

Inspection report
SOUTH TYNESIDE
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: November 2002

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Basic information about the LEA

Name of LEA:	South Tyneside Local Education Authority
Address of LEA:	South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council Town Hall and Civic Offices Weston Road, South Shields Tyne and Wear NE33 2RL
Reporting inspector:	David Halligan HMI
Date of inspection:	November 2002

Introduction

1. This inspection of South Tyneside local education authority (LEA) 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 (December 2001)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's 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 based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports and audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and members; discussions with groups of headteachers and governors; staff in other departments at that local authority; and diocesan representatives. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA (published in 2001). A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to 55 schools, and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 71 per cent.

3. Inspection judgements, converted into numerical grades, are used in the comprehensive performance assessment profile for the education service. The Audit Commission published the assessments for each upper tier council on 12 December 2002. The judgements from this inspection will be incorporated into the proposed subsequent annual update of the education service scores.

4. Some of the grades are used in the comprehensive performance assessment profile for the education service. It is intended that the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) for education will be updated annually so the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next annual assessment.

Commentary

5. Since the first inspection just two years ago, the social and economic context of South Tyneside is, not surprisingly, little changed. Its difficulties and disadvantages remain. It is an area of extensive relative and absolute poverty. The size of its population is falling. This has given rise to a need to reorganise school provision.

6. Against this background, the schools have shown some success in bringing about a rise in academic standards. Results are generally better than in similar authorities and at the ages of 7, 11 and 14, test performance has improved, frequently at a rate faster than nationally. Even so, the LEA is unlikely to reach its targets for 2004 and in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) the proportion of pupils gaining five or more passes at grades A* to C has been stubbornly difficult to shift in the long-term, notwithstanding the single year's improvement in 2002.

7. The first inspection found serious weakness in the council's corporate arrangements and in the strategic management of its education service. Since then there has been much change for the better. New officers have been appointed. Political and administrative structures have been reorganised. Most importantly, the council as a whole and the delivery of its functions as an LEA have a new and purposeful strategic direction.

8. Education has a clear and prominent place in the council's priorities. A crucial development has been the new medium-term financial strategy which makes spending follow policy, rather than history and so has increased spending on education. The other crucial development has been improvement in the management and the effectiveness of the education service. The LEA is now playing a part in raising standards in the schools.

9. All functions were inspected but those which were satisfactory or good in the first inspection, and which the LEA's assessment show to be unchanged, were not subject to fieldwork in this inspection. Of those receiving fieldwork, the following are now good:

- support for schools causing concern;
- the promotion of social inclusion; and
- support for looked after children.

The LEAs provision for health, safety, welfare and child protection was not subject to detailed fieldwork but evidence encountered during the inspection showed it too have become good.

These functions are satisfactory:

- providing and implementing a strategy for school improvement;
 - monitoring, challenging and intervening in schools, including those which are under-performing.;
 - raising standards in literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3;
 - supporting for minority ethnic and Traveller pupils;
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- supporting gifted and talented pupils;
 - supporting school management;
 - support for governors;
 - assuring the supply and quality of teachers;
 - the management of school improvement services;
 - the strategy for Special Educational Needs (SEN);
 - supporting school improvement for SEN;
 - the provision of school places;
 - asset management planning;
 - provision for pupils who have no school place;
 - combating racism;
 - the formulation, implementation and evaluation of corporate plans;
 - decision making;
 - leadership of members and officers; and
 - advice for members.

The following functions are unsatisfactory:

- the effectiveness of management support services;
- providing value for money in SEN support; and
- meeting statutory duties for SEN.

10. These lists present an impressive body of improvement in a short time. Many functions which were weak are now satisfactory and many which were only just satisfactory are now strongly so. In all, nearly three-quarters of the services re-inspected this time had improved.

11. The LEA has a clear determination to improve, evident in the work of both officers and members. It is built into its new systems for management and evaluation and is evident from its success in acting upon nearly all of the recommendations from the first inspection. It is supported by its knowledge of its own strengths and weaknesses, evident in the accuracy of the self-assessment it produced in preparation for this inspection. Its capacity for self-improvement is evident, particularly in its current drive to improve support for SEN which is based more on its own evaluation of the work than on the findings of the first inspection.

12. The LEA is now satisfactory but has more to do to become good. It is too soon to see the full effects of many of the changes on schools and, in any case, the first inspection left a massive agenda for change. The LEA has not shrunk from tackling difficult issues, for example of school closure and it has more to do to convince some schools, especially primary schools, that it is pursuing the right policies.

13. Given the improvement so far made, the structures, procedures and policies now in place to bring about further change for the better, we are convinced of the LEA's capacity to act on the recommendations made in this report and to improve further.

Section 1: The LEA strategy for school improvement

Context

14. The Metropolitan borough of South Tyneside serves an area of about 20 square miles on the bank of the river Tyne. Its social and economic characteristics have changed little in the two years since the first inspection. Disadvantage continues to be severe. The LEA's analysis in its Education Development Plan (EDP) shows the area to have the highest rate of unemployment in mainland Britain. In November 2001 it stood at 10.2 per cent, compared to the national three per cent. This same source shows six of the borough's 20 wards to be among the five per cent most deprived areas in England, according to the government's index of multiple deprivation. A further six are among the most deprived 10 per cent.

15. Average incomes are lower than elsewhere in the North East and 40 per cent of the population is wholly or partly dependant on welfare benefits. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is close to that in similar areas but above the national figure. In primary schools the percentage is 35.8, compared with the national 21.6 and in secondary schools it is 24.6, compared with the national 16.8.

16. The percentage of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs is 3.6 per cent. This is in line with the national level. However, the percentage of pupils in special schools is above the national average in primary schools (1.5 compared with 1.0) and well above in secondary schools (3.5 compared with 1.8). The percentage of minority ethnic pupils in the schools is low. It is 2.7 per cent.

17. The total population of the borough is approximately 153,000 and the slow decline noted in the last inspection continues. The current school population is 25,326. At the present rate of decline, the EDP shows this reducing by about 5,000 over the next 20 years.

18. The LEA maintains five nursery schools, 56 primary schools, 11 secondary schools, of which only one has a sixth form, and five special schools. The Education Action Zone (EAZ) continues to serve two secondary schools, their 13 main feeder primaries, a special school and a pupil referral unit. Since the last inspection two further action zones have been established under the excellence in cities scheme. They each serve a secondary school and, respectively, three and four primary schools. Since the last inspection, the number of Beacon schools has increased from five to nine, including two secondary schools, one of which has also become a technology college.

Performance

19. The performance of pupils in South Tyneside is in line with national averages except for achievement of the higher grades at GCSE where it is below. Between 1999 and 2001, rates of improvement in English and mathematics at Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 were above those found nationally.

20. School inspections show that pupils' attainment on entry to school is below the national average and that of similar authorities¹, as it was in 1999. In 2001, at the end of Key Stage 1, the proportion of pupils achieving at least Level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics continued to be in line with national averages and was above the averages found in similar authorities.

21. The last inspection showed that, at the end of Key Stage 2, performance in the three core subjects was in line with the national averages and those of similar authorities. In 2001, the proportion of pupils achieving at least Level 4 in English, mathematics and science was above that of similar authorities. It was in line with the national averages in English and science, but above in mathematics. Between 1999 and 2001, the proportion increased by 7.6 per cent in English and 4.2 per cent in mathematics compared to national improvements of 4.6 per cent and 1.7 per cent respectively.

22. In 2001, performance at the end of Key Stage 3 remained in line with the national averages. It was also in line with similar authorities except for English where it was above. In English and mathematics the LEA's pupils made more progress than that found nationally between 1999 and 2002.

23. In the GCSE, results have fluctuated. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more passes at grades A* to C is below the national average, although in line with similar authorities. Between 1999 and 2001, this proportion decreased by 0.6 per cent to 40 per cent, compared to a national increase of just over two per cent to 48.4 per cent. However, provisional data for 2002 shows a rise of three per cent. The proportions of pupils achieving five or more grades A* to G, and of those achieving one such grade, are in line with the national average but above that for similar authorities.

24. Inspection shows that primary schools perform well. In their last inspections, 46 of the 56 schools were good or very good, compared to 7 in 10 nationally. Six of the authority's 11 secondary schools were good; five required some improvement. The proportion of schools managed well or very well was just below that nationally for primary schools but 13 per cent below that for secondary schools.

25. Attendance is in line with national levels at 93.9 per cent in primary schools and 90 per cent in secondary schools, compared with the respective national percentages of 94.3 and 91.4. The level of unauthorised absence is well below the national figure in both primary and secondary schools.

26. In primary schools, the exclusion rate is in line with the national rate and that of similar authorities. However, in secondary schools, the rate remains above the national figure.

¹ South Tyneside's statistical neighbours are Sunderland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Gateshead, Salford, North Tyneside, Sheffield, Portsmouth, Tameside, Stoke on Trent and Blackpool.

Funding

27. South Tyneside's education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for 2002/03 is three per cent below the national average but two per cent above the average for similar authorities and for metropolitan authorities. At the time of the last inspection education spending had been below SSA for some years. In 2002/03, as a result of deliberate council policy, it is one per cent above SSA.

28. In total the council is spending 9.3 per cent above SSA in 2002/03. This level of spending has been possible in recent years at a cost to reserves, which, the authority acknowledges, is not sustainable.

29. At the time of the last inspection, the budget for secondary schools was eight per cent below the secondary SSA. The LEA is now committed to bringing this spending up to SSA by 2005/06 and is on course to do so. Secondary budgets have been increased and the total spending is now only four per cent below SSA.

30. The level of delegation in 2002/03 is, at present, below average. It is 86.5 per cent and so below the Department for Education and Skills target which is 87 per cent.

The main areas of central spending are:

£ per pupil	South Tyneside	Statistical neighbours	Met districts	England
Strategic management	73	90	82	74
Special education	123	106	101	103
School improvement	54	31	27	28
Access (exc. Transport)	56	48	51	48

31. School improvement costs increased significantly in 2002/03 and are substantially above average, approximately double the average for metropolitan districts and England as a whole. However, the staffing costs of the function are not significantly out of line with other authorities and the high reported cost has been produced partly by the way the LEA has coded its expenditure.

32. In common with other authorities the LEA's capital expenditure has increased substantially in recent years. Over the past six years, it has grown at an average of 40 per cent each year and by fivefold overall, from £2.2 million in 1997/98 to £11.8 million in 2002/03.

33. South Tyneside has continued to be successful in attracting a wide range of additional external funding. Within the education sector, the LEA benefits from the Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative and an EAZ is in place. Wider council programmes, such as the Single Regeneration Budget and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, have significant education components.

Council structure

34. The council has 60 members. Fifty are Labour, six are Liberal Democrats and three are Progressives. One seat is vacant. Since the first inspection, the reformed political structure has been further modified and the executive committee now consists of 10 members. They are the leader and deputy leader, five members carrying responsibilities for each of the council's directorates, one of which is lifelong learning and leisure, and three members with responsibilities for the council's corporate priorities, namely the environment, social inclusion and community safety. This structure of political leadership is successful in providing clear political direction for the council's services at the same time as ensuring that corporate priorities are delivered through those services.

35. At the time of the first inspection, the scrutiny function had only just been established and was ineffective. It too has now been reorganised and a lifelong learning and leisure scrutiny committee has been set up. It is working effectively.

36. The inspection report recommended the review of the education department's management structure. The department has gone beyond the recommendation, by not only reviewing the structure but also reforming it and making it more effective.

The LEA strategy for school improvement

37. The EDP for 2002/2007 is good plan, albeit a complex one. The actions to be taken are specified in great detail and are numerous. This is a sound strategy, given the previously poor quality of school improvement work.

38. The plan is based on a detailed audit and, in particular, on a frank and realistic critique of the first EDP. The audit makes good use of Ofsted inspections and a wide range of performance information, to justify a demanding programme. The targets set are very challenging. The national priorities are dealt with fully, and the identification of information and communications technology (ICT) as a local priority is justified by evidence, although it does overlap with other priorities.

39. The plans show a clear logic leading from priorities to activities, targets and success criteria. Responsibilities, timescales and procedures for monitoring and evaluation are carefully set out. Satisfactory attention is given to SEN and to the performance of under-achieving groups; in general, the targeting of planned actions is detailed and highly focused. The plan's careful and, in many respects, imaginative emphasis on broadening approaches to teaching and learning is a considerable strength.

40. The EDP is supplemented by plans in the school improvement strategy and handbook which set out more detailed procedures for action on the EDP. The plan itself is also cross-referenced to the authority's use of EiC which is the other main strand of the school improvement strategy.

41. The EiC programme had a hesitant start. The work was originally scheduled to begin in September 2000 but was delayed because the DfES judged the action plans inadequate. Revised plans were submitted and approved by the DfES. Eventually, the various strands were introduced in stages, beginning with the gifted and talented strand in the

summer term of 2001, the introduction only being completed in September 2002, when the city learning centre was opened.

42. The improved plans are clear and systematic but are weak in their treatment of attainment. They rarely show a logical connection between the activities and outcomes in pupils' attainment, and they rarely use measures of attainment as criteria for judging the plans' successful implementation.

The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP

43. The LEA has made reasonable progress in implementing its strategy for school improvement. The implementation of the first EDP was weak and, when the current senior officers took up post, they reached a sensible decision, given the level of vacancies and new appointments, to keep to its stated outcomes but to be flexible about details and timings. The new EDP is being implemented according to plan.

44. Some of the attainment targets have proved a problem. The targets set were very challenging and, although attainment has improved, in 2001 the LEA missed its Key Stage 2 English target of 79 per cent by 3.5 per cent. It met its target of 74 per cent in mathematics. Provisional results for 2002 show shortfalls of nine and two per cent against the 2002 targets for English and mathematics. The LEA is unlikely to meet the 2004 target for English of 87 per cent or the mathematics of 85 per cent.

45. In the GCSE, the 2001 target for five or more A* to C grades was 43.5 per cent. It was missed by 3.8 per cent. Despite the 2002 rise, the 2004 target, which is 52 per cent, is unlikely to be met. The A* to G targets have been met.

46. The number of new permanent exclusions has fallen to 40, exceeding the target of 56. The LEA has also achieved its target to reduce unauthorised absence in secondary schools to 0.4 per cent but it failed to meet its very challenging target of 0.1 per cent in primary schools.

47. The first EDP had seven priorities. In matters other than meeting academic targets progress has been satisfactory but inconsistent. Significant improvement has been made in the identification of, and intervention in, schools causing concern: these are now good. There has also been progress in support for literacy and numeracy. The Key Stage 3 strategy, the EiC initiative, the new Behaviour Support Plan, support for looked after children and support for pupils of minority ethnic origin, have contributed to reasonable progress in the priority relating to increasing motivation and participation. Until recently, however, there had been weak progress in supporting schools' self-evaluation. As a result, the matter remains a priority in the current EDP.

48. Evaluation of the first EDP was weak. That of the current one is much improved. Its findings are reported to headteachers for the purpose of validation and then to the lead member for education and the relevant scrutiny committee.

49. Excellence in Cities is now being implemented effectively but the combination of weak planning for improvement in attainment and the very recent introduction of most of the

activities means that few schools can show improved standards as a consequence of EiC. However, preliminary assessments in three schools are beginning to show benefits for pupils. There is also some good practice. Work in the secondary schools and the primary schools in the EiC action zones is now being used as a basis for the development of the curriculum and policy in the other primary schools in the borough. Beacon and specialist schools are being used to support weak schools and, more generally, as sources of expertise. The city learning centre has already been able to make a contribution to the performing arts. The work has included pupils' producing sound recordings which have been broadcast by a local radio station. Discussions with headteachers during the course of the inspection showed that they value the start made by the LEA in the implementation of EiC.

The allocation of resources to priorities

50. Since the last inspection, the allocation of resources to priorities has improved significantly. It is now satisfactory. The LEA has acted on the recommendations made in the report and improved its financial planning. The increased spending on education over the past two years is the result of the council's newly introduced medium-term financial strategy. That strategy, first introduced in 2002/03 is being further refined for 2003/04 to link further spending plans for education with the council's strategic objectives. Within the education budget, resources are allocated according to the priorities set out in the service plan.

51. The funding formula for schools is uncomplicated and, apart from the low level of secondary funding which is now being redressed, it does not result in serious difficulties for schools. Nevertheless, it is out-of-date and does not fully reflect the present needs of schools.

52. The LEA is presently consulting on delegating a substantial amount of SEN funding. This is a sensible development and is being handled satisfactorily. It will increase the present low overall level of delegation. More generally, consultation with schools on financial planning is satisfactory. It works initially through a representative group of headteachers. Schools get indicative budgets in good time and, in the coming financial year, the schools' budgets will include projections for the following three years.

53. Budgetary control is sound overall and has been significantly strengthened by new, rigorous budget monitoring procedures at departmental and corporate level. Four schools have small deficits. Budget surpluses are larger and increasing. This year almost three-quarters of primary schools have a surplus in excess of five per cent, compared with just under half of primary schools in the previous year. School improvement officers are working to ensure that surpluses are only held to pay for planned school development.

The promotion of continuous improvement, including Best Value

54. This aspect of the LEA's work was satisfactory in the last inspection and continues to be so. No fieldwork on it was done in this inspection but, as reported below, significant improvements in corporate planning and evaluation have added to the authority's capacity to promote continuous improvement.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for pupils' attainment being made through EiC:

- build attainment targets into the activities more systematically and assess the effects of the work on standards of attainment.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

Summary

55. Since the last inspection this work has improved considerably. The LEA has acted effectively on the recommendations in the report and now directs its support where it is most needed. In this, it makes good use of the information it collects. Its identification of, and intervention in, schools causing concern is now strong. Its capacity to support headteachers, particularly those in secondary schools, is much improved now that it has recruited officers with expertise in primary and in secondary school management. However, arrangements for school management support services are weak.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

56. The first inspection reported that there were many weaknesses in the way the LEA explained this part of its work to schools and that it had failed to respond effectively to the government's requirements for the conduct of relations between LEAs and schools.

57. Significant progress has been made. The LEA's work in the area is now highly satisfactory. The school survey confirms this view. In November 2001, the LEA set out clearly its policies and procedures for monitoring, challenge and support, together with the criteria used to determine the need for any intervention. These are well understood by headteachers and chairs of governing bodies.

58. The LEA is now providing sound support and guidance to schools in developing self-evaluation and most schools are evaluating their own performance. The LEA has also established a system to categorise schools, which determines the amount of any additional, differentiated support to be provided. Policy on schools causing concern is clear and increasingly well understood by schools.

59. Schools understand the system for the allocation of support and when schools want more support, they are encouraged to purchase it from neighbouring authorities or the independent sector. The LEA has issued guidance on alternative providers. From September 2002, schools have also been able purchase additional support from, or brokered by, the LEA through a series of school improvement projects. Many schools want to take up the offer, but headteachers spoken to in the course of the inspection were disappointed in the slow start of the programme.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools

60. This work is now highly satisfactory. Monitoring is done systematically, using performance data, schools' self-evaluations and visits to schools by school improvement officers. The LEA uses the information it collects to direct additional support to those schools most in need. Where necessary, officers challenge schools both in the target-setting process and in discussing their self-evaluations.

61. Monitoring begins with analysis of data about individual schools. This analysis by itself can alert officers to potential concerns in schools. It is available both to schools and to school improvement officers. The schools themselves are provided with a comprehensive range of performance data and all of the new school improvement team have capacity to guide and support schools in the best use of data. Good training and written guidance are also provided for headteachers and governors on its use. The school survey shows both primary and secondary schools rate this work as better than satisfactory. There are, however, weaknesses. There is no local benchmarking of performance data and information on attendance and exclusions is not included. Special schools are less well supported with data and the use of 'P' scales to determine the progress of pupils is weak. In the schools' survey, special schools rated LEA support as poor.

62. Schools not identified as causing concern or in need of additional support are allocated the equivalent of three days support per year for visits by school improvement officers. The LEA is committed to reducing this allocation. The agenda for these visits are known in advance and include issues identified by both the LEA and the school. Notes of visit are made available to headteachers and chairs of governing bodies and provide useful feedback. There is a clear focus on school improvement through self-evaluation, although the LEA recognises that further work is required to secure consistently effective work in all schools.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools

63. In 1999, the LEA's work with schools causing concern was satisfactory. It is now good.

64. Currently one primary school, identified in November 2000, is subject to special measures. The LEA expects it to be removed from this category by the spring of 2003. No schools have been placed in special measures or found to have serious weaknesses since July 2001. Recent visits by HMI have found improvement in the LEA's approach which is having positive effects and, in addition, one primary school, which was found to be underachieving, is making good progress. One secondary school has been designated a school facing challenging circumstances.

65. The LEA's clear policy on intervention differentiates effectively between schools according to need. The policy uses five levels of concern. Schools at level one are, in the main, those experiencing temporary difficulties; they receive up to five extra days of support. Schools in special measures are at level five and receive an indicative allocation of 25 extra days of support.

66. For each school on the register, a support group is convened which includes the headteacher, the chair of governors, the school improvement officer and other relevant officers. The group is responsible for co-ordinating support, drawing on resources and expertise from across the department, and for checking progress against the school's action plan. Difficulties are tackled promptly.

67. School improvement officers meet each term with a senior officer to review the progress of all schools on the register. Reports from this meeting go to the lead member for

education and to the relevant scrutiny committee. Officers see the termly meetings as opportunities to adjust the level of support in particular schools or to identify concerns in other schools. However, the policy and guidance document does not show how the LEA plans the reduction in its support as the school improves.

68. The LEA has not had cause to use the full range of its legal powers on schools causing concern. However, it has appointed additional governors to schools at levels four and five.

Support for literacy

69. The last inspection judged that support for literacy was highly satisfactory; it remains so. Nevertheless, the 2004 target for Key Stage 2 is unlikely to be met.

70. Support to schools in raising standards in English is well-managed. A senior adviser, appointed in November 2001, co-ordinates the literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3 strategies and there is a senior consultant for both the primary and Key Stage 3 literacy strategies. She is supported by a primary consultant with a small team of leading teachers, and a consultant who works at Key Stage 3. She is also responsible for supporting transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, summer schools and catch-up programmes.

71. Until recently the LEA has been unable to show how schools were identified for additional support or the effect of this support on levels of performance in the schools. Detailed performance data, together with schools' own self-evaluation, are now being used to identify accurately the needs of schools and to target differentiated levels of support. These are areas where there has been significant recent improvement.

72. The LEA organises regular network meetings for literacy co-ordinators in schools in order to ensure that all schools benefit from the good practice that exists in the authority. It also organises courses that are available to all schools. The training and support given to schools are of high quality and valued by schools across all phases. Co-ordinators met in the course of this inspection spoke particularly highly of the network meetings and they reported that the links with the EAZ and with Beacon schools, together with the use of leading teachers have made a positive difference to work in classrooms. Good guidance to support the curriculum and improve teaching, especially with regard to boys' writing, has been welcomed by teachers.

Support for numeracy

73. In the last inspection, support for numeracy was satisfactory; it is now highly satisfactory. Despite good progress, the LEA's target of 85 per cent for 2004 is unlikely to be met.

74. The LEA has a clear strategy for raising attainment in mathematics which is set out in the EDP and is well understood by schools. The strategy aims to improve the quality of teaching by, among other things, increasing the effectiveness of teachers' and pupils' use of ICT. It also aims to support pupils' progress across the key stages by developing effective assessment and transfer of data.

75. Support for schools in raising standards in mathematics is well managed by a senior consultant. The numeracy team consists of a primary consultant, a Key Stage 3 consultant and a small group of effective leading mathematics teachers. As in the case of support for literacy, additional support for schools is being increasingly well-targeted as the analysis of schools' needs becomes more detailed and thorough. Currently just under half the primary schools are receiving this support.

76. Schools not receiving additional support benefit from a range of high-quality activities including a well-organised network for mathematics co-ordinators and training events some of which are provided by leading teachers. Training conducted in conjunction with a neighbouring authority has extended teachers' expertise in relation to SEN. Links with related activities promoted by the EAZ continue to be effective. Teachers spoken to reported that they increased confidence and improved skills.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

77. Support for ICT is satisfactory as it was at the time of the last inspection. No detailed fieldwork was carried out.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

78. Support for schools to raise standards at Key Stage 3 was not covered in the first inspection. It is satisfactory.

79. Raising attainment in Key Stage 3 is the second priority in the EDP. In 2001, attainment in all three core subjects was in line with that found nationally and the progress made by pupils from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 was also in line. Since 1999, the rate of improvement in English has been above that found nationally. Nevertheless, the LEA's analysis concludes that, based on prior attainment, standards are not high enough. The LEA has a number of concerns that, to a greater or lesser degree, mirror national ones. In English, the gap between the performance of boys and girls at Level 5, widened from seven per cent in 1999 to almost 16 per cent in 2001. The proportion of pupils achieving at the higher levels is below the national average in all core subjects. The LEA is also aware of the need to take steps to increase pupils' motivation.

80. The implementation of the national strategy has provided a sound basis for further improvement. The English and mathematics strands have been introduced into all secondary and special schools. Consultants for the science and ICT strands took up post in September 2002 but the LEA has yet to recruit for to the teaching and learning strand. Some leading teachers have been established for mathematics and work is in underway to identify leading English departments.

81. Support for schools is suitably differentiated and has been allocated on the basis of an analysis of data and schools' self-evaluation. Contracts for additional support are agreed with schools and progress is monitored regularly by the strategy team. School co-ordinators in secondary and special schools report that effective training has made a significant difference to teaching across the curriculum resulting in, among other things, raised expectations on the part of teachers, particularly in relation to boys' achievement. The

dissemination of best practice through liaison with the EAZ and through network meetings for heads of department is particularly effective.

82. A senior adviser is responsible for the co-ordination of this strategy and of the primary literacy and numeracy strategies. This arrangement has promoted consistency between key stages. Teachers from Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 have visited each other's classes and attended shared training events. Both primary and secondary school staff value these opportunities.

Support for minority ethnic groups including Travellers

83. This function was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. The report recommended that schools should be supported to enable them to meet the wider needs of minority ethnic pupils, and that both the quality of the support received and the progress made by schools with their Education Minority and Traveller Achievement Grant plans should be monitored and evaluated. These recommendations have been acted on effectively. The function is now fully satisfactory.

84. Minority ethnic pupils form only a small proportion of the school population, significantly below the national average. The majority attend one of three primary schools, and most of these move to a single secondary school, though particularly at the age of 11, there is a trend towards wider dispersal throughout the borough's schools. While there are few schools with no minority ethnic pupils, the large majority have very few.

85. The grant is delegated to schools in relation to numbers and language support need, though for schools with very small numbers support is provided from centrally retained resources. The basis of allocation is familiar to, and supported by, headteachers and governors. An ethnic minorities grant support group has been set up, with joint school and officer membership. Suitable steps to monitor the implementation of schools' action plans have been introduced through regular school improvement officer visits to schools, and a detailed analysis is made of pupils' attainment. Monitoring of attainment, attendance, exclusions and admissions is undertaken centrally in the Pupil Support Unit. While the number of pupils, both in total and in specific ethnic groups, makes comparative measures of attainment difficult to interpret accurately, the LEA is now approaching a position where it can measure individual pupils' progress, and prior attainment is used, as it is with all pupils, as the chief basis for target-setting. The EDP contains suitable targets for minority ethnic groups, and overall the attainment of pupils is similar to that of other pupils in the borough's schools.

86. Although there are no Traveller children in the schools at present, the department is producing a strategy to support any arrivals and, at the time of the inspection, an officer was attending a national conference to help with this development.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

87. The support for gifted and talented pupils is highly satisfactory. This reflects an improvement since the last inspection, when it was satisfactory. There was then significantly less provision in secondary schools than now.

88. Since the establishment of the EiC initiative in 2001, a strand co-ordinator for work with gifted and talented children has been appointed and each secondary school has appointed a co-ordinator for this work. All secondary schools have made an audit of their provision, and most have now completed action plans, though some of these are outline plans intended to be refined and incorporated in the overall school action plan at its next revision. The range of activities, both in schools and more widely in the LEA, has expanded significantly in the last year. This year eight summer schools were provided for able pupils in Year 6. School and cluster-based activities have included master-classes for Year 9 pupils during the Easter break, training for core subject teachers, joint projects with business and industry, and pupils participating in creative arts workshops, in addition to extending the curriculum by additional language and classics provision. Beneficial links have been developed with local universities, enabling pupils to work with experts on extended projects on topics such as marine life and volcanoes. The importance and value of working with parents of gifted and talented pupils has also been recognised, and group visits of parents to local universities have been organised to enable them to find out about higher education at first hand, in the belief that this may overcome reluctance to consider this as a post-school possibility for their children.

89. Work with primary schools is just getting under way, and the LEA has secured the part-time services of the EiC strand co-ordinator to stimulate developments in this phase. An audit of provision in primary schools in the EiC EAZ has been undertaken and plans made, and a senior school improvement officer has an overall responsibility for supporting and monitoring developments in primary schools. One of the Beacon secondary schools is already working to support its main contributor primary schools, and the LEA is this term providing a keynote course intended to stimulate developments.

Support for school management

90. Support for school management was poor at the time of the last inspection. Rapid progress has been made to rectify these weaknesses and the support is now satisfactory.

91. The work of the school improvement team is now focused primarily on support for leadership and management in all schools. There is a particular emphasis on those where inspection or LEA monitoring shows them to be weak. However, many of the developments are too recent to assess their impact.

92. The LEA's analysis of inspection reports shows that the most significant and common weaknesses relate to monitoring, evaluation and planning for school development. Support and advice to schools on these issues are made through a range of courses for headteachers and governors and on the regular visits of school improvement officers.

93. The LEA has an effective programme of support for new and acting headteachers offering induction linked to informal mentoring by a colleague headteacher and there is a new induction programme for deputy headteachers. The LEA is now encouraging aspiring and serving headteachers to undertake the national training programmes. There are effective networks of support for subject co-ordinators in primary schools. A two-year, rolling programme of training for middle managers in secondary schools commenced in September 2002. It is being centrally funded by the LEA and delivered by an independent provider in

partnership with school improvement officers. It is too early for the effects of this work to be apparent.

94. The LEA recognises that it has substantial work to do in preparing headteachers and governors for Best Value. Initial training for senior managers and headteachers took place during the autumn of 2001. Governors have received information on Best Value through training and the governor newsletter but their understanding is variable. Senior managers are given satisfactory advice about purchasing additional professional development services.

Support to governors

95. In 1999, the LEA's support to school governors was highly satisfactory. It continues so, and governors spoken with in the course of the inspection were supportive of the service. Moreover, recent developments have a potential for further improvement. A new support service is responsible for developing policy and strategy on school governance, improving the recruitment of governors, and providing training and clerking services which 97 per cent of schools currently purchase. This new service is located within the school improvement branch in order to emphasise the role of governors in school improvement. Its strategy is well understood by governors.

96. There are currently 57 vacancies for local authority nominees on governing bodies, a vacancy rate of 26 per cent which is above the national average. However, the LEA has undertaken a recruitment campaign and has extended the criteria for eligibility beyond political restrictions. As a result, 31 potential governors have been identified.

97. The LEA provides information for governors through regular and informative newsletters and the director's termly report. Governing bodies also get detailed analyses of pupils' performance. Governors spoken to in the course of this inspection appreciated the clarity of this information which, together with training and support from the LEA, has greatly assisted them in setting targets for attainment. Governors have a sound understanding of the role of the governing body in school self-evaluation.

98. Last year only between a quarter and a third of governors attended training events organised by the LEA. However, feedback from those who did attend was positive. The LEA has recognised that, in order to increase attendance, it must improve further the relevance of training. Officers have undertaken an analysis of the findings of school inspections regarding governor bodies in order to inform this year's training programme. In addition, good quality training is provided to meet the identified needs of individual governing bodies.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

99. The LEA's overall approach to and organisation of management services for schools is unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, individual services are satisfactory. The LEA is aware that improvement is needed and has brought forward Best Value review of traded services. The review is as yet incomplete, but is intended to reform service provision.

100. The last inspection was critical of inflexible three-year service level agreements (SLAs), which allowed schools no freedom of choice. At the request of schools, these have been allowed to run their course till April 2003. For next year, in consultation with schools, officers have drawn up new SLAs, which are annually renewable and offer schools different levels of service.

101. At present, the services are not costed properly, neither are the full costs delegated to schools. Instead the money to pay for them is simply transferred straight from school budgets to the LEA without proper invoicing. This is unsatisfactory. The LEA has also not provided schools with information on alternative suppliers, guidance on effective procurement, or information on comparative costs. These shortcomings have been clearly identified in the Best Value review.

102. Individual services have not been subject to fieldwork during this inspection. They were found to be satisfactory at the last inspection, the LEA's view is that they remain so and the majority of schools endorse that verdict.

The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

103. This area of work was not inspected in the first inspection. It is satisfactory because, until very recently the recruitment and retention of teachers have not presented problems for the LEA. However, the number of applicants for posts has begun to decrease. There are particular difficulties in recruiting in some subjects and in schools in difficult circumstances. There are also difficulties in finding good supply teachers.

104. The LEA has begun to collect data on patterns of vacancies and information about why teachers leave their posts and what would attract them to stay. It has entered into discussions with teacher unions and with teacher consultative groups about possible strategies. These have yet to lead to the development of a recruitment and retention strategy. Responsibilities and resources for the work have not been specified.

105. There is a coherent and relevant programme of professional development, which emphasises school improvement and self-evaluation. Schools, particularly primary schools, report improvements in the range and quality of provision since March 2002. There is extensive use of external providers including neighbouring LEAs and local universities. A directory of alternative training providers has been assembled and officers plan to develop it further.

106. From September 2002, improvements have been made to the induction programmes for headteachers, deputies and newly qualified teachers. It is too early to judge the effect of many of these changes. School improvement officers perform their key role in supporting new headteachers well. The LEA also makes satisfactory mentoring arrangements for new and acting headteachers. An advanced skills teacher for leadership and management runs the induction programme for deputy headteachers. Newly qualified teachers make up a slightly smaller proportion of the teaching force in South Tyneside than they do nationally. In 2001, almost 90 per cent of newly qualified teachers remained in post for a second year, above the national average. The revised induction programme, which is run by an independent provider, has been well received by schools.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

107. At the time of the first inspection there were significant weaknesses in the leadership, strategic planning and performance management of services to support school improvement and the services provided poor value for money. The effectiveness of these services has greatly improved. They, and the value for money they provide, are now satisfactory.

108. The LEA has established a school improvement branch within the education department. The branch has a satisfactory range of expertise which it deploys effectively. It consists of the school improvement team, an education centre, the governors' administration and support service and the education department information centre which provides performance data for schools, together with training in its use. All parts of the branch are required to play a part in securing improved provision and improved outcomes for all pupils. There is improved liaison between the school improvement team and personnel officers, for example in ensuring effective support for issues of capability and under-performance. Financial support continues to be satisfactory and guidance from the finance team is highly regarded by headteachers.

109. The school improvement team has been restructured, and reduced significantly in size. Throughout 2000/2001 new appointments were being made and it was not until December 2001 that the present team was fully in place. Although a senior post with secondary phase responsibilities has proved difficult to fill, the LEA is now able to offer improved school management support in secondary as well as primary schools. The school improvement officers also have responsibilities for aspects such as early years, assessment and SEN. The LEA's expectation is that they will marshal support for schools in these areas and act as 'champion' for their development. The LEA's explanation of this aspect of their role lacks clarity, practice differs between officers and schools are unclear as to what to expect.

110. The school improvement branch is led well and, in most respects managed effectively. Its work puts the LEA's newly defined strategies into practice. The performance management system has been recently introduced, as has an induction scheme for new staff. These systems are newly developed and not yet consistently applied. It is too early to judge whether they will bring about sustained improvement.

Recommendations**In order to make school improvement more effective:**

- Improve the new school improvement projects by clarifying for schools the timetable for their introduction, together with the sources and amounts of expertise and support to be made available.
- Improve the information provided for schools by showing them how they compare with other schools in the area and how they perform on attendance and exclusions.
- Improve the quality of data on pupils' performance provided to special schools and provide them with support in using 'P' scales.
- Improve support for school management by providing effective guidance and training for headteachers and governors on the application of Best Value principles.
- Improve schools' use of management services by ensuring that the services are properly costed, that the full cost is delegated to schools and that schools are provided with information about alternative suppliers and information comparative costs.
- Improve the supply of teachers by developing a recruitment and retention strategy with clearly identified responsibilities and resources.
- Improve schools' understandings of the roles and duties of school improvement officers by defining the role of a 'champion' clearly, specifying the responsibilities and intended outcomes of the role.

Section 3: Special Educational Needs

Strategy

111. The last inspection found that the LEA had a satisfactory policy for SEN but its implementation had been slow and the principles underlying the inclusion strategy were poorly understood in the schools. Much work has been done, particularly in the last year, to develop a new and highly satisfactory strategy but there has not been enough time to put it into practice. The strategy fully reflects the government's policy intentions and sets out stages for implementing an inclusive approach to provision for children with SEN. It clearly locates the executive responsibility for implementing the policy with schools, reserving to the LEA the functions of overall co-ordination, monitoring and quality assurance. The work done in preparing the strategy has considerably increased the LEA's capacity for improvement.

112. A revised policy statement clearly sets out the LEA's intentions for SEN provision and links well with corporate priorities. The SEN strategic plan is based on a careful audit, undertaken as part of the post inspection action plan. Consultation on the plan has been thorough. Much work was done in the early stages to clarify the central attributes of a good SEN service, and this has helped considerably to achieve a more broadly based understanding of the principles of inclusion. The plan has clear targets but some of the success criteria are insufficiently precise to support a detailed evaluation of progress.

113. As work on the implementation of the plan begins, new approaches to the early identification and assessment of children's needs are being developed and are already having some beneficial effects. There has also been a reduction in the number of pupils educated in special schools outside the LEA, and the plan provides for further staged reductions. The total proportion of pupils in special schools is much higher than in similar LEAs and than the national average, with a correspondingly high cost. The strategic plan is designed to increase inclusion in mainstream schools wherever possible.

Statutory obligations

114. The last inspection found that the LEA took reasonable steps to meet its statutory responsibilities. This continued to be so until recently when the work has become unsatisfactory because there has been some slippage in the completion of statements within the recommended 18-week period. This is a consequence of the sound decision to give priority to changes in management and to the preparation of the SEN strategic plan. Staffing vacancies for much of the period have compounded this delay and a third of the educational psychology posts are unfilled. The proportion of pupils with SEN statements is close to that in both similar LEAs and nationally. The LEA is seeking to reduce the number of statements, to enable more time and resources to be devoted directly to work with pupils, though statements are still to be maintained for children whose parents so wish.

115. There is considerable variation in the quality of statements. The lack of clear guidance about suitable educational programmes is a general weakness; some statements are inadequate as a basis from which to prepare individual education plans.

116. School special educational needs co-ordinators are responsible for organising annual reviews, but report that owing to central staffing shortages it has often been difficult to arrange the attendance of the necessary officers at review panels. The LEA is aware of this and is taking steps to recruit more staff.

117. An impetus has been given to the parent partnership scheme through the appointment of a parent partnership officer and, with recently improved consultation, the number of appeals has been significantly reduced. Parents are closely involved in the planning and preparation for reorganised provision for autism. They have been helped by the LEA to visit similar units elsewhere in the country to identify the features they would value in the new development.

SEN functions to support school improvement

118. The last inspection showed this to be satisfactory. While there are some weak features, it continues so and the plans set out in the strategic plan offer good prospects for improvement. As a result of the restructuring of the advisory service, there is no longer an adviser with specific SEN responsibility. Schools can purchase specialist support from their SEN budget and a school improvement officer acts as 'champion' for this work. The lack of clarity of this latter role leaves schools uncertain as to where they should seek advice.

119. Currently SEN support services are managed and allocated centrally. Schools are not clear how their allocations are determined but the survey shows that most of them are satisfied with both the amount and the quality of the support. The strategy proposes the delegation of money for support to schools to enable them to determine the nature and amount of support needed. An inclusion panel to moderate the designation of children as in need of 'school action plus' support by schools is intended to improve the process of allocating resources according to need and moreover to do this openly.

120. Good quality guidance has been issued to schools on the revised Code of Practice and the identification of need, and training has been provided for SEN co-ordinators and others on the revisions to the code. This has been accompanied with a helpful guidance paper for mainstream schools to support them in preparing school SEN policies and offering a checklist for them to use in internal evaluation of their work and systems.

121. With effect from the beginning of the current term, schools have been told their annual allocation of educational psychologists' time. This sound initiative is intended to enable schools and psychologists to plan their activities more effectively in relation to needs. However, schools are already being notified of changes to their original allocations and are beginning to question the feasibility of the arrangement.

122. The recently completed strategic plan does not specifically deal with issues of the attainment of SEN pupils which are dealt with in the EDP. Nevertheless, support for, and the use of, 'P' scales remains inadequate.

Value for money

123. The last inspection was critical of the lack of clarity generally in funding arrangements for SEN and of the absence of systematic monitoring of expenditure and the extent to which resources related to need. Although the overall cost of SEN provision is close to the national average, the comparatively high number of special school places means that this element of the total SEN expenditure is very high. Moreover, the funding arrangements were formerly very complicated so that the extent to which resources were matched to needs was not adequately monitored. This has been tackled vigorously and the strategic plan provides for a much more straightforward and transparent financing system which offers the prospect of improved value for money. This can only be implemented in stages and, until it is implemented value, for money remains unsatisfactory.

Recommendations**In order to improve provision for special educational needs:**

- Increase the proportion of SEN statements completed within 18 weeks or less as quickly as possible.
 - Improve the quality of statement writing by providing training on producing statements with a more detailed specification of the structure and content of the educational programme needed.
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Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

The strategy to promote social inclusion

124. The authority has a strong corporate commitment to the promotion of social inclusion. Its work in this area is good. It is delivered through its medium-term financial strategy and, in particular, through the use of external government funding. Money gained from the New Opportunities Fund, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, the Single Regeneration Budget, the Children's Fund, Space for Sports and the Arts and from the Early Excellence and Sure Start programmes is used in a series of strategically driven initiatives in education which are central to social inclusion.

125. Pupils in the schools at risk of social exclusion benefit from the effective collaboration with social services which is enabled by corporate commitment. The extent and quality of this collaboration are unusual. The services meet routinely to plan joint work. The education service has further shown its commitment to this corporate policy in its new SEN strategy and in the EDP which makes narrowing the attainment gap between different groups of pupils a priority. The education service operates within a corporate policy in its arrangements to combat racism.

The supply of school places

126. The LEA's planning of school places was assessed as satisfactory at the last inspection; it is now highly satisfactory. Faced with an unrelenting decline in the number of pupils over the coming years, the LEA has taken decisive action in both the primary and secondary sectors to tackle surplus capacity. It has responded vigorously to the recommendation at the last inspection to draw up a plan to remove surplus places.

127. Although primary surplus capacity, at around nine per cent, is in line with national averages now, it is projected to rise to 18 per cent by 2006. The LEA is, therefore, right to insist that action is essential to plan provision in the borough as a whole. The plans are for large-scale change. They involve school and nursery closures, amalgamations and variations to capacity. The authority has published clear preferred options and is consulting on them. This is being handled in a satisfactory way although the presentation of the case for individual schools sometimes lacks clarity, for example in terms of projected numbers of pupils.

128. In the secondary sector, the LEA faces similar problems of declining numbers. There are clear plans for ensuring that the target of a maximum six per cent surplus is achieved. Reorganisation in Jarrow is about to be completed with two school closures and the opening of a new school in January 2003. This will result in the removal of 800 surplus places. The scheme is enterprising. It involves further and higher education partners and provides for progress on SEN inclusion by creating a unit for autistic children.

129. The school organisation plan underpins this work. It is linked with other plans effectively and formulated in the context of priorities for the education service and the council as a whole. Strategic direction is clear but the plan does not have enough detail on

projected numbers by age group and by area. The overall projections, however, are sound and in recent years have been almost invariably within acceptable margins of error. The School Organisation Committee functions smoothly and the LEA has good, productive relationships with the diocesan authorities.

Admissions

130. Arrangements for admissions were highly satisfactory at the time of the first inspection. No detailed fieldwork was done in this area which schools' views, and the LEA's assessment show to be still highly satisfactory.

Asset management

131. Asset management planning is highly satisfactory. The recommendations of the last inspection have been acted on. The DfES's assessment is that the work is effective.

132. There are effective systems for assessing the condition, suitability and sufficiency of the school building stock and the LEA has introduced systematic prioritising of projects. Consultation procedures are generally sound. The management of building projects is satisfactory.

133. The LEA itself has a clear view of its priorities. The backlog of condition work is a little higher than average and amounts to £29 million. Substantial inroads are being made, which should reduce it by approximately £11 million. The LEA has a good record of using money from different sources to pay for the work and this past success is a cause for some confidence about further reduction. After a shaky start, one private finance initiative scheme for the renewal of a secondary school is well advanced and good use has been made of the targeted capital fund. Plans to improve the building stock are clearly linked to the school improvement agenda and are well integrated with plans for the removal of surplus places.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

134. This function was highly satisfactory in the last inspection. It continues to be so and improvements made since then, together with the quality of planning for the future show a good capacity for further improvement.

135. The alternative education service, registered as a pupil referral unit, is the LEA's vehicle for providing education for most pupils not educated in schools. This recently received a favourable inspection report. The service incorporates a number of centres for pupils of different age groups and with different kinds of problem. It is currently housed on five sites in an assortment of buildings, not all ideally suited for their use. There are contingency plans for re-housing some units following the implementation of school closures currently proposed. The plans for the accommodation are sound. The plans for the structure of the service area also sound and, if implemented, will lead to improvement.

136. Twenty-five hours per week of tuition is provided for all excluded pupils including, since March 2002, those from primary schools. This is provided from the sixteenth day following exclusion or, in the case of looked after children, the sixth day. For those in Key

Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, currently about 30, either formally excluded or nearing permanent exclusion, work is directed towards reintegrating them into a mainstream school, and there are close contacts with the target school for reintegration to ensure that this can happen as smoothly as possible. Recent reintegration rates have been good, with more than 75 per cent of Key Stage 3 pupils being returned to either a mainstream or a special school.

137. For Key Stage 4, provision is more varied. It includes a unit for young mothers and pregnant schoolgirls. A good range of alternative kinds of curriculum provision has been developed, and this is used sensitively and judiciously to meet the needs of individual pupils. The curriculum available to all Key Stage 4 pupils is carefully matched to their needs. In addition to the National Curriculum, there are links with the further education college and with local firms, so that pupils can benefit from vocational courses and work experience placements.

138. Exclusion of primary age pupils is unusual and the rate is well below that in similar LEAs and nationally but the proportion of pupils permanent excluded from secondary schools is very high, placing the authority well into the top quarter nationally. Outreach work to mainstream schools on behaviour management, undertaken in collaboration with educational psychologists, is reported to be reducing the numbers of pupils excluded from secondary schools.

139. The attendance of many excluded pupils at the alternative education service is a weakness. Last year it was 56 per cent, with 28 per cent unauthorised absences. The authority is taking steps to improve it. One unit in the service caters specifically for some 20 pupils with very poor attendance records, and places are offered here as an alternative to parental prosecution. The attendance of many of these pupils is reported to be better than when they were in mainstream schools, though it is still not good.

140. The LEA's expenditure on this function is very close to the average expenditure in similar authorities. It is effective and represents good value for money.

Attendance

141. Support for school attendance was good at the time of the last inspection. It continues so and was not subject to detailed inspection.

Behaviour support

142. Behaviour support was highly satisfactory in the previous inspection. It continues to be so. This is the LEA's assessment and that view is supported by the school survey. No fieldwork was carried out.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

143. The last inspection found the LEA satisfactory in discharging its responsibilities for health and safety and for child protection. The LEA's own assessment, made some six months prior to the inspection, was that the functions were still satisfactory. However, the

judgement of this inspection, taking into account improvements that have been made since then, is that this is now good.

144. Following the last inspection, the LEA set up a health and safety unit within the personnel department of the directorate. This works closely with the corporate service for health and safety. There are clear and comprehensive policies, governors and schools are alerted to their responsibilities, and a wide range of training is provided or arranged, with regular checks on uptake. Comprehensive guidance on all significant features of health and safety, including specimen policy guidance, is provided to schools and monitoring arrangements are thorough.

145. All secondary schools and nearly all primary schools responding to the school survey rated arrangements for child protection as either good or satisfactory. Several improvements have been made in recent months to improve the quality of child protection arrangements in the authority. The partnership between the education and the social services departments has been significantly strengthened. Education department senior officers sit on area child protection committee panels, and social services officers are members of the education department access and inclusion management board. In addition to a designated member of staff with child protection responsibilities, each school is now required to have a deputy or alternate, to act as support and in case the main designated person is involved in the case. A new child protection procedures handbook was produced recently and briefing sessions are planned to introduce this in the next few weeks.

146. Most child protection training is provided by social services. Social services officers also respond where possible to requests for training from individual schools. A register of training uptake is kept.

147. A number of measures are planned which, when implemented, should bring about further improvement. It intends to make an analysis of sources of referral, in order to achieve greater consistency. Bids are being prepared for funding to enable the appointment of a group of school counsellors to work in some secondary schools, and possibly their main feeder primaries. Plans have been made to develop a multi-agency support group for vulnerable children on the point of entry to secondary education.

Looked after children

148. Support for looked after children was judged satisfactory in the last inspection, and the LEA's assessment is that it continues to be so. This assessment was, however, made prior to some significant developments that have taken place this year and, although no detailed fieldwork was carried out in this inspection, there is sufficient evidence to show that this support is now good.

149. The attainment of looked after children has increased considerably in the last two years, and the proportion leaving school with at least one GCSE A* to G grade in the summer of 2002 exceeded three-quarters, higher than both the national and the LEA's targets. This improvement is also reflected in the proportions gaining five or more A* to G grades (55 per cent) and five or more A* to C grades (14 per cent). The post-16 destination profile for this group is very close to the national profile for all pupils.

150. A very high quality corporate parenting handbook has been prepared through co-operation between the education and social services departments. An extensive training programme is provided for elected members, governors, teachers, learning mentors, designated teachers, education welfare officers, and carers. Much of it is interdisciplinary. This has the added benefit of helping to widen each party's appreciation and understanding of the work of others. All schools have a designated teacher, and a central record of this is maintained and checked for accuracy at six-monthly intervals, together with a record of training uptake. Personal education plans have been prepared for almost all the children currently in care and it is expected that the small number outstanding will be complete by the end of November 2002. It is intended that school improvement officers will monitor the attainment of looked after children and the implementation of the plans in the course of their visits to school.

Measures to combat racism

151. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's arrangements to combat racism were sound. A number of measures have been introduced to meet the requirements of current legislation and arrangements continue to be satisfactory.

152. A renewed determination at corporate level to combat racism is evident in the appointment of a corporate policy officer, the conduct of a full council audit, the adoption of a race equality scheme by the council preceded by the formal acceptance of the findings of the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, and the provision of a programme of training for managers. A multi-agency panel, with officer and community representatives, has been set up as a key component in the corporate strategy.

153. This corporate activity is reflected in measures taken in the education department, where a strategic group to improve anti-racism measures was set up earlier this year. This group has prepared a strategic plan that is the subject of consultation at the time of the inspection. It has also issued guidance to schools on the implications of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, drawing attention to issues related to teaching, learning and the curriculum.

154. New guidance has been issued to schools on identifying and reporting on racist incidents. Six such incidents were reported in the last school year, and two in the previous year. Appropriate action was taken to respond to all of these, but officers believe that this does not represent accurately the scale of the problem and that there is some unwillingness on the part of several schools to report such incidents.

155. In response to requests made by community groups, some funding has recently been made available to support homework classes in community languages. These are attended by pupils and their parents. The LEA has also made provision for additional support for minority ethnic children and their families, most notably for dual language teaching, translation services and, more recently, the employment of a home-school liaison teacher. This is reported by officers to have had a significant impact on home-school relationships and to have led to an increase in the numbers of minority ethnic parents attending school meetings. Bilingual classroom support has been increased. The professional development programme includes training to equip all teachers for working with minority ethnic pupils. A

recent valuable initiative is the appointment of a half-time co-ordinator to work with asylum seeker pupils and their families.

Recommendations

In order to improve the promotion of social inclusion:

- Improve the planning of school places by making better use of projected numbers in each age group in different areas.
- Improve the attendance of pupils educated other than in a school, particularly by reducing the number of unauthorised absences.
- Ensure that schools report all incidents which are determined to be racist according to the definition of such incidents contained in the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

Section 5: Corporate issues

Summary

156. The last inspection found that the corporate governance of the LEA was weak. Since then the authority has acted on all of the recommendations made in the report and this essential part of its work is now highly satisfactory, though it is too soon to judge the full effectiveness of its impact.

Corporate planning

157. The developments in planning have occurred partly as a result of action taken in response to the inspection report and partly as a result of wider, corporate reforms of the council and its administration. Action on the recommendations from the report was led by a 'Change Management Team', set up by the DfES to support the LEA in the production of the action plan to deal with the recommendations. Its work in turn was monitored by a 'Change Management Steering Group' accountable to both the Secretary of State and the leader of the council. This work has played a major part in improving corporate planning. The actions proposed were clear and systematic in their response to all of the recommendations, including to those for improving corporate management. Nearly all of the plans have been implemented to some degree, although some, for example those relating to SEN and to the provision of school places, necessarily need more time before they can be implemented fully.

158. Changes in political and administrative structures, the appointment of new senior officers, including the director of the education service and the chief executive, and new planning processes have produced an authority in which much change has taken place and more is possible. The strength of the effect of corporate governance on education functions is most evident in the strategic development of work to promote social inclusion.

159. The LEA now has a comprehensive and strategically driven planning process. Education is now placed among the chief strategic aims of the council, set out in its community strategy which declares the strategic priorities for education and the key actions to be taken in the current year to act upon those priorities. This, in turn, is developed in more detail in the plan for the education service as a whole which provides the framework within which the contributing parts of the service make their operational plans. The service plan also shows how the work of the education service contributes to the higher level corporate priorities, for example community safety and equalities. The most detailed level planning is that all officers are required to have a personal development plan.

160. This arrangement of performance management has been introduced rigorously. As a result, there is clear strategic direction in the work of the education department. The system has, however, only just been introduced and it is too soon to make a full judgement of its effectiveness in improving support for schools. What is clear, however, is that it provides a framework with considerable potential benefits. It offers a ready means for both officers and members to evaluate the work of the education service. Combined with the work being done by officers to develop the management of quality assurance and the monitoring of

the work of the education service against Best Value performance indicators, evaluation is built securely into the planning system.

Decision making

161. Decision making is straightforward and brisk. The last inspection judged it satisfactory; it is now highly satisfactory. The planning system, founded on the work of the post-inspection action plan, has been introduced in little more than a year and the process leading to the creation of a detailed programme for implementation of a newly formulated SEN policy is working to a similarly tight timetable. As part of the process of decision making there are regular cycles of meetings between leading officers and members both to assess progress in the implementation of decisions and to develop future policy. Members are given highly satisfactory advice.

162. The most important change to the decision making process has been in making financial decisions. Now that there is a medium term financial strategy to build budgets on the foundations of political priority, financial planning takes place on the basis of policy, rather than in order to maintain historic spending patterns.

The leadership provided by officers and elected members

163. The last inspection found the leadership of officers to be weak. It is now highly satisfactory. Since the last inspection there have been major changes in the senior staffing of the council's administration. None of the executive directors has been in post longer than 18 months and the present chief executive took up post in May 2002. The priority of these new officers has been the development of secure and effective planning and decision making. In this they have been successful. However, speedy change has carried with it a cost. Discussions in the course of this inspection, combined with the evidence of the school survey showed that some of the schools, particularly the primary schools, have yet to be convinced, that the LEA is pursuing the right policies. The LEA has introduced a new system of consultation, and goes to some lengths to explain its policies to the schools. It has not, as yet, been entirely successful in this.

164. Elected members gained experience in operating the reformed system of governance they had introduced before the last inspection. This lies behind the new structures they have just introduced. Discussion with members provided evidence that these structures have become effective. Debate in the executive committee is reported by members to show gains in corporate strength. The members with responsibilities for corporate priorities now subject those with responsibilities for service delivery to scrutiny for the corporate contribution being made by the services.

165. At the time of the last inspection, the more general scrutiny function was poorly developed. The recent changes in political organisation have strengthened it. There are indications that the change has been productive. For example, its area based meetings are ensuring that the views of schools and the wider community are being brought to members' notice as they move towards formulating proposals for the reorganisation of primary schools.

166. Like the leadership provided by officers, that provided by members has improved and is highly satisfactory. That leadership now offers a potential for positive improvement in service delivery but more time will be needed before it is possible to measure the full effectiveness of the changes.

Partnership

167. The last inspection showed this aspect of the LEA's work to be highly satisfactory. It is still so and consequently the area was not inspected through fieldwork. Nevertheless, inspection of corporate matters and of the strategy for school improvement showed important developments in the area. In particular, corporate governance has gained much from the effective work of the local strategic partnership which, in its production of the community strategy, has been at the heart of council's improved corporate planning.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic planning:

- Improve strategic planning by working more closely with the schools to secure their commitment to, and support for, the LEA's plans and policies.

Appendix: Recommendations

Recommendation to improve the strategy for school improvement

- Improve the support for pupils' attainment being made through EiC by building attainment targets into the activities more systematically and by assessing the effects of the work on standards of attainment.

Recommendations to make school improvement more effective

- Improve the new school improvement projects by clarifying for schools the timetable for their introduction, together with the sources and amounts of expertise and support to be made available.
- Improve the information provided for schools by showing them how they compare with other schools in the area and how they perform on attendance and exclusions.
- Improve the quality of data on pupils' performance provided to special schools and provide them with support in using 'P' scales.
- Improve support for school management by providing effective guidance and training for headteachers and governors on the application of Best Value principles.
- Improve schools' use of management services by ensuring that the services are properly costed, that the full cost is delegated to schools and that schools are provided with information about alternative suppliers and information comparative costs.
- Improve the supply of teachers by developing a recruitment and retention strategy with clearly identified responsibilities and resources.
- Improve schools' understandings of the roles and duties of school improvement officers by defining the role of a 'champion' clearly, specifying the responsibilities and intended outcomes of the role.

Recommendations to improve provision for special educational needs

- Increase the proportion of SEN statements completed within 18 weeks or less as quickly as possible.
 - Improve the quality of statement writing by providing training on producing statements with a more detailed specification of the structure and content of the educational programme needed.
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Recommendations to improve the promotion of social inclusion

- Improve the planning of school places by making better use of projected numbers in each age group in different areas.
- Improve the attendance of pupils educated other than in a school, particularly by reducing the number of unauthorised absences.
- Ensure that schools report all incidents which are determined to be racist according to the definition of such incidents contained in the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

Recommendation to improve strategic planning

- Improve strategic planning by working more closely with the schools to secure their commitment to, and support for, the LEA's plans and policies.

