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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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 the LEA's work was circulated to 116 schools. The response rate was 81 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 14 primary, one special and three 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. South Gloucestershire became a new unitary authority in 1996, assuming responsibility for education services previously administered by the County of Avon. It serves a relatively advantaged area. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is around half the national figure and adult unemployment is low. Over the last four years, South Gloucestershire has made good progress in building relations with, and earning the respect of schools. It has coped well with rapidly growing pupil numbers and achieved a seamless transfer of services.
5. The Authority has the lowest aggregate standard spending assessment (SSA) for education in the country and members have provided good leadership in ensuring that this has not seriously affected the funding of schools. The Council has consistently spent above SSA.
6. Strategic management is strong. The LEA has been successful in reshaping, enhancing and significantly improving services for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and in improving access to education. It has also rightly focused attention on schools' taking of greater responsibility for the standards pupils achieve.
7. Overall pupil attainment in primary schools is above average but should be better. In secondary schools, attainment is average, but should be much better. While some schools achieve excellent results, others noticeably under-perform. Support for school improvement varies in both quality and the time it takes to be effective. Advisers have a key role in the LEA's approach to school improvement. While they provide much good support, it is sometimes poorly focused.
8. The education development plan (EDP) rightly attempts to address the causes of pupil underachievement but details relating to the plan's implementation are vague. LEA support for weaker schools is uneven. There is a need for greater sharpness in the gathering of intelligence on under-performing schools and better targeting of resources to help them.
9. While provision of new school accommodation is a strength, maintenance of existing accommodation is unsatisfactory. In two schools visited, the quality of accommodation was found to be inhibiting pupils' learning. Even allowing for the difficulties that it inherited, the LEA has made insufficient progress in this area.
10. Some services, such as Finance and Personnel, are very effective. In addition, many functions are performed adequately and the following are carried out particularly well:
 - financial management;
 - support for literacy and numeracy;
 - support to governors;
 - development of a strategy for pupils with SEN;
 - supply of new school places;
 - admissions;
 - education otherwise than at school; and
 - combating racial harassment.

11. Weaknesses include:

- drafting of the EDP;
- provision of monitoring, challenge, intervention and support;
- use of data to support target setting;
- support for information and communication technology (ICT) in both the curriculum and administration;
- identification and support for schools causing concern or likely to do so; and
- support to improve existing school accommodation.

12. In many ways, the LEA has made an effective start, particularly in supporting the most vulnerable pupils. Strengths clearly outnumber weaknesses, although the latter are significant and of concern. The weaknesses are in key areas of school improvement and urgent action is needed to address the relevant recommendations set out in the report. The LEA has the capability to put in place the improvements required but a return inspection will be needed, concentrating on the main areas of weakness which the LEA has now sensibly decided to subject to early Best Value reviews.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13. South Gloucestershire was formed as a new unitary authority in April 1996, assuming responsibility for education services for the districts of Kingswood and Northavon, which had previously been administered by the County of Avon. The school age population is currently growing at twice the national average (by 4.8 per cent between 1996 and 1999) and is expected to rise by a further 1.6 per cent every year for the next three years. In January 2000, there were 39,049 pupils in South Gloucestershire primary and secondary schools.
14. The LEA covers a relatively advantaged area with a diverse mix of rural and more traditional urbanised areas, including several market towns that have expanded over the last 30 years and large areas of major new housing development. Although in the more traditional urbanised areas there are relatively few adults with higher education qualifications, there is a high percentage of owner occupiers and adult unemployment is low.
15. Around four per cent of primary pupils and just over 12 per cent of secondary pupils in the LEA's schools live in Bristol. About 1200 secondary pupils living near the edge of South Gloucestershire attend schools in neighbouring LEAs. There is a significant number of Travellers, but overall the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is around half national figures and below that in otherwise similar LEAs. Around 2.8 per cent of pupils have statements of SEN, in line with the national average. The percentage of pupils educated in special schools is below the national average.
16. There are fourteen 11-18 secondary schools and 97 primary schools, eight of which have nursery aged children on roll. Around two-fifths of children under five are in council maintained provision. Schools vary considerably in size from 41 to 574 pupils in primary schools and from 759 to 1821 in secondary schools. The majority of primary schools serve the 4-11 age range. The smallest primary schools are in rural areas and eight of these have under 80 pupils. Many secondary schools are fed by a large number of primary schools. There are four special schools, one serving pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, one for pupils with complex learning difficulties and two for pupils with severe learning difficulties. Additional SEN support is provided in eight resource bases attached to mainstream schools. A pupil referral unit is also provided.

Performance

17. LEA baseline data show that standards on entry to primary schools are good. Although standards have fallen slightly over the last three years, around four-fifths of pupils achieve expected levels in language and around two-thirds achieve these in writing. Corresponding figures for reading and mathematics show that around three-quarters of pupils achieve expected levels.

18. Attainment overall in primary schools is above average but should be better. In secondary schools, attainment is average, but should be much better. Standards at Key Stages 1 and 2 are in line with or above similar¹ LEAs. At secondary level, pupils in some schools also perform well. In contrast, there is under-performance in others and an unacceptable variation in performance between schools. At Key Stage 3, although attainment is broadly in line with the national average, it has fluctuated. Performance overall is well below that in similar LEAs. In particular, English results at Key Stage 3 are lower than expected. At Key Stage 4, the percentage of pupils achieving 5 GCSE grades A*-C is broadly in line with that nationally, but again below similar LEAs. The average points score at age 16 is in line with the national average, but also well below similar LEAs. At age 18, standards achieved have been mixed, although the average points score for pupils entered for two or more A levels is in line with the national average and just above similar LEAs.
19. Over the last four years, standards have not improved consistently. In English and mathematics at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, standards have improved in line with those nationally. At Key Stage 4, however, while the proportion of pupils achieving five GCSE grades A*-C and the average points score have increased, the improvement has been at a lower rate than nationally. At age 18, the average points score for pupils entered for two or more A levels has risen faster than that nationally.
20. In their last Section 10 inspections, one-eighth of the LEA's schools were graded as very good. For primary schools, recent OFSTED data show the percentage of schools graded very good or good to be above both similar LEAs and the national average. In addition, although the quality of education provided, climate and management have all improved, accommodation has been identified as a weakness. For secondary schools, the percentage of schools graded good or very good is well above average. This is not reflected in overall pupil performance. Strengths include financial control and administration, and both climate and management have improved.
21. Attendance in primary schools is above the national average. In secondary schools, attendance is broadly in line with national figures. Permanent exclusions in primary schools are below average. In 1998/1999, the rate of permanent exclusion in secondary schools was average but recent data shows that this has now fallen significantly.

Funding

22. The Government's SSA for education in South Gloucestershire in 2000/2001 is the lowest for primary education nationally and the third lowest for secondary education, producing the lowest aggregate overall. The Council regards the education service as a key priority area and has, since its inception, spent consistently above SSA (106 per cent in 1999/2000 and 105 per cent in 2000/2001).

¹ 'Similar LEAs' are a group of LEAs with statistically similar social and economic characteristics to South Gloucestershire.

23. The individual school budgets per primary and secondary pupil respectively in 1999/2000 were £1,638 and £2,373. Comparisons with similar LEAs, unitary authorities and England as a whole show the following:

1999/2000	Primary	Secondary
South Gloucestershire	£1,638	£2,373
Similar LEAs	£1,634	£2,274
All unitary authorities	£1,667	£2,400
England	£1,733	£2,433

24. For 2000/2001, the Council will meet all the Secretary of State's targets for reduced central expenditure and increased delegation to schools. In 1999/2000 the Council delegated 81.2 per cent of its local schools' budget to schools, slightly below similar LEAs, but above the average for unitary authorities and LEAs nationally. Net spending on school improvement per pupil was low, at two-thirds that in similar LEAs, and under half that spent by unitary authorities and LEAs nationally. Largely as a result of new building projects reflecting the growth in pupil population, net spending per pupil on school admissions and the supply of school places was three times that spent by similar LEAs, unitary authorities and LEAs nationally. Similarly, capital expenditure was over 30 per cent higher than in similar LEAs, unitary authorities and LEAs nationally. Spending on SEN in 1999/2000 as a percentage of the local schools' budget was two-thirds that in similar LEAs, unitary authorities and LEAs nationally. Further analysis of SEN spending is provided in paragraphs 105 to 107.

Council structure

25. During the inspection, the traditional committee structure of the Council was abolished in favour of a cabinet style approach. Previously, education was served by one of eight council committees. Under the new arrangements, decision making is being streamlined, with key decisions being taken by a new body, the Executive. This has seven members, all drawn from the ruling political group. One member of the Executive has responsibility for Education and Lifelong Learning. Scrutiny of Executive decisions is to be undertaken by five cross-party select committees, each chaired by a member from the two minority political parties. One of the select committees will focus on education and lifelong learning. The full council will continue to determine strategic policy. Five area forums, and separate forums for governors and headteachers, serve as consultative committees. The new system has the support of all three political groups on the Council.
26. Senior LEA personnel comprise the director of education, the assistant director (children & community services) and the assistant director (strategy, support & performance). The school performance working group of officers and Members was set up in 1999. The group has been systematically monitoring performance, support for schools causing concern and progress against targets.

The education development plan

27. South Gloucestershire's EDP has been approved for three years, but has some important weaknesses. The structure is too complex and the content overloaded.

While the activities within the School Improvement Programme are feasible in principle, many of the strategies, responsibilities and success criteria lack sharpness. The lack of a clear and comprehensive implementation plan makes it virtually impossible to monitor and evaluate the activities' effectiveness in contributing to school improvement.

28. The EDP has seven priorities:

- to raise standards of achievement in language learning, literacy and English in primary and secondary phases;
- to raise standards of achievement in numeracy in primary and secondary phases, and mathematics at Key Stages 1 and 4;
- to improve the quality of teaching of ICT in order to develop its use by teachers and pupils for teaching and learning;
- to support teachers in raising the educational aspirations and expectations of all pupils and to engage parents in their children's learning;
- to raise standards of attainment by improved curriculum planning, continuity and progression in the whole curriculum across primary and secondary phases;
- to promote school improvement through effective personnel practice and professional development of staff and governors; and
- to promote school self-evaluation through the annual review process and to take action to improve schools causing concern.

29. The plan is based on a detailed audit and makes good use of OFSTED data to justify priorities. These reflect the national agenda, and those that have been locally defined rightly identify the raising of pupil aspirations and continuity and progression as important routes to raising pupil performance. The plan sets mostly appropriate targets, although for Key Stage 2 literacy the aggregate of school targets is below that of the LEA and the targets for five GCSE grades A*-C lack ambition. Although targets are being met, many schools are unclear about their support entitlement under the EDP and how this can be accessed. EDP initiatives were found to be supporting improvement to some degree in ten of the schools visited.

30. Consultation on the plan was extensive and both primary and secondary schools indicated that the LEA handled this well. The LEA has also produced its own review of progress on implementing the EDP during 1999/2000, although the outcomes are mostly descriptive. Following recent annual reviews of schools and further consultation, the School Improvement Programme has been revised for 2000/2002 and issues to be addressed by schools to raise standards of pupil achievement have been identified. During the inspection, following discussion at the LEA's EDP Forum, the programme was being further refocused.

31. Links between the EDP and various other LEA plans are underdeveloped. There are however useful cross-references to, for example, the early years and child care development plan (EYCCDP).

The allocation of resources to priorities

32. For the most part, the LEA successfully allocates resources to priorities and spends effectively. Three year medium term financial planning assists the process in an informed and systematic manner and the plan for 2000/2003 sets out a suitable programme for improvement.
33. The LEA is not a well funded authority and there are few areas of expenditure where its spending is significantly above the England average. The growth in school population demands additional capital expenditure and more officer time. This is reflected in South Gloucestershire's spending in 1999/2000 and helps to explain why expenditure on admissions and supply of school places is much higher than in the majority of other LEAs.
34. There is ample evidence that the poor quality of buildings in South Gloucestershire schools needs addressing urgently and that the Council's Capital Investment and Asset Management Strategy should be reassessed. The Council has considered securing additional external funding for major projects through such programmes as the Single Regeneration Budget and Private Finance Initiative (PFI), but has not pursued these possibilities.
35. The level of central expenditure by the Council is reasonable. Corporate recharges to education relating to schools were equivalent to £20 per pupil in 1999/2000. Following additional delegation to schools and reassessment of the budget, they are expected to fall to the equivalent of £7 per pupil in 2000/2001. The basis of the charges is not always clear.
36. The LEA has established a culture of service planning and has begun to introduce performance management and self-assessment. Although work on benchmarking has so far been limited, officers are aware of the cost of services provided. The Best Value Performance Plan is a good document. With the exception of those proposed for the advisory service and the Capital Investment and Asset Management Strategy, Best Value reviews have been appropriately scheduled. The LEA also ensures that, in the case of schools, governing bodies reflect the principles of the Best Value regime in their expenditure, as set out in the scheme of delegation.

Recommendations

In order to improve the management of the EDP:

- complete the review of the School Improvement Programme to:
 - a) streamline and focus the activities more specifically on improving standards, school management and the quality of teaching;

- b) provide more detail of how priorities and activities are to be implemented by clarifying timelines, sequencing, responsibilities and success criteria;
- c) clarify schools' entitlement to support and indicate clearly how schools can access activities included in the EDP.

In order to improve the focus of resources on priorities:

- continue to pursue external funding to promote priorities;
- ensure that corporate recharges to the education department are subject to agreed standards in terms of specification and costs, involving service level agreements where appropriate.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

37. The Council has provided support for school improvement by consistently funding education above SSA levels. This reflects the Council's continuing commitment to education as a high priority.
38. The LEA provides cost effective support for pupils with SEN, has kept pace with the demands of a rapidly growing pupil population in creating new school accommodation and administers admissions procedures efficiently. The extent and quality of provision for pupils with problems have improved significantly. The LEA is also making a particular contribution to school improvement in combating racism.
39. Maintenance of present school accommodation is unsatisfactory. Even allowing for the difficulties that were inherited, the LEA's approach in this area has been inadequate.

Monitoring, challenge, intervention and support

40. The LEA has only recently defined the functions of monitoring, challenge, intervention and support for individual schools in any detail. In the past, the LEA has been slow to identify and grasp the nature of problems affecting some schools. This has resulted in it sometimes providing ill directed support and poor value for money.
41. The LEA's approach has steadily improved. All schools are monitored through interim and annual reviews over a two year cycle and this has helped the LEA to improve its knowledge of schools. Differentiated support to schools has been in place since April 1999. Since September 1999, an area school review process has enabled the LEA to consider the appropriateness of overall support for an individual school provided by its various services. From April 2000, each school has been placed in one of four different bands, based on its standards, quality of teaching and leadership and management.
42. The role of the link adviser is pivotal to the LEA's approach to supporting school improvement. Link advisers have successfully begun to challenge a dependency culture in schools, have helped most schools set appropriate targets for improvement and have provided help in monitoring teaching and standards. They have encouraged headteachers to support each other and helped facilitate good links with the Beacon school. They have been most effective when helping schools identify and address key management issues. These are positive features.
43. There are, however, weaknesses in the LEA approach. In eight of the schools visited, LEA monitoring was found not to be sufficiently robust to identify the root causes of the school's difficulties. Action points arising from reviews are often too numerous to be manageable and provide only limited help to headteachers and governors in development planning. The quality of work provided by advisers also varies. While they often provide good support, sometimes they fail to make

effective use of performance data and their support is poorly focused. There is a need to consider how advisers are best deployed. Moves to encourage schools to more systematically evaluate themselves should mean that, in the case of the better performing schools, central funding of routine monitoring visits is no longer necessary. This in turn should present the opportunity for link advisers to be re-deployed so that the majority of their time is spent working with schools causing concern. With this in mind, it is appropriate that the proposed timing for the Best Value review of the Advisory Service should also be brought forward.

Use of data to support target setting

44. Baseline data collected on entry to primary school provides a useful benchmark for charting attainment across Key Stages 1 and 2.
45. Other sets of data provided to schools are not adequately supported by commentaries and are inadequately tailored to meet individual school needs. The individual school profile, provided by the LEA, contains a large amount of data that is difficult for schools to process and use purposefully. In the case of Year 6 pupils transferring to secondary schools, information arrives too late. Additional difficulties have also arisen with transfer of data for pupils moving into South Gloucestershire secondary schools from other LEAs.
46. Link advisers have a working knowledge of school performance data but use it to varying degrees to challenge and support schools. There are also wide differences in the understanding of school managers about the significance and use of this data. Some headteachers are beginning to track pupils' progress and identify the extent to which their schools add value. Sharing of good practice between schools is largely underdeveloped, although secondary heads of English and mathematics have received valuable training on the use of data and target setting.

Support for literacy and numeracy

47. Support for improving standards in literacy and numeracy is very good. A challenging 12 per cent improvement in Key Stage 2 literacy is envisaged between 2000 and 2002, but the LEA is on course to meet this target.
48. The strategic management of LEA support for literacy and numeracy has been good. Management structures and accountabilities are clear. The literacy and numeracy consultants are well prepared, knowledgeable and provide practical advice and training on teaching, monitoring and target setting. Central training for headteachers, coordinators, teachers and governors has been well run. Published material designed to disseminate good practice has been of good quality. Schools report that Leading Mathematics Teachers have provided valuable demonstration lessons. Literacy and Numeracy coordinator forums have proved valuable for sharing good practice.
49. In-school support and training for coordinators, headteachers and governors in planning, implementing and monitoring the literacy and numeracy strategies are good. Link advisers have helped schools to develop literacy and numeracy action

plans and have contributed effectively to monitoring implementation of the Numeracy Strategy.

50. The provision of Year 6 booster classes and summer schools and the targeting of Year 7 pupils in under-performing secondary schools, are all positive developments to support the raising of standards at Key Stages 2 and 3. Innovative work on early modern foreign language teaching is also having a beneficial effect on pupils' literacy in Key Stage 2 as well as helping modern foreign language learning in Key Stage 3.
51. There are good links between support for literacy and the LEA's lifelong learning initiative. The LEA is accredited as a basic skills quality mark assessor and a higher education institution runs accredited courses for literacy coordinators and leading mathematics teachers. These courses have helped improve the teaching, monitoring and evaluation of literacy and numeracy. Family literacy projects have also been successful, in developing basic literacy skills of both parents and their children. A 'reading buddy' partnership with a local firm has also contributed to raising literacy standards.

Support for information and communication technology

52. The ICT curriculum is identified as a priority in the EDP, reflecting concerns about pupils' lack of progress, poor standards, the quality of teaching, access and training. Support has been unsatisfactory. A major review has recently been undertaken in response to further concerns in schools about curriculum and technical support. A revised strategy to support schools has been drawn up and is in the early days of implementation.
53. The previous strategy for managing and developing ICT lacked coherence and placed too much demand on an overstretched service. As well as supporting the ICT curriculum, the service provided support and training for school administration and the education department itself, and embraced information services. The demand from schools for support in helping to maintain outdated hardware and the installation of internet connections and new networked systems, overwhelmed the capacity of the service. The ICT advisory staff lacked direction and struggled to deliver the desired results. Restructuring has recently established dedicated support for schools, quite separate from the support for the rest of the education department.
54. Staff currently employed to provide technical and curriculum advice have the appropriate expertise and are competent. Teachers reported that when available, courses were helpful, support for in-school training was good and technical support appropriate. In contrast, response times were often slow. Internet connections for use in the curriculum have been installed in all schools and training provided. Networked computer suites have been installed in 21 primary, one special and all secondary schools.
55. Improving the management of ICT support is rightly a high priority for the LEA. A senior member of the education department has assumed responsibility for coordination of curriculum, administrative and technical support. There are termly

meetings with secondary schools. Schools are drawing up their own action plans for ICT.

56. The restructuring of the management of technical and curriculum support, the refocusing of ICT activities and arrangements for monitoring performance have the potential to provide more responsive services for schools. However, there is a significant backlog of work that will continue to put pressure on the service. The identification of ICT as the first focus of the education department's Best Value performance review is, therefore, very timely.

Support for schools causing concern

57. Only three South Gloucestershire schools have been found by OFSTED to require special measures and only one has been identified as having serious weaknesses. Overall, the support for these schools has been uneven. Monitoring has often been excessive and difficulties have been encountered in implementing over-complex action plans. Significantly, once the LEA has taken the initiative in deploying advisory headteachers to support the schools, it has been much more effective.
58. Until recently, the LEA's approach to schools in difficulties was too reactive, placing too much reliance on OFSTED reports. Since April, there have been signs of improvement, with the LEA attempting to address the issue through the new banding system. Schools with either serious weaknesses or requiring special measures have been classified as Band 4, requiring intensive support and subject to an LEA support plan. In addition, other schools causing the LEA concern based on the quality of teaching, standards and/or the quality of leadership and management have been classified as Band 3, requiring extensive support and subject to an LEA negotiated action (or priority support) plan. The LEA has identified ten schools in this category.
59. The banding system has yet to take full effect and its procedures for identifying weak schools are still unproven. Priority support plans have been in place since 1999/2000, but their success criteria, measurable outcomes, resourcing and sequencing have often been vague. The latest examples are more precise but require more work to establish a realistic programme of prioritised and focused support. The use of advisory headteachers has recently been formalised so that support can be better matched to the needs of schools in difficulties. As yet, however, there is no register of specialist support to help schools with management problems. Eight schools causing concern were visited. LEA support was found to have been both appropriate and effective in helping bring about improvement in only three of the schools.
60. Schools identified for additional literacy and numeracy support have benefited from the extra help provided and standards have risen.

Support for school management and governance

61. Support for school management is generally satisfactory. The LEA places a high priority in the EDP on improving the management of schools and a comprehensive range of services is provided. Provision of courses and support

for networking is good. Support on financial and personnel matters is very good and support for school governors is excellent. As indicated above, support for ICT in the curriculum and for schools causing concern needs further development.

62. The LEA provides a reasonable range of courses and facilitates a number of valued networks for headteachers, teachers and governors. Schools are consulted appropriately and are involved actively in evaluating the quality of this provision. Aspiring, new and serving headteachers have access to suitable training and take-up is very good. Middle managers benefit from courses and networks and these are having a positive impact on teaching, the monitoring of attainment and standards. There are very good working partnerships with higher education providers through the joint planning of courses, many of which are award bearing, and which support small schools. Arrangements for supporting modern foreign languages and design and technology are not clear. There is also too much reliance on one-off courses, rather than sustained and sequential support.
63. Since April 2000, the Advisory Service has offered support to schools through courses based on 'buy-back' arrangements through a 'School Improvement Subscription'. All schools have agreed to purchase the support for 2000/2001. Training opportunities are also available on a 'pay-as-you-go' basis. Advisers have provided good support for improving classroom teaching, including training headteachers and coordinators to carry out classroom observations.
64. The training for governors is excellent and prepares them very well for their role in school management. Governors receive informative written advice and guidance. In many of the schools visited, link advisers provide useful information and advice that enhances the effectiveness of governing bodies.

Support for post-16 education and lifelong learning

65. The LEA has shown initiative in a number of areas to support school improvement post-16. Its vision for post-16 development in the Authority is clear and provides a sound basis for discussion and further action. It has also conducted a 14-19 review and encouraged collaboration between institutions through projects and conferences.
66. The matter of small sixth forms is an ongoing issue in Kingswood and the LEA has attempted to address this through a project supported by the Institute of Education at London University. In Northavon, the LEA has supported the High Reliability Project. Participating schools have found both projects helpful, although the LEA has had only limited success in sharing the findings with others.
67. There are productive partnerships with further and higher education providers and work related initiatives with Learning Partnerships West. Partners speak highly of the leadership and coordination of this work by the director.
68. Collaboration within the Kingswood Partnership has resulted in the improved transition of pupils into post-16 provision. There is good evidence of pupils who

are disaffected taking up and completing vocational courses in further education and there has been a slight rise in GCE A level results in the area.

Recommendations

In order to improve the arrangements for monitoring, challenging, supporting and, where appropriate, intervention in schools:

- develop advisers' ability to identify difficulties in schools at an early stage, and ensure that progress on the issues identified is routinely checked through analysis of data and, only where necessary, through monitoring visits;
- improve the deployment of advisers so that their time is mostly spent supporting schools causing concern;
- ensure that action points arising from annual reviews are focused, manageable and specifically prioritise areas for improvement; and
- bring forward the proposed timing for the Best Value review of the advisory service.

In order to improve the use of data to support target setting:

- review the focus and presentation of data provided to individual schools;
- work with other LEAs to improve the arrangements for handling data relating to pupils from other LEAs educated in South Gloucestershire schools; and
- identify schools which find difficulty in using data appropriately and take steps to improve their understanding.

In order to improve the support for ICT in the curriculum:

- continue monitoring implementation of the new ICT strategy; and
- review staff deployment to determine whether staffing is sufficient to meet current support needs and whether brokerage arrangements might be more appropriate.

In order to improve the support for schools causing concern:

- review the role of advisers in supporting schools in difficulties and, in the case of schools in special measures, consider deploying specialists to take on this work;
- ensure that priority support plans are focused, clearly sequenced and manageable; and

- make the recruitment and deployment of advisory headteachers more systematic by creating a register of specialist support to help schools with management difficulties; also extend this to include deputies and classroom teachers.

In order to improve the support for school management and governance:

- clarify for headteachers the nature of intended support for modern foreign languages and design and technology, including any brokerage arrangements; and
- reduce the focus on one-off courses by further developing programmes that provide more sustained and sequential support.

In order to improve the support for post-16 education and lifelong learning:

- take steps to disseminate the findings of the Kingswood Institute of Education and High Reliability projects more widely.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

69. Since becoming a unitary authority, South Gloucestershire has worked hard to establish its own identity. It has been successful in achieving a seamless transfer of services, building relationships and improving consultation.
70. Members have provided good political leadership in building the trust of schools, improving support for SEN and access to education and developing awareness of the need to improve standards.
71. During its first four years, the Council has put in place many of the systems needed to take the LEA forward. The Council's Best Value performance plan, children's services plan, EYCCDP and lifelong learning development plan are all of good quality and support the priorities set out in the EDP. An international dimension to the EDP also reflects corporate strategy. The priorities for the school improvement programme are incorporated into the Council's priorities within the Corporate Plan. The EDP also ties in with key corporate priorities for 1999/2002.
72. Under the new decision making structure, education and lifelong learning is one of seven areas under the responsibility of the new executive members. They are responsible for developing and proposing the policy framework to the Council and for all executive decision making within it. Having taken advice from relevant select committees and interest groups, the executive makes recommendations to the Council. The EDP, school admissions arrangements, the EYCCDP and the non-statutory lifelong learning development plan all contribute to the policy framework.
73. Members generally receive good quality advice from officers and briefing seminars are particularly valued. Consultation procedures, on both corporate and education matters, are well established and effective. Decisions are invariably made well before implementation. Delegation, from members to officers, from the corporate centre to the education department, and from chief officer to responsible budget holders, encourages speedy action. The director provides strong leadership, particularly in relation to finance, planning, reorganisation proposals and partnerships.
74. The supply of information to schools and the quality of consultation with schools is good, with headteacher and governor forums especially effective. Headteachers readily participate in LEA working groups. The director and assistant directors also provide good support to schools through regular visits.

Partnerships

75. The education department has been effective in developing partnerships with other departments and voluntary groups. Good liaison, communication and discussion with partners have become well established and have helped to develop mutual knowledge of each partner's priorities, policies and plans. Joint planning structures are steadily becoming more effective. Good examples

include the EYCCDP and the community safety strategy. The newly drafted children's services plan draws all related activities together in a rational way. The Early Years Partnership and partnership against racial harassment are both examples of good working partnership arrangements. Liaison with the police, the health authority and social services is highly satisfactory, although there are areas for further development.

76. The early-years partnership has a clear and effective structural organisation with relevant working groups to which the LEA makes a full contribution and lends practical support. The partnership is active and encourages good cooperation between voluntary and maintained groups. It has clear and realistic priorities for development and has deployed small sums of money to support various initiatives to good effect. Access to training and visits of advisory and accredited teachers to all childcare and early years educational settings are appreciated.
77. The liaison with the police has contributed to a comprehensive response to national requirements. The education department is fully involved in the implementation of community safety strategy and its working groups. A range of initiatives, such as the development of a youth offending team, action against drugs and racial harassment and, in its very earliest stages of discussion, combating truancy, show a good level of cooperation between the two organisations. The police have also recently devised a new strategy to improve and assure the quality of the contribution and advice it provides to schools.
78. The health authority and health trust are both undergoing considerable structural and strategic changes. At strategic level, there is a willingness to engage in discussion about the likely future shape and structure of services. There are some examples of good service cooperation, such as hospital teaching and, although not yet consistent in all schools, some good models of effective use of speech therapy. There are still issues to resolve, such as the timely provision of medical advice for multidisciplinary assessment for children with SEN and joining up the continuum of health and education services in the most productive way.
79. Liaison with the social services department is improving. An appropriate structure for strategic planning with a range of sub-groups, which look intensively at specific common issues, has been developed. There is a shared understanding of the role of the Children's Services Plan as a corporate and overarching strategy for children in need. Areas of joint concern have been clearly identified. There are some good illustrations of cooperative working between the two departments over, for instance, establishing suitable protocols. Recent conferences on the education of children in public care and multidisciplinary child protection training have encouraged a greater level of debate between teachers and the education and social services departments over common issues. This needs to become more routine and regular.

Support for school infrastructure: management services

80. Schools' buy back of delegated services is high and usually 100 per cent. This applies even where schools have expressed some dissatisfaction with the quality of a service; for example, the property consultancy is bought back by 97 per cent of primary and 79 per cent of secondary schools. Appropriate consultation has

taken place with schools about services to be delegated, both for 1999/2000 and 2000/2001. There are some well constructed service level agreements (SLAs) for non-delegated services, setting out clear specifications on standards for schools. A working group of officers is looking at the future of SLAs and the selling of services, but the production of completed SLAs has not so far been seen as a priority. Individual SLAs for buy-back services for 2000/2001 had yet to be finalised at the time of the inspection. Schools have a right to expect clearly articulated SLAs to be available well before the beginning of a financial year. These should set out the total costs of the service, both central and delegated and include a clear service specification and a choice of differentially priced service levels. Such SLAs are not yet in place.

81. Financial and personnel services to schools are very good and are recognised as such by schools. ICT support for school administration is unsatisfactory. The contracted services for school meals service and transport are effective. Other contracted services for property, cleaning and grounds maintenance are unsatisfactory.
82. The LEA's financial service provides effective monitoring both of the education department and schools' budgets. It has a good knowledge of the specific circumstances pertaining to individual schools and offers well received advice. Internal Audit works well as an integral part of the financial service and communication with schools is clear and precise.
83. Very few schools have deficit budgets and none present any serious management difficulty. The financial service ensures close monitoring of schools with a surplus of over five per cent.
84. The personnel service is of a very good standard in all aspects and is highly rated by schools. It offers clear guidance on staff employment policy and procedures and provides effective input on casework issues in schools. Joint headteacher and governor training on key personnel issues is an important part of the service.
85. Support for ICT administration has improved, but is still unsatisfactory. The LEA has recently separated the administrative and curriculum functions of the ICT service and has appropriately prioritised the service for a Best Value review later this year. The LEA is also addressing the issue of previous under-investment. Failure to keep pace with change in ICT hardware and software has caused great dissatisfaction in schools. In response, the LEA is providing substantial extra investment this year, with further additional funding proposed for 2001/2002. The funding will be used to create a modern ICT network, thereby improving both administration and curriculum facilities. A headteachers' ICT group has been established to monitor progress.
86. The Council's property consultancy has been providing support for property services maintenance since 1998. The support provided to schools is poor in all respects. The system adopted, whereby a link to schools is provided through a 'patch surveyor', is not functioning effectively. Response times are slow and work carried out by contractors is of variable quality. The property services consultancy contract expires in 2001, with a two year option. The quality of the

delivery of the service should be investigated before 2001, ideally as part of the Best Value study of capital investment and asset management.

87. The contracted services of cleaning and grounds maintenance are less than satisfactory. Existing contracts are due to terminate in March 2001 and December 2000 respectively. Client managers within the Council should continue to work with schools to design a package of options for schools to buy, if they wish, at the contracts' termination.
88. The school meals service has demonstrated what can be achieved in respect of service improvement. The education department, acting as contractor, has improved quality and cut costs, with the effect that all secondary schools have bought back the service for a four year period from April 2000 and no primary school has requested delegation.
89. Transport provision is organised effectively via a service level agreement with the Council Direct Services Organisation.

Recommendations

In order to improve management services to schools:

- set out clearly articulated SLAs for all buy-back services; make these available well before the beginning of a financial year; ensure that the SLAs set out the total costs of services, both central and delegated, offer a choice of service levels and include a clear service specification.
- monitor closely with schools the implementation of the revised approach to ICT administrative support and the impact of additional investment; and
- review the provision of property services maintenance as a matter of urgency within the context of the Best Value review of capital investment and asset management.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

90. The LEA's strategy and provision for SEN are satisfactory and a number of appropriate and well thought out steps are being taken to ensure further improvement. A new draft special educational needs development strategy has been prepared and approved by the Education Committee for consultation with stakeholders. The strategy places inclusive education within a clear and coherent framework. It tackles issues of provision and funding that are all in need of urgent and radical reappraisal. It is appropriately referenced to other relevant strategic plans. When implemented it should lead to significant improvements in standards of attainment, provision and value for money.
91. The strategy identifies ten priority areas, each with key intended outcomes and clearly identified tasks. In the schools visited, experienced special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) raised appropriate questions about the readiness of schools and teachers to approach inclusion in a positive way. As part of the strategy, the LEA has correctly identified the need for extensive SEN training and development for all staff and this is detailed within the document.
92. The LEA has rightly given a high priority to reviewing the existing four special schools. As a result, the LEA will in future maintain one special school for complex learning difficulties and two for severe and profound learning difficulties. Opportunities have been taken to significantly improve the accommodation in two of the schools. The LEA will have a leaner and more appropriate special school provision to complement the provision for SEN in mainstream schools. The management of this change has been completed effectively.
93. Sixty-eight per cent of South Gloucestershire pupils with statements attend mainstream schools, either in the eight resource bases or supported in mainstream classes with devolved budgets. This statistic represents a higher than national level of inclusion in primary schools but is in line with the national average in secondary schools. Provision in the resource bases has recently been reviewed to clarify admission arrangements. A key development in the LEA's support for inclusion has been the recent appointment of three Inclusion Coordinators with the appointment of a fourth planned. Their role is to provide support and guidance for senior staff and SENCOs in mainstream schools on the implementation of inclusive education and, in particular, on the educational needs of statemented pupils who may not be making satisfactory progress.
94. The process of assessment and issue of statements is appropriately managed. All statutory assessments are considered by the case advisory panel, which includes appropriate representation from schools. A training programme assists headteachers who are members of the panel. Three-quarters of the assessments for statements are currently completed within 18 weeks, which represents an improvement on previous years. The local health trust is aware that the completion of speedy and good quality medical advice is an essential contribution to the production of statements and that this has not always been provided in a timely way. The quality of statements seen during the inspection was satisfactory. Annual reviews are conducted appropriately and transition

plans are completed. There are differences in funding and statementing criteria between South Gloucestershire and neighbouring authorities. In four of the schools visited, various difficulties had arisen when putting in place support for pupils living outside the authority.

95. The LEA has increased the support and guidance for schools in order to reduce the demand for statements. This strategy is starting to be effective; for the first time this year and despite a rise in the pupil population, there has been a slight reduction in the number of referrals for statutory assessment and in the number of new statements.
96. The restructuring of the educational psychology service (EPS) and separation of its work from the SEN administration team has resulted in clearer responsibilities and an improved remit for the case advisory panel. The continuity of officers and advisers for SEN has played a big part in ensuring a measured approach to the many changes. Senior managers are well qualified and experienced and are much respected in the schools.
97. The supportive parents for special children group meets termly with the LEA and is consulted about the LEA's SEN developments. The group appreciates this, although the parents feel that they could make an even greater contribution if invited to feed in parental concerns to the training of administrative staff. They would also wish to be included in the LEA's survey of client satisfaction identified within the SEN development strategy.

Statutory responsibilities

98. The LEA takes all appropriate steps to meet its statutory responsibilities.

SEN functions to support school improvement

99. The provision and support for SEN are improving. The LEA maintains a range of support services. Support for children with sensory impairment is provided on a regional basis. The remit of the learning support service now focuses more on a preventative approach to supporting primary pupils at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice. In many schools visited, the learning support teacher makes a practical and effective contribution to supporting individual children and also advises SENCOs on routine assessment and administrative issues. The quality of support varies between schools.
100. The EPS has a small team but its operational plan is clear and its work in schools is consistently highly regarded. Even in the early stages, the new role of Inclusion Coordinators is proving effective and schools are benefiting from the practical and expert advice given. The support schools receive from services for the visually and hearing impaired is appropriate and satisfactory.
101. Training courses, although modest in number, are of good quality and relevant. SENCOs, particularly in primary schools, feel well supported by regular cluster meetings and annual conferences. An SEN handbook has recently been circulated to schools.

Value for money

102. Recent action taken by the LEA is appropriate to ensure that the support it provides gives at least satisfactory value for money in all areas of SEN. The LEA has steadily enhanced the funding of SEN and is committed to further funding specifically for pupils in mainstream schools at Stages 2 and 3 of the Code of Practice. National comparative figures show that for 1999/2000, the LEA budget for SEN was a quarter less as a percentage of its local schools budget than that in similar, other unitary and other authorities nationally.
103. In 1999/2000, the cost per pupil of provision for pupils with statements in mainstream schools was well above similar LEAs, unitary and other authorities nationally. This reflects the policy of the LEA to include a greater percentage of pupils with statements, including more pupils with complex needs, in mainstream schools. Proposed spending on support for statemented pupils in mainstream schools in the current year is 42 per cent above that in 1996/1997. The rationale for this spending is not sufficiently transparent.
104. Arrangements for monitoring the use of SEN funds in schools have recently been improved. A proforma has been sent out to schools asking them to identify their SEN expenditure. An appropriate figure of 3.6 per cent of the school budget has been identified as the recommended minimum that schools should be spending on SEN.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for pupils with SEN:

- conduct the consultation with stakeholders on the draft SEN strategy and implement the strategy in a timely way, providing an appropriate training programme as planned;
- work with the health authority and health trust to improve the speed and quality of medical advice for the statutory assessment for pupils with SEN;
- involve the Supportive Parents for Special Children Group in devising and implementing a survey of client satisfaction and in staff training for assistant education officers and case officers; and
- ensure the rationale for specific SEN expenditure is more transparent to schools.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

105. South Gloucestershire manages its provision of school places effectively. Written documents produced for consultation in respect of reorganisation of schools are very good. The LEA has established a school organisation committee and produced a school organisation plan in accordance with statutory requirements. In September 1999, there were seven per cent surplus places in primary schools and 5.6 per cent in secondary. Six primary schools and one secondary had in excess of 25 per cent surplus places. Pupil numbers are expected to increase by 4.5 per cent in the primary sector and 19.3 per cent in the secondary sector during the five years of the plan.
106. So far, the LEA has succeeded in providing new school places without excessive interim overcrowding in existing schools. The District Auditor, reporting on planning school places in 1998 found much to commend the LEA, stating that, authority-wide forecasts had been reasonably accurate. Since then, the use of information technology systems to support strategic planning of pupil places and associated admissions to schools has been enhanced, further improving procedures for projections of local population and school planning.
107. The LEA's infant class size plan is being implemented successfully and it is anticipated that all Key Stage 1 pupils will be educated in classes of 30 or under by September 2000.

Asset management

108. The Council's approach to the asset management of building stock is unsatisfactory. The dates set by the Department for Education and Employment for the submission of the asset management plan (AMP) policy statement and survey data were not met. A steering group of headteachers, governors and diocesan representatives which was intended to monitor the AMP has not yet been established. The Best Value Performance Plan sets out an intention to review capital investment and asset management in 2002/2003. This should be brought forward to 2000/2001.
109. There are strengths. Some success has been achieved in accessing New Deal funding and in funding new schools. Where building improvements have taken place, schools frequently express satisfaction with the consultation procedures and the completed work. The building condition surveys conducted as part of the AMP were also carried out efficiently.
110. The Council inherited many school buildings in need of extensive refurbishment. Its current assessment of outstanding repairs is £35m as landlord and £5m as tenant. Of the £35m, £18m is classed as essential and urgent. It also estimates that surveys now being undertaken to assess the suitability of accommodation for teaching purposes will increase the cost of outstanding work by another £20m. The annual level of revenue maintenance expenditure is insufficient to make significant inroads into the backlog of work, and future capital programmes,

as at present structured, will not meet the needs. Primary schools have over 13 per cent of their accommodation in temporary provision.

111. The Council has not explored PFI schemes to support capital expenditure on education, although it has chosen this option in supporting some other non-education areas. When capital expenditure on education has been committed, slippage between estimated and actual expenditure in a given year has frequently occurred. For example, although the projected capital spend for 1999/2000 was £11.1m, the actual expenditure is likely to be some £8.7m. This pattern of slippage will need to be remedied for future years in order to maximise funds available for school improvements.
112. In two primary schools visited, accommodation problems were impacting on pupils' learning in ICT. In one, access to a networked computer room involved movement between buildings. This was restricting pupils' independent use of computers. In another, where funding had been made available for hardware, there was insufficient space to accommodate a networked computer room.

Admissions

113. In accordance with the Admissions Code of Practice, the administration of admissions to schools in South Gloucestershire is well managed. Following consultation, significant changes in admissions policy to secondary schools were introduced in 1999. The changes varied the priority admission criteria, particularly in respect of siblings, with the object of increasing the opportunities for children to attend their local schools. The major result of the change was a reduction in the year 7 intake from neighbouring Bristol LEA from 14 per cent of the total in 1996 to six per cent in 1999. Similar changes are envisaged for primary schools in 2001, but are not anticipated to have such marked effects.
114. The number of appeals is very high and slows the admissions process. It is anticipated that the number of secondary appeals will reduce in 2000 and beyond as the new system of secondary admissions becomes more established. This will need to be monitored closely.
115. Several aspects of the admissions system require addressing as part of the continuing dialogue with the admissions forum. These include the monitoring of the appeals process, the complexity and clarity of the admissions booklet for parents and coordination of the admissions timetable with other local admissions authorities.

Education otherwise than at school

116. The LEA discharges its statutory duty to provide education otherwise than at school well. It has a good, flexible range of provision that includes hospital teaching, home tuition, a pupil referral unit, mainly for secondary aged pupils, and college placements and a prevocational project for Key Stage 4 pupils who are unlikely to be reintegrated into school. This provision is well managed to meet the different needs of pupils. Although very small in number, young mothers of school age are less well supported.

117. Suitable targets to improve provision are included in the behaviour support plan. An appropriate standard has been set to provide alternative provision within two weeks of the date of referral. The standard is met for most pupils, although a few still experience some delay.
118. Ways of making alternative provision full-time by 2002 have been considered. Currently, pupils attending the pupil referral unit receive part-time provision of between 12 and 15 hours. In 1998/1999, 29 pupils received only five hours tuition; of these 13 received this low allocation for more than 30 weeks. This is not satisfactory. Appropriate plans for improvement have been drafted but these have yet to be fully costed.
119. Reintegration into mainstream provision has an appropriate priority. Procedures provide suitable assistance to parents in finding a school place and easing and supporting a pupil's re-entry into school. Some success has been achieved in reintegrating pupils in a timely way, although 12 pupils at Key Stage 3 in 1999/2000 remained in an alternative placement for more than one school year.
120. Appropriate management arrangements to ensure consistent service standards are in operation. Home and hospital tuition is very well managed. Pupil progress and placement is systematically monitored. Appropriate service performance standards are established and monitored. Planning is clear and sets appropriate targets for development. Good cooperative working arrangements between relevant services are recognised as important, although regular consultation with parents on the current provision and proposed changes needs to be further consolidated.
121. The LEA has a satisfactory procedure for registering and monitoring pupils who are educated by parents at home. The monitoring records for 1998/1999 show that suitable checks were made on all home educated pupils.

Support for attendance

122. The Education Welfare Service provides only basic support to schools in maintaining satisfactory levels of attendance. Additional support is provided to improve the attendance of Traveller children. In the schools visited, there was some evidence of good and effective support to individual pupils, although this was not consistent. There is very little evidence of the service providing effective advice to schools on developing appropriate systems to monitor attendance or on taking effective measures to combat truancy.
123. The service has faced management difficulties and senior staff have taken effective action to develop a more consistent and improving standard of service. Suitable protocols have been established as well as clear procedures for tracking pupils who move schools without appropriate notification. As yet the service has not made effective use of legal powers but it has begun to look at how these can be used more productively.
124. Staff are deployed in a straightforward way to clusters of schools and visit most primary schools fortnightly and secondary schools weekly. The LEA's monitoring shows significant variations in rates of unauthorised absence between secondary

schools. The current deployment does not reflect the level of school need in a sufficiently precise way. However, it is intended to disseminate among other school a useful project in one school with relatively lower attendance.

125. Suitable targets for improvement have been set, although the coherent strategy for meeting the targets is not sufficiently clear in either the EDP or Behaviour Support Plan.
126. The pupil referral unit provides effective support to pupils who face longer-term attendance problems.

Support for improving behaviour

127. LEA support for improving pupil behaviour is satisfactory. Behaviour is judged at least satisfactory in a similar percentage of primary schools to that nationally. However, the distribution differs in secondary schools where behaviour is judged good or unsatisfactory in a significantly higher percentage of schools than nationally. Exclusions have steadily decreased in secondary schools and in the current year this has been significant. Only 12 pupils have been excluded so far this year compared with an overall total of 48 pupils last year. Fixed term exclusion has also reduced significantly.
128. Improving the standards of behaviour and discipline and reducing exclusion have been priorities since the inception of the LEA. A working group, including a significant number of representatives from schools, devised a behaviour policy, designed inservice training for staff working with disaffected and excluded pupils and developed a framework for the management of behaviour. This partnership between schools and the LEA provided the foundation for the development of the behaviour support plan. The plan is comprehensive and identifies appropriate priorities. It is usefully complemented by extensive annexes linking other related plans and policies and provides guidance for schools on the management of, and support for pupil behaviour.
129. The priorities identified in the behaviour support plan are also included as an activity in the EDP. While both plans outline appropriate objectives, neither provides sufficiently detailed action plans for the intended activities. The plans, therefore, do not provide a satisfactory management tool to coordinate and monitor developments. Senior officers intend that the detailed actions taken to pursue priorities will be developed in service plans. However, these are not drafted to clearly reflect contributions to EDP and behaviour support plan priorities. Activities are taking place to help implement the broad activities identified in the plans. Schools, however, are not clear about what they are or how they might be relevant to them. Initial monitoring of the EDP lists several completed activities. However, the monitoring gives little evidence of how teachers have rated the usefulness of the activities or what impact these have had on school improvement.
130. A continuum of provision for pupils with behaviour problems has been developed. This is an achievement for a small authority with few resources. The pupil referral service provides support to schools and support is also available from educational psychologists, the learning support services and the education

welfare service. In addition, some schools are appointing learning mentors. The work of five small services has been drawn together to form a single team responsible to one manager to ensure appropriate coordination. Further work needs to take place between this service and others to identify the service which can best respond to each referral and determine procedures for directing specialist support to the children in most need.

131. The pupil referral service provides an entitlement of six hours a term to each secondary school to support whole school developments. Individual pupils are referred to the service for additional support. Clear procedures ensure that, prior to any referral, a school has already some taken action to tackle the problems. Effective planning and liaison with parents are also good features of the work. Pastoral support programmes have integrated well into the current arrangements.
132. Exclusions are comprehensively monitored. This provides very good management information on the effectiveness of behaviour strategies. Schools also have access to advice on the legal procedures governing exclusion.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

133. The LEA discharges its statutory duty to work with other agencies to protect children from significant harm in a satisfactory way. In the schools visited, designated teachers had received recent training on the use of procedures. The intention to update procedures in line with new regulations has been communicated to schools. A suitable approach to update designated teachers is also planned.
134. Arrangements for discharging responsibilities for health and safety are appropriate and are coordinated by a specialist officer. A comprehensive health and safety manual includes requirements for each curriculum area. Training is provided to school staff and governors. Appropriate monitoring is in place.

Children in public care

135. Improving the education of children in public care has a suitably high priority. Initial efforts have focused on devising a suitable basis for effective working arrangements between Social Services and schools. Children in public care are a priority for referrals for support from all children's services. Strategies to maintain educational continuity and to support teaching and learning to raise attainment are not satisfactory.
136. Plans set targets for attainment that are high and challenging at Key Stage 2 and satisfactory at GCSE. Corporate plans, such as the children's services plan and the quality protects management action plan, together with the behaviour support plan, identify an appropriate strategy. This includes improving liaison and communication between the education department, schools and Social Services by devising effective protocols to clarify working arrangements, improving monitoring and identifying and training teachers with responsibility.

137. Progress has been made on most activities. Designated teachers have been identified and take-up of training has been good. Protocols have been agreed and monitoring strategies put in place. Schools are well aware of the priority to be given to raising attainment of children in public care but report delays and difficulties in receiving basic pupil information. Returns sent from the LEA are not always up-to-date. Not all headteachers are clear about how information on pupil movement should be communicated. Social Services confirm that the number of care placement moves experienced by children in public care is still rather high. This was confirmed in the schools visited and makes ensuring educational continuity and progress more difficult.

Minority ethnic children

138. Minority ethnic children are supported by services organised appropriately by a regional consortium of the four ex-Avon unitary authorities. The services are funded under the Ethnic Minorities and Travellers Achievement Grant. Minority ethnic children of African, Caribbean and South Asian heritage are supported by a team coordinated on behalf of the consortium by Bristol LEA. Twenty-one schools in South Gloucestershire receive appropriate support from this service, often for very small numbers of children. The service responds in a flexible way to the needs of individual pupils.

139. Support for Travellers is also appropriately organised on a regional basis, with South Gloucestershire as the lead authority. The arrangement has a suitable management structure. The regional collaboration has been recently reviewed and continues to receive the support of all four LEAs. The service is small but offers teaching and welfare support at any one time to roughly 250 Traveller children, of which just over half attend South Gloucestershire's schools.

140. Improving the attainment of Traveller children is an appropriate priority and is addressed by relevant activities in the Education Development Plan. Effective strategies are in place to encourage attendance at secondary level. In one secondary school, consistent and expert back-up is provided by a support teacher. The support from the service, however, is not of this quality in all schools. Access and advocacy for Traveller children are well developed and appropriately supported. Attendance rates at about 80 per cent are encouraging. Support to improve attainment is less consistent.

141. Schools continue to need help to develop strategies to overcome complex issues such as supporting the development of basic literacy of children who have fallen over three years behind their peers. Help is also needed in developing suitable assessment practices for use when pupils attend for only short periods and in adapting aspects of the secondary curriculum to reflect pupils' cultural needs.

Combating racism

142. The Local Authority has made a very effective response to the recommendations of the MacPherson Committee following its enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. This response constitutes very good practice. It is an example of a well thought out, practical and collaborative approach to a difficult issue. The local authority has corporately developed a statement of intent, based on sound

principles appropriate to the local context. This has received the approval of the Council and has been widely disseminated. It is now being put into practice.

143. Implementation has focused appropriately on developing a structural framework that ensures all dimensions of equality are taken on board by all Council departments. A partnership against racial harassment includes all the Council departments, the Health Authority, the police, Support Against Racial Incidents (a voluntary organisation) and the probation service. The partnership's working framework is particularly strong and effectively coordinates the resources available to different groups and organisations.
144. Within this policy and framework, the education department has formed an Equalities Working Group. This group includes representation from most of the sections of the department and has developed a programme of action covering all aspects of equality to implement the statement of intent through three core objectives. A race equality sub-group draws together representatives of key services, schools and governing bodies with the intention of steering and overseeing the implementation of the action plan which links up initiatives from all other plans. As part of this work, the group has been responsible for developing comprehensive and informative procedures for combating racial harassment, which have been circulated to schools.
145. The procedures have been carefully introduced to schools and governing bodies in local meetings and appropriately linked to the development of policies on bullying. They have been in operation since January. Training for governors has been devised. The procedures and the confidential approach taken have been received in a positive way by the schools visited. Schools are open to recognising that racial harassment takes place and that they have an important role to play in counteracting it. Forty reports have been received which are mostly confined to name-calling, illustrating the prevalence of this unacceptable behaviour.
146. A work force survey is being conducted to monitor the ethnicity, gender, disability and age of the work force with a view to promoting future positive action strategies. Equality standards are also being included in professional development and performance review, in management competency arrangements and in service operational plans. Curriculum developments are being considered by the citizenship working group. The achievement of boys and minority ethnic pupils is also monitored.

Social exclusion

147. The Council has placed a high priority on developing effective support services for children who are at risk of social exclusion. Since the LEA's inception, services have increased the amount of support available and taken steps to improve the effectiveness and coordination of support. Within the relatively limited resources available, the LEA has developed a continuum of provision that is, in the main, successful at ensuring that nearly every child receives an appropriate education. The provision has the capability of achieving a consistent standard of very good practice. To achieve this, improvements are required in

service planning to clearly reflect the coordinated and rigorous implementation of activities identified in the EDP and the behaviour support plan.

Recommendations

In order to improve the entitlement and access of pupils to education:

- reassess the Capital Investment and Asset Management Strategy; in particular, review school accommodation needs relating to ICT;
- implement plans to make provision of education otherwise than at school full time and consult parents and other agencies about the implementation of these plans;
- continue to work in partnership with headteachers to ensure appropriate and timely reintegration into school of pupils who have been excluded;
- steadily develop and increase the range of strategies used by the Education Welfare Service to improve school attendance;
- improve planning to ensure that the implementation of activities in the EDP and Behaviour Support Plan are coordinated and mapped across relevant service plans;
- continue to develop the referral process so that pupils are directed to the most appropriate service and more specialist support is targeted most effectively at the children in most need;
- devise, in partnership with Social Services, strategies which protect the educational continuity and improve the learning of children in public care; and
- take steps to improve the consistency of support to improve the attainment of Travellers' Children.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the management of the EDP:

- complete the review of the School Improvement Programme to:
 - d) streamline and focus the activities more specifically on improving standards, school management and the quality of teaching;
 - e) provide more detail of how priorities and activities are to be implemented by clarifying timelines, sequencing, responsibilities and success criteria;
 - f) clarify schools' entitlement to support and indicate clearly how schools can access activities included in the EDP.

In order to improve the focus of resources on priorities:

- continue to pursue external funding to promote priorities;
- ensure that corporate recharges to the education department are subject to agreed standards in terms of specification and costs, involving service level agreements where appropriate.

In order to improve the arrangements for monitoring, challenging, supporting and, where appropriate, intervention in schools:

- develop advisers' ability to identify difficulties in schools at an early stage, and ensure that progress on the issues identified is routinely checked through analysis of data and, only where necessary, through monitoring visits;
- improve the deployment of advisers so that their time is mostly spent supporting schools causing concern;
- ensure that action points arising from annual reviews are focused, manageable and specifically prioritise areas for improvement; and
- bring forward the proposed timing for the Best Value review of the advisory service.

In order to improve the use of data to support target setting:

- review the focus and presentation of data provided to individual schools;
- work with other LEAs to improve the arrangements for handling data relating to pupils from other LEAs educated in South Gloucestershire schools; and

- identify schools which find difficulty in using data appropriately and take steps to improve their understanding.

In order to improve the support for ICT in the curriculum:

- continue monitoring implementation of the new ICT strategy; and
- review staff deployment to determine whether staffing is sufficient to meet current support needs and whether brokerage arrangements might be more appropriate.

In order to improve the support for schools causing concern:

- review the role of advisers in supporting schools in difficulties and, in the case of schools in special measures, consider deploying specialists to take on this work;
- ensure that priority support plans are focused, clearly sequenced and manageable; and
- make the recruitment and deployment of advisory headteachers more systematic by creating a register of specialist support to help schools with management difficulties; also extend this to include deputies and classroom teachers.

In order to improve the support for school management and governance:

- clarify for headteachers the nature of intended support for modern foreign languages and design and technology, including any brokerage arrangements; and
- reduce the focus on one-off courses by further developing programmes that provide more sustained and sequential support.

In order to improve the support for post-16 education and lifelong learning:

- take steps to disseminate the findings of the Kingswood Institute of Education and High Reliability projects more widely.

In order to improve management services to schools:

- set out clearly articulated SLAs for all buy-back services; make these available well before the beginning of a financial year; ensure that the SLAs set out the total costs of services, both central and delegated, offer a choice of service levels and include a clear service specification.
- monitor closely with schools the implementation of the revised approach to ICT administrative support and the impact of additional investment; and

- review the provision of property services maintenance as a matter of urgency within the context of the Best Value review of capital investment and asset management.

In order to improve support for pupils with SEN:

- conduct the consultation with stakeholders on the draft SEN strategy and implement the strategy in a timely way, providing an appropriate training programme as planned;
- work with the health authority and health trust to improve the speed and quality of medical advice for the statutory assessment for pupils with SEN;
- involve the Supportive Parents for Special Children Group in devising and implementing a survey of client satisfaction and in staff training for assistant education officers and case officers; and
- ensure the rationale for specific SEN expenditure is more transparent to schools.

In order to improve the entitlement and access of pupils to education:

- reassess the Capital Investment and Asset Management Strategy; in particular, review school accommodation needs relating to ICT;
- implement plans to make provision of education otherwise than at school full time and consult parents and other agencies about the implementation of these plans;
- continue to work in partnership with headteachers to ensure appropriate and timely reintegration into school of pupils who have been excluded;
- steadily develop and increase the range of strategies used by the Education Welfare Service to improve school attendance;
- improve planning to ensure that the implementation of activities in the EDP and Behaviour Support Plan are coordinated and mapped across relevant service plans;
- continue to develop the referral process so that pupils are directed to the most appropriate service and more specialist support is targeted most effectively at the children in most need;
- devise, in partnership with Social Services, strategies which protect the educational continuity and improve the learning of children in public care; and
- take steps to improve the consistency of support to improve the attainment of Travellers' Children.

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