialist support is available when required.

140. The current arrangements for supporting the achievement of minority ethnic children are rudimentary. No reliable information is currently available on either the number or the ethnicity of minority ethnic children in Torbay schools. There is no current plan for supporting their achievement. Language and cultural support for children is provided by Devon LEA on an individual basis. Support is provided partly by teachers but mainly by learning support assistants. Arrangements are now being finalised for a member of staff to have some overall responsibility for co-ordination, oversight and management of this work in Torbay.

141. Support for minority ethnic children who speak English as an additional language, 22 of whom are currently receiving in-school help, is satisfactory. Schools visited reported very small numbers of children of minority ethnic heritage. Useful support is provided via home-school liaison, the distribution of booklets in community languages for parents and advice to class teachers on strategies to support pupils during the literacy hour.

142. Although some schools celebrate cultural diversity through the curriculum and their general ethos, LEA-led moves in this direction are of very recent origin and have yet to impact on schools. A sound Equal Opportunities Policy was circulated to schools at the end of April.

Gifted and talented children

143. Although sometimes variable, LEA support for gifted and talented pupils is in line with Government policy and is satisfactory overall. There are no detailed LEA policy statements on gifted and talented children, although the EDP does include several activities for promoting improved provision. The LEA has developed a focus group of teachers to look at the issues and has been responsible for promoting master classes, summer schools and networking for teacher co-ordinators. All but one of the schools visited had clearly identified the children concerned and had either already put in place arrangements for them to receive enhanced or extended provision, or were in the process of doing so.

Combating social exclusion, including racism

144. Support to combat social exclusion and racism is unsatisfactory. There is no overall strategy to address social exclusion and the council has yet to adopt a policy framework and plan for corporate action to address the recommendations of the Macpherson report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

145. A detailed paper was discussed at the directors' management team in August 2000, but the corporate policy response remains at draft stage. There is no evidence of further action beyond the setting up of a cross-directorate group of officers supported by the chief executive of the Devon council for racial equality, which is working on the council's response. This is too little and too late. The police have taken their responsibilities seriously and unilaterally set up a racist incident monitoring group. Both the head of the chief executive's policy unit and a representative of the Education welfare service are members of the group.

146. Against a backdrop of corporate inertia, the education directorate has taken steps to fulfil its statutory responsibilities. Its equal opportunities policy was agreed by committee in March and was circulated to schools, together with draft guidelines for challenging and dealing with racial harassment at the end of April. Though some schools have themselves ensured that their ethos and curriculum reflect the diversity of British society, others have not and the LEA has failed to give a decisive lead. Following the recent appointment of a former headteacher with extensive experience in culturally diverse inner-city areas, some training and advice are now being offered to schools.

147. Although there is no overall strategy to address social exclusion, there are a number of useful initiatives. The 'Torbay Tomorrow' partnership, funded through the Single Regeneration Budget, has funded a range of initiatives at one of the community colleges and is helping to create ICT learning centres. The police are particularly active through the crime and disorder partnership and work closely with the Education welfare service on the valued and effective Home Office funded Crime Reduction Programme, based in four secondary schools. There is now a recognition that concerted strategic action is needed and a proposed strategy for external funding was to have been considered by the policy committee in June.

Recommendations

In order to improve pupils' access to education:

- improve the supply of school places in order to meet the statutory requirement to secure a suitable school place for every child needing one in the area in which they live, by:
 - urgently developing a clear and agreed strategy linking place planning and admissions;
 - establishing a capital resource policy which will enable enough places to be provided;
- improve the policy formulation to support admissions:
 - urgently developing and implementing a strategy to improve under-performing schools so as to maximize the appeal of all schools as choices for parents;
- produce a statement of policy and develop a strategy for gifted and talented pupils, in light of local and national developments; and
- respond to the Macpherson report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence:
 - by agreeing a corporate race equality policy and action plan with time-scales, measurable outcomes, targets and a means of evaluation; and
 - by drawing together the relevant initiatives already in place into a coherent strategy for supporting diversity and combating racism within education.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR IMPROVEMENT

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- improve corporate budget planning and resource management by establishing a strategic plan, clarifying priorities and making the approach to funding these robust; and
- demonstrate a commitment to Best Value principles by ensuring that:
 - any funding charged to education is identified and managed via clear service agreements between departments and fully and accurately reported to members; and
 - ensuring that Best Value reviews are completed on time.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to improve support for school improvement:

- improve relations with secondary schools by establishing clearly each partner's role and responsibilities in securing school improvement, in line with the Code of Practice for LEA-school relations;
- improve the focus and effectiveness of the advisory service by:
 - developing performance indicators so that the impact of advisory work can be more readily evaluated;
 - clarifying for schools and the service the priorities for future support and development;
 - giving a greater priority to, and allocating designated time to, the personal professional development of advisers;
 - reviewing and managing adviser workloads to prevent them becoming excessive;
 - tackling the late cancellation of courses and streamlining course booking arrangements;
- improve support for schools by ensuring that advisers' notes of visit:
 - clearly indicate priorities for action, and time-scales;
 - are copied to chairs of governors;

- make public more comparative data and extend the range of data supplied to schools, for example, to cover information on ethnicity and progress of minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers;
- improve support for literacy by:
 - investigating more consistently the impact of the support and training provided and, following the severing of the link with Devon, by monitoring the extent to which support is meeting schools' needs; and
- improve the quality of support to schools causing concern by:
 - more accurately targeting inputs at areas where schools lack the capacity to improve, in particular focusing on leadership/management and quality of teaching; and
 - enhancing the role of members in monitoring school progress.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In order to improve strategic management:

- institute effective arrangements for corporate governance, by ensuring that the corporate governance Best Value Review is carried out to timetable and implementing its recommendations;
- agree a clear framework of corporate policy priorities, to support clear and consistent decision-making by members;
- in conjunction with all schools, and taking account of the national agenda, establish a clear common vision for education within Torbay that takes account of local circumstances;
- agree clear specifications of the respective roles and responsibilities of officers and members;
- implement a corporate performance management system that links individual objectives to council priorities; and
- promote a programme of development for members, to enable them to better carry out their monitoring functions.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

In order to improve support for pupils with special education needs:

- In light of the planned expansion of SEN inclusion, review the establishment, function and deployment of all support services including the educational psychology service;
- discontinue the practice of issuing statements prior to all advice relating to a statement having been received;
- produce a more detailed and comprehensive policy and programme of training and support to prepare mainstream schools for SEN inclusion;
- develop the existing SENCO moderation exercise to secure the involvement in the work of all SENCOs who wish to be part of it; and
- review the monitoring mechanisms of schools' use of SEN funds with a view to linking expenditure to the degree of impact on pupil progress and attainment.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

In order to improve pupils' access to education:

- improve the supply of school places in order to meet the statutory requirement to secure a suitable school place for every child needing one in the area in which they live, by:
 - urgently developing a clear and agreed strategy linking place planning and admissions;
 - establishing a capital resource policy which will enable enough places to be provided;
- improve the policy formulation to support admissions:
 - urgently developing and implementing a strategy to improve under-performing schools so as to maximize the appeal of all schools as choices for parents;
- produce a statement of policy and develop a strategy for gifted and talented pupils, in light of local and national developments; and
- respond to the Macpherson report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence:
 - by agreeing a corporate race equality policy and action plan with time-scales, measurable outcomes, targets and a means of evaluation; and

- by drawing together the relevant initiatives already in place into a coherent strategy for supporting diversity and combating racism within education.

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**Office for Standards in Education
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE**

Tel: 020 7421 6800

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