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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
SOUTHEND ON SEA
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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APPENDIX: 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 the work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was based partly on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with LEA members, staff in the directorate of education and library services and from elsewhere in the council, and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 60 schools. The response rate was 80 per cent.

3. The inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to four first schools, one junior school, six combined schools, six secondary schools and one special school. During the visits, inspectors tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits considered whether support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money. Evidence from other OFSTED visits to schools within the LEA was also considered.

COMMENTARY

4. Southend on Sea forms the major part of the largest conurbation in eastern England. While historically its role has been as a seaside resort and commuter town, the service sector of its local economy has become increasingly important. The council is ambitious and sees itself as well positioned to participate in the regeneration of the East of London currently spearheaded by Thames Gateway. While the borough as a whole is a little more deprived than the national average, unemployment and deprivation are concentrated in a small central area. The performance of Southend on Sea schools is in line with or better than national averages, and in many respects it is improving strongly. Attainment in its secondary schools is particularly strong.

5. Southend became a unitary authority in April 1998. Immediately, the council accorded education a high priority and began to address what it saw as the underfunding of schools. A comprehensive and accurate audit soon uncovered an unacceptable variation in school performance. Officers and members responded by establishing a strategy for school improvement based on high challenge and high support. At the same time, the LEA substantially increased the level of delegation to schools.

6. Many of the strengths of the LEA's school improvement strategy derive from this early resolve. Its Education Development Plan (EDP) sets out a generally coherent and well-structured set of activities. The LEA has rapidly developed a very good service that analyses and interprets performance data for schools. Challenge has been robust and sustained, and demanding targets have been set. The impact of the LEA's strategy can be seen in the rapid improvement in performance of the LEA's weaker schools, and its success in reducing the number of schools in special measures or judged to have serious weaknesses.

7. Despite the determination shown in implementing its school improvement strategy, the LEA has not been successful in providing all of its education functions satisfactorily: there are weaknesses in provision for some of the most vulnerable children. The LEA does not have clear and transparent strategies for special educational needs (SEN) and inclusive education to match its commitment to these issues. Despite recent improvement, support for behaviour is not satisfactory, and the inspection team has concerns about the status of the provision made for pupils who have no school place. Furthermore, officers and members have not given sufficient priority to addressing the recommendations of the report of the Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence and have failed to show leadership to schools on the need to combat racism.

8. Moreover, although the LEA has met with some success in raising standards in schools, it has not been consistently effective in doing so, and its approach has not done enough to support school autonomy. It has not, for example, succeeded in establishing a comprehensive partnership based on constructive dialogue with the majority of its foundation secondary schools, and its support for schools' capacity to manage themselves has not been wholly effective; nor does it give schools the information and flexibility they need to make genuinely autonomous choices about the procurement of services.

9. Nevertheless, the LEA discharges most of its functions to support school improvement adequately. Its particular strengths are:

- the level of financial delegation and the provision of financial information to schools;
- support to schools for the use of performance data;
- the EDP;
- the implementation of modernised council structures;
- support for literacy;
- support for early years;
- the recruitment of governors;
- property services;
- asset management planning; and
- planning for school places.

10. There are weaknesses in:

- the relationship between the LEA and most foundation secondary schools;
- support for information and communication technology in schools;
- support for management in schools;
- support for pupils who have no school place;
- support for behaviour;
- support for children from minority ethnic heritage;
- support for children in public care;
- service planning and performance management systems;
- strategic planning for services to support pupils with SEN and social inclusion;
- value for money in the services to support pupils with SEN; and
- measures to counter racism.

11. Gaining control of locally delivered services has boosted the ambition of members and officers to revitalise the local economy and to tackle the root causes of the endemic deprivation at Southend's centre. Education and lifelong learning are key components in this endeavour and are reflected in the range of externally funded regeneration schemes as well as in the council's support for the Education Action Zone (EAZ), the submission being successfully led by the LEA.

12. A highly effective chief executive is leading an overhaul of management arrangements. A modernised council structure is being implemented well. The speed and efficiency of decision-making has improved and arrangements are being made to improve stakeholder involvement in the council's processes. Planning at corporate level has been strengthened with the introduction of more coherent financial and service priorities. However, planning at service level is still inconsistent and performance management systems are underdeveloped. The inspection team nevertheless believe that the council has the capacity to improve, and to address the recommendations in this report.

13. It can be seen from paragraphs nine and ten of this report that the LEA has both significant strengths and weaknesses. While the inspection team recognises the good work of members and officers entailed in attaining, in so short a time into the life of the authority, a position in which most of the provision made by the LEA is adequate or better, the council can hardly be satisfied with the extent of the current weaknesses, given its commitment to social inclusion. It must expect an early return inspection to ascertain whether its provision in that area has improved.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

14. Southend on Sea forms the major part of one of the largest conurbations in the east of England. Historically it has had a role as both a commuter town and a resort town. In recent years the commercial centre of the town has grown and, set strategically on London's doorstep, it is a part of the Thames Gateway regeneration area. The borough, which has a population of 177,000, is among the most deprived 25 per cent of districts nationally. Unemployment at 4.4 per cent is above the national rate of 3.7 per cent. However, unemployment and associated deprivation are heavily concentrated in just three wards.

15. In January 2001, the LEA had 14,689 pupils in primary schools and 11,367 in secondary schools. Some 21.3 per cent of primary school children are eligible for free school meals, which is higher than the average nationally (19.7 per cent) but the proportion of secondary pupils eligible for free school meals (15.7 per cent) is lower than that found nationally (17.6 per cent). The proportion of the population that comes from a minority ethnic background is low at 3.9 per cent, compared to the national average of 10.1 per cent. The proportion of minority ethnic children in schools is also low (4.4 per cent compared to a national average of 12.1 per cent). While the proportion of primary pupils with statements of educational needs is close to the national average (2.6 per cent compared with 2.7 per cent nationally), that for secondary pupils is substantially lower than the national average (2.6 per cent compared with 4.0 per cent nationally). Just over a third of three-year-olds in the borough have a place in Southend schools, as do almost all of the four-year-olds.

16. There are 60 schools in the LEA. In the primary phase there are 15 infant, 14 junior and 14 combined primary schools. Of the 60 schools, 17 are foundation schools, including ten of the 12 secondary schools. Of the 12 schools, four are grammar schools, while five of the remainder have some element of selection. There are substantial cross boundary movements of pupils from outside the borough into Southend's selective secondary schools and of Southend pupils into comprehensive schools in Essex. There are five special schools and these also serve pupils from outside Southend. An Education Action Zone in the borough was established in April 2000. There is one Beacon infant and nursery school.

Performance

17. The performance of Southend on Sea schools is in line with or better than national averages. Results in its secondary schools are particularly strong. In their last inspection, the proportion of primary and secondary schools judged to be good or better was broadly in line with national averages. In recent inspections, the majority of primary and secondary schools were judged to be good or very good.

18. Baseline assessment has been introduced in all Southend on Sea schools, and prior attainment on entry to primary schools is in line with the average for similar LEAs and nationally. Attainment of pupils at Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics is in line with national averages but lower than that for pupils of similar LEAs. Attainment at Key Stage 2 is rising at above the national rate. While the attainment of girls has generally exceeded that for boys, the gap has narrowed. A higher proportion of Southend on Sea pupils achieve five or more GCSE grades A* – C at Key Stage 4 than nationally or the average for statistical neighbours. The

proportion achieving at least one A* - G grade is in line with national averages but has risen faster than the national rate since 1998. The average points score at GCE Advanced level for Southend pupils is higher than the national average and improving at a faster rate. Progress between Key Stage 1 and 2 and Key Stage 3 and 4 is in line with national averages but that between Key Stage 2 and 3 is well above the national average. For both primary and secondary schools the levels of attendance and exclusions are in line with national averages.

Funding

19. During its three years of existence, Southend LEA has gradually increased spending in education and is now funding at a level above its standard spending assessment (SSA). Capital expenditure has increased substantially in 2000/01 from its low level, relative to the national average, for the previous two years. This is in large part due to the need to increase capacity in the secondary sector. Some £840,000 of the additional capital expenditure is funded from the increase in funding to above SSA in 2001/02. The LEA policy of maximising income from the Standards Fund has been effective, as has its assistance to schools to access external funding from the EAZ, New Opportunities Fund (NOF) and through seeking specialist status for its schools.

20. Southend is the highest delegating LEA in the country, at 89.8 per cent in 2000/01. In 2001/02 the LEA will easily meet the Government's targets for delegation and strategic management costs. The increase in school budgets of 4.1 per cent per pupil is short of the Government's target of five per cent, but this is reasonable considering the already high level of delegation.

21. The gross delegated funding per pupil in Southend was higher than the England average for both primary and secondary schools (LEA, £1958 and £2767; national, £1868 and £2559 respectively), but slightly lower for special schools (LEA, £9188; national, £9357).

22. Southend LEA's expenditure on centrally provided services is well below both national and unitary averages in all areas. This due to the high level of delegation and relatively low spending across the categories of strategic management, (SEN) and access. Central spending on SEN (£103 per pupil) is two-thirds of the national average (£160 per pupil) though, taking into account both central and delegated funding, overall spending on SEN is only slightly below the average for similar LEAs and nationally.

Council structure

23. The council is modernising its structures at member level. Having improved the efficiency of its decision-making, the council is now seeking to strengthen the openness and transparency of its processes. Within the new 'executive' model for council structure, consisting of cabinet including a leader and eight executive members, one member is responsible for education and lifelong learning. There are three scrutiny committees: social, economic and environmental. Education issues, falling under the social scrutiny committee, are accorded an appropriately high priority. These committees are assiduously checking and, where relevant, challenging the recommendations made by the cabinet. They also initiate enquiries into specific areas of council activity. An advisory forum has been established to provide a more structured and meaningful dialogue with stakeholders. This is a well

thought through development that is intended to replace the contribution previously made by co-opted members of the education committee.

24. The council has sought to mitigate what is said to have been a parochial departmental culture inherited from the former district council. Seven working parties, each led by a member of the officers management board, are responsible for a series of cross council initiatives designed to involve staff from all departments. Within the directorate of education and library services the departmental structure relevant to schools' education functions consists of three divisions, and a fourth division includes responsibility for the adult education service and the youth service in addition to library services. The structure is well balanced and ensures effective co-ordination.

The Education Development Plan

25. The EDP is a good document, based on an accurate, detailed and comprehensive audit, which was approved for three years by the Secretary of State in April 1999.

26. The priorities, targets and activities are well defined, clearly derived from the audit and have a very evident local flavour with, for example, a specific priority to address poor attainment in science. The rationale supporting each priority is set out in detail and demonstrates the links to national priorities and corporate plans and strategies. The activities set out under each priority constitute a balanced plan to address the weaknesses in schools and the needs of underachieving groups. The findings of the school survey and school visits indicate that the majority of primary schools find the EDP priorities relevant. However, staff and governors in some of the secondary schools considered that the document focused insufficiently on their needs.

27. The 2002 targets for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 all appeared challenging when set. In the event, improvement has been faster than expected, and in 2000 the performance of schools has met or exceeded targets for 2000. Higher targets than those set nationally for 2001 and 2002 have been agreed in revisions to the plan in 2000. These revised targets are realistic, but challenging. The levels of exclusions are falling ahead of EDP targets.

28. The set of activities included under each of the priorities represents a coherent, balanced and comprehensive strategy to address the issue to which the priority relates. Clear, objective, relevant and realistic outcome-based success criteria and targets are included. Planned actions are well sequenced, resourced and clearly described. The description of target groups is consistent with the nature of the activity and the purpose of the priority. Responsibilities at all levels are clearly identified. However, there are a few weaknesses in the plan. Without a summary, for example, it is difficult to track the proposed support for groups of disadvantaged pupils, as they appear in several priorities. The priority for supporting school self-evaluation is not sufficiently clear either about what it is intended to contribute to the standards pupils achieve, or about how school self-evaluation will affect the LEA's strategy for school improvement.

29. The strategy for monitoring and evaluating the EDP is good and the progress report produced at the end of the first year is objective and detailed for almost all activities, and has led to appropriate redirection of activity. A consultative group of key stakeholders and schools oversees and supports the development of the plan

and has confirmed the continuing relevance of the EDP priorities. New activities are added as needed to address emerging issues and new national priorities.

30. Consultation on the first EDP was undertaken to a tight time-scale as the LEA came into existence in April 1998, with submission of the EDP required by December. As a result, it was hurried and confused. For subsequent plans, consultation has improved and is now satisfactory. The range of organisations and groups consulted is broad and relevant. By establishing a consultative group to oversee each priority the LEA has provided a mechanism for on-going review and feedback.

The allocation of resources to priorities and Best Value

31. Since local government reorganisation (LGR), Southend has brought rising spending in social services under control and has allocated additional resources to education effectively, in line with the council's educational priorities. The authority appropriately projects its likely revenue funding forward to 2002, in line with comprehensive spending review figures provided by the Government. Although the service and budget planning cycles are now synchronised, the links are not yet strong enough at service level. Budgetary control is sound and education is the only council service area where there is growth in funding.

32. Since LGR, Southend has increased per pupil funding by 22 per cent. In addition, over the last three years the LEA has transferred £1 million from the secondary to the primary sector to redress an inherited imbalance of funding. Other priority areas such as additional support for schools in special measures, attendance and health and safety have been funded from growth and reallocation of existing resources.

33. The school funding formula is simple and well understood by schools, but is not sufficiently targeted at educational need. The formula is more strongly pupil-led than most (93 per cent for primary schools and 96 per cent for secondary) with six per cent of delegated school funding allocated as a learning support factor based on pupil numbers, free school meals and test attainment. The proportion of formula funding allocated for disadvantage for secondary schools is a substantial increase on that included in the formula inherited from Essex (2.12 per cent) and that within the formula for grant maintained schools (1.27 per cent). Nevertheless, the LEA's understandable decision to distribute a substantial proportion of the learning support element on pupil numbers unduly limits its redistributive effect, particularly in the secondary sector. While the LEA is committed to adjusting the formula over time as part of the on going review of special educational needs, there is little detail currently available on the proposed formula changes. Moreover, although the 1999 revision of the funding formula aimed to move away from the historic basis, which favoured smaller schools, it is still perceived by larger primary schools as not meeting their needs.

34. The council's arrangements for Best Value show a combination of strengths and weaknesses. The Best Value Performance Plan is clear and well presented. The revised document for 2001 to 2006 has explicit links with the priorities in the education and libraries strategic plan. The auditor's opinion was unqualified and the council is implementing the two main recommendations: establishing a corporate procurement strategy, and more closely linking financial and service planning. A

recently produced Best Value toolkit includes accurate and practical guidance and advice to officers.

35. Although the infrastructure is in place, there is as yet little evidence that pilot Best Value reviews have had an impact on services. The authority has learned some lessons from the pilot reviews, which were led by second tier managers. It has set up a small Best Value team that will lead future reviews to ensure consistency and increase challenge. However, other weaknesses remain to be addressed. The scope of Best Value reviews is frequently too narrow to justify the resources involved, and action plans are inadequately focused on measurable outcomes. The Best Value review of admissions has been inspected as part of this inspection (see section five).

Recommendations

In order to improve accessibility and relevance of the Education Development Plan:

- provide a summary of the planned support for disadvantaged groups.

In order to improve the quality of Best Value reviews:

- broaden the scope of reviews; and
- focus action plans more clearly on measurable outcomes.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

36. Raising standards is a key objective for the council and several services are making a significant contribution to its achievement. Personnel and finance services provide well regarded support to school senior management. Service staff work closely with other LEA officers in the assessment of school strengths and weaknesses during the annual review process. The council is facilitating school improvement through its commitment to improving accommodation. The LEA is developing strong links at a strategic level with a wide range of voluntary and public sector agencies. In addition, the council's economic regeneration strategy has been successful in attracting useful external funding from the European Social Fund and Single Regeneration Budget.

37. Support for schools in managing attendance focuses particularly, and increasingly effectively, on schools causing concern and those in areas of relatively high deprivation. However, there are weaknesses in support for pupils with special educational needs and for inclusive education. Support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage is unsatisfactory, as is that for schools experiencing problems with pupils' behaviour.

Monitoring, challenge, intervention and support

38. The functions of monitoring, challenge, intervention and support are not sufficiently clearly defined. Despite this, the LEA in practice firmly challenges underperformance and unsatisfactory attainment in schools, and intervenes effectively where there are weaknesses. At relatively low cost, it has succeeded in reducing the number of weak and underperforming schools. Nevertheless, the approach taken to the monitoring and support of schools is insufficiently differentiated, takes too little account of school self-evaluation and does not ideally support the LEA's stated desire to promote school autonomy. Moreover, the LEA is not as effective in supporting improvement in secondary schools as it is in primary.

39. From the outset, Southend adopted a school improvement strategy based on high challenge and high support to address an unacceptable number of weak and underperforming schools. The LEA set out clearly the way it would work with schools and its view of the implications of the Code of Practice on LEA/school relationships. An annual review process was instituted that evaluates all the information on schools that is available to the LEA. This process provides the basis for allocating schools to categories of concern and for directing support to meet schools' needs. A useful database has been set up to assist in the collation and analysis of information relevant to the school.

40. Its monitoring of schools provides the LEA with a reasonably detailed and growing knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses arrived at through a combination of desk-based analysis of school data and a programme of six well-planned and well-documented visits to schools by their attached adviser. The information produced forms the foundation for the school review process.

41. This review process has been particularly effective where the LEA has needed to intervene in schools causing concern. It has informed a high level of well-managed support promptly provided to schools in any of the cause for concern categories. The LEA's expectations for improvement have been challenging, not

only during intervention, but also once a school has moved out of the cause for concern categories.

42. The LEA has been, in general, firm and rigorous in its challenge to schools to raise attainment. Perhaps inevitably, this was not initially a comfortable process, nor should it have been. At first, some schools considered it excessively robust. That concern is now diminished, although the level of challenge remains high, as the visits to schools demonstrated. Two schools, however, were working to unofficial targets, below those communicated to the LEA. This suggests a lingering divergence of view between the LEA and a minority of schools as to what is realistic.

43. The LEA's centrally funded support for school improvement has been substantial, but its impact has been mixed. Almost all of the resources for school improvement are held centrally. All schools have a minimum entitlement of up to three days monitoring and support with a further seven days negotiable, largely for EDP activities and the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs). The additional support offered is optional and the volume of take up, which has varied between two and five days for schools giving little or no concern, reflects the differing needs and priorities across these schools. Support has been particularly strong for literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 2. However, support for information and communication technology (ICT) in the curriculum and for school management, although improving, is generally unsatisfactory.

44. The high challenge, high support strategy has been largely effective in tackling the LEA's initial priorities. However, it is less well suited to a context where the number of schools causing concern is falling and there is growing capacity for self-evaluation and management in Southend's more successful schools. It is not evident that successful schools need the relatively high level of centrally funded support which they currently receive. Central retention of the funding for this support limits the potential to delegate resources to schools and allow them to judge the services that they need and the source from which to obtain them. Given that attached advisers in Southend have access to good performance data, assessments of school effectiveness can be made without the need for such an extensive programme of visits.

45. The LEA's strategy for school improvement has been less effective in the secondary phase. Since LGR, the LEA has developed an effective partnership with its primary schools and good relationships with some secondary schools. However, it has not established an effective partnership with the majority of its ten foundation secondary schools. Most are grammar schools or partially selective and the majority are high or very high achieving. Many of them were unhappy with the apparent reduction in school autonomy associated with the change from grant-maintained to foundation status. Inevitably there were tensions, not all of which have been fully resolved. Almost all foundation secondary schools value some elements of LEA support, such as the provision of high quality performance data analyses, the links with the secondary advisers and the quality of budgetary information and consultation. Nevertheless, overall the LEA's attempts to establish a comprehensive partnership based on constructive dialogue with its foundation secondary schools have been less than successful, as our visits to schools and discussions with headteachers showed. Recently, there have been signs of improvement. The four secondary schools involved with the EAZ, three of which are foundation, are working more constructively with the LEA. This is encouraging, but not sufficient.

46. The school achievement and effectiveness division (SAE) is leading the LEA's strategy for school improvement well. The allocation of responsibilities to staff is in line with the key elements of the LEA's strategy for school improvement. The performance appraisal system ensures individual targets and professional development are aligned to the EDP and the annual service plan. There is a good programme for the induction of new inspectors and advisers. The LEA makes good and increasing use of a wide range of external consultants to supplement its existing expertise.

47. Management and planning of the service are good. The SAE division sets out its intentions clearly within its planning and ensures effective targeting of resources in line with the annual service plan and EDP priorities. However, the LEA has recognised that it needs to change its strategy to support school improvement. It is already committed to reducing the entitlement for monitoring and intends to develop a role as a broker of support services. The introduction of service level agreements for support is planned from September 2001. Southend's total net school improvement costs are less than the average for other unitary authorities and overall the LEA provides satisfactory value for money.

Collection and analysis of data

48. The support provided to schools in the use of performance data is very good. Leadership and management of policy in this area are highly effective. The data are comprehensive, accessible to schools and effective in enabling them to make informed decisions about their progress and to assess their relative strengths and weaknesses.

49. The LEA has established a well-defined policy in relation to its support for performance data. The LEA's information service is located in the strategy and resources division and works with the SAE division to provide a range of comparative data.

50. During school visits, inspectors confirmed that most schools have at least an adequate understanding of the performance data supplied by the LEA and most are able to use it very effectively to support their own target-setting. Special schools were not as positive as mainstream schools, and the data available for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds are not yet sufficiently well integrated to enable the performance of all relevant groups to be suitably analysed. Overall, however, the quality of the analyses is very good and the guidance and training in support of the use of the data are of good quality and have helped schools to make effective use of the statistics provided.

51. The LEA aims to have access to full electronic transfer of data on individual pupils within a year. In the meantime, LEA officers collect data on an individual pupil basis from all schools and in return provide schools with a comprehensive analysis of this local data. Detailed analyses of test data for all of the statutory assessments and optional standard tests are provided as well as baseline assessment information and analysis of GCSE results. Clear and well-presented charts enable schools to form a view about their progress against the national averages and assess gender differences by subject. The value added analysis booklets show progress for individuals between the tests compared to the median progress for the LEA. This

allows useful inter-school comparative analysis within the borough, although the validity of the interpretation is reduced where there is high mobility.

Support for literacy

52. The support provided by the LEA for helping to raise attainment in literacy is generally good with some very good features. There is a good literacy development plan, the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) is well led, targeting of schools is very systematic and effective, and there is clear evidence of a positive impact. Attainment is improving at all key stages and, although progress has not been even for all age groups, standards in English are at or above national expectations in all key stages.

53. Results for reading at Key Stage 1 have improved from 80.8 per cent in 1998 to 85.2 per cent in 2000, over one and a half times as fast as the national rate. Writing at Key Stage 1 has improved from 83.3 per cent to 87.5 per cent, slightly faster than the national average. At Key Stage 2 attainment in English improved faster than the national rate in 1998 to 1999 but slowed the following year. This was due to a refocusing of the support work by the LEA from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 1 and is reflected in the rapid progress at that key stage. Nevertheless, the LEA achieved its original EDP target for 2000 and standards at Key Stage 2 are above the national average. The LEA is on track to meet its 2002 target which has been revised upward to 81 per cent.

54. Improving standards in literacy is EDP priority one. The plan builds effectively on the focus in the NLS and there are suitable linkages. The literacy action plan is detailed and identifies clearly the key issues and the strategy for supporting schools in the implementation of the NLS, and raising attainment to reach the 2002 target. All activities have clearly identified success criteria against which the LEA measures outcomes.

55. Management of support for the NLS is very good. The LEA's solution to difficulties in recruiting full-time literacy consultants has involved establishing a team of five school-based expert literacy teachers as part-time literacy consultants managed by one of the original consultants. The arrangement works well, and the teachers are highly regarded by schools. Detailed analysis of data is used effectively to target schools for intensive support. The number of such schools varies according to need, but progress is monitored thoroughly. Evaluations of the impact of the support generally show that it accelerates improvement in attainment.

56. Effective training in support of the NLS has been provided to all schools. All link advisers and LEA staff who provide English as an additional language (EAL) have also had the literacy training to help support and monitor the progress in non-intensive schools. Appropriately, the LEA has a focus on writing in 2000/2001 to reflect the national priority and the need to redress the imbalance in attainment between reading and writing. At Key Stage 3, conferences were organised for secondary school heads of English and this has resulted in the appointment in several schools of literacy co-ordinators. Some secondary schools have chosen to respond individually to literacy work at Key Stage 3 and the LEA intends to maintain a watching brief in these schools. The LEA is involved with the national Key Stage 1 intervention, where there has been good progress. Several schools receive support from the EAZ. Links with the local family literacy scheme and with the school library

service are very productive and further support the work being done to improve standards of literacy.

Support for numeracy

57. The support for numeracy is highly satisfactory and improving, with some good features. Standards in mathematics in the LEA are already above national averages at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. There is a clear strategy for supporting schools to improve further, the strategy is well led and the evidence of progress in schools supported by the LEA is unequivocal. Useful links exist between the strategy to improve numeracy and other recognised areas of weakness within the LEA.

58. End of key stage tests show that between 1998 and 2000, results for mathematics improved from 85.8 per cent to 90.4 per cent at Key Stage 1 and from 57.2 per cent to 72.4 per cent at Key Stage 2. Progress at Key Stage 2 comfortably surpassed that for the LEA's statistical neighbours and that nationally, and Southend's Key Stage 2 target of 71 per cent for 2000 has been exceeded. Revised higher targets have now been established for 2001 and 2002. At Key Stage 1, progress was not as great as that nationally, although the LEA started and remains above the national average overall. This is now a priority area for the LEA.

59. The activities under the EDP priority of 'Improving the numeracy skills of children and young people in Southend' relate well to the LEA's detailed numeracy action plan. The latter maps out appropriate strategic objectives and key issues for action in support of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS). These include acknowledged areas of weakness such as the development of ICT training in curriculum support materials and promoting school management, leadership and monitoring of numerical targets in all primary schools.

60. The lead consultant manages a group of 11 leading mathematics teachers with expertise covering Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 3 and special education. This has enabled the LEA to provide a broad range of support including that for Key Stage 3. Locally and nationally produced performance data are used successfully to focus support on those schools furthest away from their own statutory targets in mathematics. This makes effective use of limited resources. Support for schools requiring intensive support is closely monitored and evaluated to establish its impact. Data produced by the LEA show that work in those schools designated for intensive support in numeracy or part of the EAZ has been very successful.

61. More general progress in the implementation of the NNS is monitored by the LEA's attached advisers, all of whom have received training. All schools attended the central training programme for the NNS, and additional five-day and four-day training packages have been offered to representatives from Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 1 schools respectively. Additional training has also been offered to develop further teachers' skills in enhancing the performance of lower attaining pupils.

62. Schools visited as part of the inspection are generally very positive about the quality of support and training provided by the LEA, particularly in relation to guidance on the implementation of the NNS. However, there exist some confusion and uncertainty in schools, which the LEA has not done enough to help resolve, about the congruence between the NNS and a commercial scheme being used in EAZ schools as well as some schools outside the EAZ area.

Support for information and communication technology

63. Support for information and communication technology (ICT) in the curriculum is a weakness that the LEA itself acknowledges. There has been too little effective strategic leadership in this area and little evidence of impact on curriculum development and standards. Fortunately, there have been improvements.

64. The LEA has, rightly, identified the need to improve standards in ICT as one of the activities in priority four of the EDP. Some progress has been made and a number of the targets set by the LEA have been achieved. However, there remains a considerable task ahead to provide a clear strategic direction and to promote effective use of ICT in schools. Support for the use of ICT in other curriculum areas has been patchy and many schools remain uncertain about the use of ICT across the curriculum.

65. The school survey highlighted a general lack of confidence by schools in the LEA's support for ICT and in its strategy for development. The LEA's ICT strategy 2000-2003 (second draft) was produced in September 2000. It is not well known or understood by many schools. It sets out suitable targets in response to national priorities and it provides some local targets such as that by 2003 all schools should be connected to each other and the borough, and should also have entered into strategic partnerships with private and voluntary bodies. However, the strategy relies on schools having their own ICT development plans. These are currently linked to a dated LEA ICT development plan. Some workshops have taken place to focus the views of key stakeholders on the LEA's proposals for ICT, but only recently has there been any real progress in developing the individual strands of the strategy. Unfortunately, problems with an external contract delayed important aspects of the LEA's overall strategy for the development of ICT. However, the LEA is now back on track to complete broadband connections to all secondary schools and, later, to primary schools.

66. There are other promising signs of progress. The LEA has recently appointed an adviser with responsibility for ICT who has improved the LEA's capacity to support schools. The distribution of laptop computers to all teachers in the EAZ has boosted teachers' confidence in using ICT. The LEA is successfully encouraging contact between EAZ and non-EAZ schools where there are notable cases of good practice. In addition, the LEA intends to provide laptops to all of Southend's teachers by the end of the year and it is looking to make laptops available to pupils.

Support for schools causing concern

67. The support provided for schools causing concern is good, but has some weaknesses. There is a clear policy framework. The process for reviewing schools is rigorous, and action targets are well considered. The LEA has successfully helped to remove several of its schools from the categories of special measures and serious weaknesses. The LEA informs schools by letter when they fall into any category of school giving concern. However, some schools remain uncertain about the definition of the LEA's passing difficulties category (an LEA defined category which includes schools encountering temporary difficulties for which additional LEA support is warranted). The triggers for the identification of schools are not sufficiently well defined.

68. Southend inherited a relatively large number of weak schools in 1998, resulting in three schools requiring special measures and five designated as having serious weaknesses. The LEA has worked successfully with these schools to help them to improve and now only one school remains in each of the categories. A suitable range of approaches has been used to support the schools, including, where necessary, the appointment of additional governors. There are no schools that have been judged by OFSTED to be in the category of underachieving. However, the LEA uses a further two categories to identify those schools which give it some cause for concern. Three schools are categorised as being likely to come under an OFSTED category if inspected; and a further seventeen fall into a passing difficulties category. The remaining 37 are considered to give little or no concern.

69. Since 1998, a multidisciplinary school review group, chaired by the director, has reviewed the progress of every school and allocated them to one of the six categories. Schools are formally notified about which category they are placed in. Documentation about the processes of LEA monitoring and intervention is clear, but lacks specific quantified criteria for the categories and this leaves some element of doubt for schools about the level of weakness necessary to trigger being placed in a category. Discussions with headteachers and governors showed that several schools in the passing difficulties category were unclear about the precise reason they had been placed in this category as well as what time-scales might be involved for their removal. All, however, welcomed the additional resources attached to this category.

70. The amount of support provided for schools in each category is defined within specific bands and is to that extent differentiated. Schools in special measures receive 50 or more days support from LEA officers. Schools in other categories get between ten and 40 additional days of support depending on need. In general, the nature and quantity of support for schools in the first five categories is well considered and effective. Task groups for each school so identified meet regularly to assess progress and identify new targets for action. The assessment process is thorough and uses a range of evidence, including reasonably detailed reports on the schools from their link adviser, although to date these reports and the outcomes of the panel meetings are not routinely communicated directly to the chair of governors at the school. There are proposals to remedy this deficiency from September 2001.

Support for school management

71. The support for improving school management has some strengths but overall is unsatisfactory. It lacks sufficient coherence with other related EDP priorities, such as support for self-evaluation, and there are weaknesses in the partnerships with some secondary schools and with governors which undermine the LEA's ability to support and challenge the quality of management in all schools appropriately. Nonetheless, support for performance management was well received, as has been training for school managers, support to improve the quality of teaching, and support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

72. Weaknesses identified during the EDP audit justified the inclusion of support for leadership and management of schools to improve performance as an EDP priority. In addition, supporting school self-review is a separate EDP priority based on the view that 'few schools have gained mastery in evaluating their own

performance or are robust enough in their action planning'. Although there have been some improvements since December 1998, analysis of recent OFSTED school inspection reports confirms that there remain weaknesses in school management in too many of Southend's schools.

73. The actions, which are set out in the EDP to address these weaknesses are, individually, sensible. The LEA has set out a clear management training plan, based on the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) standards for headteachers and senior staff. The plan details a range of support and maps contributions to particular schools. Satisfactory support is provided for the national leadership programmes. The LEA's school improvement strategies programme sets out a limited but useful range of centrally provided training and support for schools, including some appropriate to senior and middle managers.

74. Notwithstanding the above, some schools have reservations about the LEA's capacity to promote better management. Senior staff in schools visited as part of the inspection had mixed views. On the whole, those in secondary schools were more critical than in primary schools, although weaknesses were identified in all phases. Support for aspects such as performance management, which has been received by most schools, was generally well regarded. The LEA's guidance states that it will monitor the standards of performance at each school in terms of curriculum delivery, pupils' achievement and management. However, there was little evidence from advisers' notes of visit to suggest that the LEA has a clear understanding of the specific management development needs of particular schools, and even less evidence that the weaknesses are being addressed systematically.

75. Promoting school managers' skills in self-evaluation is not given a high enough profile in the LEA's dealings with schools. The LEA has done some work with external partners and three fifths of schools have attended the OFSTED school evaluation training, with a further cohort planned for the summer term. However, too little emphasis is placed on school self-evaluation overall, and in support of the LEA's monitoring strategy in particular. Some schools are already well advanced in terms of their self-evaluation approaches, but the LEA does not always acknowledge this in its monitoring. Some schools, particularly in the primary sector, were positive about joint observation of lessons between the link adviser and headteacher. However, this was not seen as part of a coherent plan to improve the school's capacity to manage itself. Insufficient support has been provided, generally, to enhance the oversight of management by governors, or to encourage governors to take a more active role in the strategic management processes for their schools. For example, to date governors have not received an annual report on school performance, nor do the less than adequate service specifications for management services assist them in making well-informed decisions about purchases.

76. Support to improve the quality of teaching is at least sound overall and has often had a clear impact. Most of the direct support to improve the quality of teaching arises out of the effective literacy and numeracy support that is described elsewhere. The LEA has also produced a useful set of videos and support materials that aim to help with lesson preparation in a range of subjects and enable teachers to examine a variety of teaching skills and strategies. The LEA's draft curriculum policy statement has a short but useful section on teaching strategies. Elsewhere there is appropriate guidance on aspects such as the teaching of citizenship. The professional development courses provided by the LEA are generally well regarded

by teachers and are reasonably broad in scope given the size of the LEA. The LEA has established a team of advanced skills teachers which is being enthusiastically supported by most secondary schools in particular.

77. The monitoring of NQTs is rigorous and effective, and in most cases there is good feedback from link advisers to the NQT and headteachers concerned. The local NQT induction programme is limited in scope, but links to the Essex scheme provide access to a greater range of induction guidance and activities.

Support for governors

78. The support provided for governors is generally satisfactory in terms of routine administration, most aspects of training, and access to advice from a help desk. However, the weaknesses in support for school management described earlier in this report (paragraph 75) inhibit governors in the full exercise of their role.

79. Supporting governors in their role and responsibilities is activity three priority five of the EDP and is also recognised within other priorities of the EDP, for example in relation to cause for concern schools. Providing specifically focused training for governors and support on key aspects of raising school standards is a key objective. The LEA met its targets of 50 per cent of governors attending training in the first year, and 90 per cent of those governors judging the training to be effective.

80. The LEA has been very effective in filling LEA nominated governor vacancies, the incidence of which is well below the national average. This has often been achieved by adopting as LEA governors those identified by the school as meeting particular requirements in terms of expertise. Other routine aspects of support for governors such as the provision of information about national initiatives and support from a helpline are satisfactorily provided. However, the LEA has not met its objective of 100 per cent of governing bodies receiving an annual report on the performance of their schools, but will do so from 2001. Visits to schools and discussions with governors confirmed that most were appreciative of the range and quality of the training and guidance provided, although a minority felt that the training was superficial.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

81. The LEA's support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory overall. The development planned within the EDP focuses on the use of an action research model to provide training for school staff and on developing materials which will increase the knowledge of teachers. While there has been some progress, the LEA still has provided all the materials intended in all core subjects. There has been some modification of the EDP activities for 2000/2001 and more time has been allocated, but actions remain insufficiently focused.

82. The LEA's policy for the education of able, gifted and talented pupils sets out aims and intended outcomes and states that all schools should have a named responsible person and that they should develop a coherent policy for gifted and talented pupils. However, the policy lacks detail and its implementation has been uneven both in schools and in the LEA. The LEA's curriculum policy does not deal in detail with provision for the most able.

83. Some initiatives have been undertaken with positive outcomes, including two summer schools in 2000 addressing the needs of gifted and talented pupils. A research project funded by the LEA is effectively supporting 20 teachers to address

better the needs of more able pupils. However, there remains too little coherence and rigour in the LEA's approach to this area of work.

Support for early years

84. The LEA provides good support to early years. Support for early years has developed rapidly since the LEA came into being in 1998. Partnership working is increasingly effective. A multi-agency conference entitled 'Beyond the Limits' promoted the co-ordination of all those engaged in support for early years. Of the 150 pledges of action given at the meeting, 87 per cent were fulfilled within six months. Joint working between social services and education is good. The Department for Education and Skills unconditionally accepted the first two early years development and childcare partnership plans (EYDCPP). These have been based on comprehensive audits of need and provision. The latest EYDCPP has been extended into a four-year strategic plan that is shortly to be submitted to cabinet for approval. The strategic plan sets out the linkages between the development of provision for the early years and other related plans such as the EDP and the Quality Protects management action plan. All DfES targets have been met and there is provision for up to 66 per cent of three-year-olds.

85. As the strategy develops, there is a shift in emphasis to the improvement of standards. A comprehensive curriculum guide to the foundation phase has been produced. Planned action includes improving the quality and quantity of training and developing support and advice for providers. All OFSTED inspection reports for nursery provision rated it satisfactory or better.

Education Action Zone

86. The Southend on Sea Education Action Zone (EAZ) was approved in the second round and came into operation on 1st January 2000. The LEA was prominent in leading the EAZ submission. The zone's action plan 2000-2001 comprises a summary of the individual action plans submitted by the headteachers of the 17 EAZ schools in November 1999. The five strands which form the basis of its work are:

- teaching and learning;
- curriculum;
- learning community;
- social inclusion; and
- human resources.

87. Within the teaching and learning strand, a detailed audit of strengths and weaknesses led to some major interventions for the zone using extra staffing targeted at particular groups. The intention is to provide 'additionality' of progress over and above that expected for schools of the same type. For example, the analysis of attainment had shown that the difference between boys' and girls' standards in reading and writing was greater than the national average, and so underachieving boys were targeted in one year group to improve their performance in these areas.

88. As part of the ICT strategy for the zone all teachers have been provided with laptop computers enabling them to have access to 'assessment manager' software to improve the degree to which assessment informs teaching approaches at

individual pupil level. This is one example of an initiative that has been picked up by the LEA and is now being applied to all teachers in the borough. The level of communication between the zone and the wider LEA has been good and appears set to continue at officer level. There is also evidence of close co-operation and of sharing of good practice between schools in and out of the zone.

Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for supporting school improvement:

- reduce the time allocated for monitoring effective schools;
- improve the communication with secondary schools and their involvement in the LEA's school improvement strategy;
- increase support to school self-evaluation and incorporate the outcomes of school self-review in LEA monitoring;
- clarify the criteria used to place schools into the passing difficulties category; and
- increase the delegation of funding for services to support school improvement and develop the role of broker of support services.

In order to improve support for ICT in schools:

- bring forward the planned formulation of a detailed ICT development plan clearly linked to a corporate ICT policy.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

89. The council's corporate planning processes are developing systematically and coherently, but have yet to be fully implemented. Nevertheless, they provide a generally satisfactory basis for translating corporate priorities into action. The leadership shown by officers and members in promoting high standards is good. However, their leadership is not equally effective across all education functions.

90. The council's corporate planning processes are well thought-through and clearly set out in guidance to officers. Learning is one of the key corporate priorities and this is translated into three objectives for the directorate of education and library services: to raise standards; to ensure equality and inclusion; and to promote lifelong learning. A clear corporate strategy, supported by five-year departmental service strategies, provides the framework for annual service planning, the management of Best Value reviews and annual budgeting. While its implementation is at a relatively early stage, it has already ensured that directorate level plans are affordable, coherent and consistent with corporate priorities. Responsibilities are clearly defined and progress is monitored regularly and systematically. However, the corporate planning process lacks a corporate ICT policy and strategy to underpin it.

91. The education and library services annual plan links to corporate objectives, but the quality of the planning for individual services is less good. Financial and service planning processes have yet to be fully integrated with each other, and planning concentrates more on the costing of inputs and insufficiently on outcomes. While there are reliable arrangements for translating the EDP into action, in most other areas service and section plans are too frequently just lists of tasks with inadequate attention given to targets or timescales. Performance management arrangements to support planning are under-developed, but proposals to improve performance review mechanisms are clear, comprehensive and are rapidly being implemented.

92. Reports from officers to members are succinct and options are clearly set out, although sometimes there is a lack of supporting analysis to enable members to make informed decisions. Officers provide advice promptly to members. Members of the cabinet and scrutiny committees receive regular, accurate and informative monitoring reports on the performance of schools and on progress in priority areas.

93. Despite the clear priority given by the council to social inclusion, the development and implementation of a coherent strategy for inclusive education have been slow and have not gained the confidence of schools. The partnership between the LEA and most secondary foundation schools is unsatisfactory and is affecting the LEA's performance in some key functions. Yet improving relationships with secondary schools appears neither as a corporate nor a service priority.

94. The council has had a tradition of partnership that pre-dates its unitary status. It has been successful in bidding for Single Regeneration Budget and European Social Fund monies. These bids have involved the Council co-ordinating the work of further education, health, the Government Eastern Regional Office and voluntary organisations. A management board led by the LEA oversees the co-ordination of bids and the implementation of programmes. The majority of the LEA's external partners consider that partnership working has improved since local government reorganisation. Easier access to officers and the drive and energy of the chief

executive were given as reasons for this improvement. The LEA has established very good working relationships with the Catholic and Church of England dioceses and with other religious bodies.

95. The LEA's purposeful liaison with other agencies is having a direct impact on schools. There were examples in the schools visited of effective partnerships in family literacy, pre-school and nursery education, and in improving attendance. However, the relationship between schools and the social services department, although improving, is still less than satisfactory.

Management services

96. The LEA provides satisfactory and sometimes good management services support to schools. Its services have become more school focused over the past three years, with good lines of communication between schools and the service providers a particular strength. The services offer good value for money. Support for premises is very good while personnel support, payroll and financial advice have recently improved and are now good. Support for ICT in administration, which is offered through a contract with an external provider, is limited and unsatisfactory.

97. Schools have a choice of service providers in most areas. The relatively high proportion of foundation schools means there is some expertise in seeking value for money, although the community schools are less well informed. However, the LEA has neither made an effort to market its services to the foundation schools, nor helped other schools to become informed purchasers. It has only recently produced a directory of the services it offers to schools, which clearly distinguishes the purchasable services from schools' entitlement to centrally funded services. Many schools visited were unclear which services they were paying for and which were provided centrally.

98. **Financial support:** The financial support provided by a small team in the education and libraries department is effective and responsive and has improved over the past three years. Most primary schools and a quarter of secondary schools buy the service at one of the three levels. The accountancy support from the council treasurer's department was criticised by some schools for its slow response to problems with budget reconciliations. These problems have largely been overcome. Well-attended termly bursars' meetings offer a good opportunity for schools to discuss their concerns with LEA officers.

99. Schools generally manage their budgets well, although few plan for a period greater than one year. There are no schools with significant budget deficits, but a majority of primary and special schools had surpluses of over five per cent of their budget. The LEA has been slow to challenge schools about these, but is now rightly taking more decisive action.

100. **Personnel support:** The personnel service provided by a team in the council's corporate services department is effective, but was hampered until recently by the small size of the team. Schools were positive about the expert and sensitive casework support provided by the team manager, but reported variable support from other team members. Personnel administration is generally satisfactory and has improved with the recent addition to the team. The annual personnel healthcheck to review schools' personnel policies and procedures is most helpful.

101. **Payroll:** The payroll service is good and has improved considerably since it was delegated in April 2000. Schools appreciate the direct contact they now have with the team.

102. **Buildings maintenance:** An effective property consultancy service is offered to schools by the property services department which includes a helpline, termly visits from a link surveyor, annual electrical and mechanical maintenance and help with feasibility studies. Take-up is increasing and includes about three-quarters of the primary schools and a quarter of the secondary schools. The schools visited were clear about their own responsibilities for repairs and maintenance and were planning effectively to meet these. Those that bought the LEA service rated it highly.

103. **ICT in administration:** Funding was delegated prior to the LEA achieving unitary status and the LEA does not provide support for ICT directly. Schools' satisfaction with the support through an external provider is decreasing and the LEA has not yet taken remedial action. Many of the schools visited commented that the quality and responsiveness of the service had declined recently.

Recommendations

In order to strengthen corporate planning:

- establish a corporate ICT policy and strategy.

In order to improve performance management:

- strengthen management information systems and service level agreements to provide members and officers with a better basis for evaluating and challenging performance.

In order to improve the quality of information given to schools:

- ensure schools are given clear details of the centrally funded LEA support and the services offered for purchase for each of the management services.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

Strategy

104. The LEA's strategic planning for services to support pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is poor. Despite an early commitment to promoting inclusion in Southend's schools, the LEA still lacks an adequate strategic plan for the development of support for pupils with SEN and for putting inclusion into practice.

105. In 1998, the LEA inherited a pattern of service provision that did not fully support the inclusive education of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. In addition, there was a general lack of awareness of the principles of inclusive education within schools and the communities they served. The LEA's early commitment to promoting inclusion in Southend's schools was evident in the SEN draft policy adopted by the shadow authority. Its principles were clear and unequivocal and mirrored the Government's proposals for raising the achievements of children with special educational needs. They were the subject of consultation with schools, pupils and parents in 1999 and were approved by the council in April 2001 as part of their strategic action plan for special educational needs.

106. In November 1998, a fundamental review of services to support pupils with SEN was initiated. In advance of the completion of the review, the LEA reconfigured services to support inclusion better, by for example establishing an integrated support service (ISS) the purpose of which is to unify the various strands of provision for children with a range of needs. Links between special and mainstream schools have developed mainly as a result of action by the schools themselves. However, the LEA has established secondary Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) links, as well as encouraging links between special schools and local primary schools. It has also secured specialist teacher support, including three advanced skills teachers (ASTs), from special schools to assist with behaviour management and Key Stage 3 literacy issues in schools causing concern. The established networks of SENCOs have been expanded to disseminate and share good practice. A number of working groups have been set up to improve consultative processes and practices by involving professionals from a number of agencies, including health and social services.

107. The 'Towards Inclusion' conference in June 2000 launched the LEA's first SEN review consultation process. The purpose of the review was to revise policy and practice in order to deliver Best Value across the whole range of SEN activity. The options set out in the consultation paper focused on early intervention to forestall the need for statementing and on the implications of that for the current configuration of special schools and mainstream resources. Many of those consulted considered the paper was cumbersome and too open-ended, giving as it did numerous options for change. The financial implications of the options were deliberately not set out in order to encourage debate about a vision for SEN in Southend. However, in practice, the debate hoped for made little progress, precisely because the discussion of a vision in isolation from a clear notion of its implications did not recommend itself to those consulted. The options involving the closure or amalgamation of some special schools were fiercely opposed, even though headteachers of those schools had been involved in the drafting of the consultation document. In consequence, because the issues were not resolved, the future of

provision of support for pupils with SEN remains unclear. The headteachers and chairs of governors of almost all schools visited were not aware of the status of the 'Towards Inclusion' options and of the LEA's policy of inclusion and most were critical of the consultation process and subsequent actions of the LEA. As a result of this uncertainty, those schools with a high proportion of pupils with SEN lack confidence that the support they receive will improve to ensure effective inclusion. For those schools currently resisting inclusion there is little or no encouragement to change.

108. Consequently at the time of the inspection the LEA lacked a clearly articulated strategic plan, based upon a comprehensive mapping of need, for the development of provision for pupils with special educational needs. A review working group led by the executive member for education was, however, developing new proposals that take account of the responses to the 'Towards Inclusion' consultation. The draft strategic action plan written as the LEA's response to the consultation process and presented to cabinet in April is an inadequate document. It lacks a rationale to link its objectives and activities to an audit of the needs that exist and assessment of the extent to which current provision meets. It fails to define what, in Southend, inclusion means: which children are to be included in mainstream and in what ways, and which are to remain educated in segregated provision. It does not set out the implications, above all the resource and training implications, of the desired shift in school population, and it does not explicitly and adequately meet schools' and parents' likely concerns, which invariably centre upon the challenge presented by potentially disruptive pupils.

Statutory obligations

109. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations. The performance of duties is monitored and there are suitable plans in place for improvement.

110. The administration of SEN has improved over the past three years and is well managed. Delays in receiving advice from health and other agencies reduce the proportion of cases completed in less than 18 weeks from 95 to 53 per cent. While this is in line with the average performance of other unitary authorities, officers have taken a range of appropriate actions, including strengthening liaison with the health authority and more intensive tracking of progress, in order to speed up the process.

111. The quality of statements is sound. Schools consider that the objectives and targets described in Part III are realistic and assist them in preparing individual education plans. The guidance prepared for schools to use at stages four and five of the Code of Practice includes criteria for assessment as well as thresholds for the range of special educational needs; it has been universally welcomed. It provides a means by which routes through to final assessment are not only standardised across the LEA but can also be moderated by officers and advisers. The guidance for other stages of the Code of Practice is detailed but more open to variation, particularly at stage three, and causes difficulties on transfer to new schools. Review procedures are well regarded by schools. Changes in the needs of pupils are taken seriously and the SEN panel's decisions about future provision are based upon that need irrespective of cost. The quality of statements and review processes was found to be satisfactory and improving in most schools where they were examined.

112. Parent partnerships have been successful largely as a result of the LEA's desire to meet parental requests where this is wholly compatible with their child's assessed requirements. It is considered that this service has contributed to the LEA's record of a minimal number of referrals to the SEN Tribunal.

SEN functions to support school improvement

113. The progress the LEA has made in reconfiguring its SEN functions to support school improvement and inclusive education, although substantial, is incomplete. As a result, the support provided to schools is still too inconsistent to be satisfactory.

114. A radical refocusing of educational psychology service (EPS) activity has enabled the support to schools to be increased. Senior posts have been established to support emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and early years, although the latter post is still vacant. The appointment of SENCOs as well as headteachers onto the SEN panel has ensured that relevant school staff are aware that the procedures for meeting pupils' needs are fair and that decisions are consistent. There have been opportunities for the EPS to provide further training, which is seen as a powerful means of ensuring that the service is able to help schools develop their skills. Co-ordinators are becoming more confident and knowledgeable, and their cluster and forum arrangements are highly regarded.

115. The integrated support service, although small, has a range of specialists whose main work has been refocused. Their role in providing schools with advice rather than individual support to pupils was not part of an agreed change with headteachers or SENCOs. Nevertheless, in most cases, their relationships with schools are good and their advice and skills are used positively. Support for schools has also benefited from several EAZ initiatives, largely focused on behaviour management.

116. Despite the progress made in reconfiguring and developing services, there are weaknesses which need to be addressed. While there are annual reviews of the service provided by the EPS to individuals, there are no service level agreements and no evaluation of the value for money the service provides. Services are centrally funded and insufficiently prepared for any further delegation.

117. Monitoring by LEA advisers has confirmed that most schools undertake the systematic assessment and targeting of the performance of pupils with SEN. Judgements within recent OFSTED reports indicate that the quality of support for SEN pupils at primary level is in line with that found nationally, but below that found nationally at secondary level.

118. Schools are critical of some aspects of service delivery. The school survey indicated that primary schools on average rated all elements of the service as less than satisfactory, but the rating for secondary schools was a little better. Almost all the schools visited considered that services to support pupils with SEN were improving. However, the majority still reported inconsistencies and gaps in support, particularly for pupils with EBD, and felt that the time available from the EPS was frequently inadequate and that the advice and the way it was presented were variable.

Value for money

119. Southend's spending on central SEN is relatively low, but its mechanisms for evaluating the value for money it receives from this expenditure are unsatisfactory. It

has weak performance management of centrally funded services and no mechanism for monitoring how effectively schools have spent this money. Funding for SEN insufficiently supports more inclusive education: the funding formula for schools inadequately matches resources to needs and the activities of special schools are not well used to support inclusion. The LEA's recently approved strategic action plan includes measures which are aimed at addressing these weaknesses.

120. The LEA's expenditure on SEN is slightly below the national average per pupil, although a relatively high proportion is delegated through the school funding formula. The SEN funding delegated to schools through the formula is fixed at six per cent of the Individual Schools Budget and is intended to support pupils at stages one to three of the SEN Code of Practice as well as providing a proportion of the support for statemented pupils. Funding for lower level statements, which had previously been devolved by a separate formula, has been delegated to secondary schools through the formula from April 2001. Delegation for pupils without statements is based on the learning support factor that is calculated using a combination of indicators of need including pupil numbers, free school meals and test performance. As part of the introduction of its new LMS formula in 1999 the LEA is committed to reviewing the number on roll element over time, particularly in the secondary sector. Despite the intention that this factor should fund additional educational need, half of the funding is still based on pupil numbers at secondary level (20 per cent at primary) which limits the extent to which the funding can be allocated to needs. For example, one secondary school with no pupils at any Code of Practice stage still received over £71,000 delegated budget for SEN in 2000/01. Proposed activity included within the LEA's recently approved strategic action plan 'Every School an Inclusive School' aims to ensure that funding mechanisms support the provision necessary within mainstream schools and that special school funding arrangements are more consistent with inclusion in the mainstream.

121. The LEA does not have systems in place for monitoring the use of delegated funding by schools to support pupils with SEN, except that the SEN panel, which makes decisions about assessments, placements and resource allocation for statements, takes account of schools' own delegated SEN funding as well as the level of unspent balances. In some of the schools visited, SEN funding is not separately accounted for, and funds are used to make classes smaller, rather than for providing specific support. The LEA is, however, committed to developing a rigorous system of monitoring of schools' expenditure on SEN by March 2002.

Recommendations

In order to improve its strategic planning for Special Educational Needs:

- the LEA should complete its deliberations on the future of inclusive education and set out a clear, coherent and transparent strategy for SEN.

In order to ensure that all mainstream schools have the resources and the expertise to implement fully inclusion:

- develop better links between all services, including special schools, providing support for pupils with special educational needs;
- draw up service level agreements for all services supporting schools educating pupils with SEN;
- improve the consistency of the education psychology service; and

- improve systems for monitoring the effectiveness of support purchased by schools from their SEN funding.
- Ensure resources are used to support inclusion by better matching delegated funding to the needs of schools.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

Planning of school places

122. The planning of school places in Southend is good. Over the last three years, the authority has successfully made cases to the government for additional primary and secondary places and there are no significant surpluses in either sector. There are effective links between school place planning, asset management planning and admissions. The class size plan has been implemented a year ahead of schedule.

123. The school organisation plan for 2000-2005 complies fully with DfES guidance and is comprehensive and accessibly written. However, it is primarily a contextual document and does not provide a clear vision for the future development of Southend schools. Forecasts of pupil numbers are accurate and show demand for secondary places increasing steadily while primary admissions are expected to peak in 2001 and decrease thereafter. The LEA has successfully bid to the DfES for credit approval over three years for 459 additional places at two foundation schools and one community school plus 120 places at the two voluntary-aided schools. There is an increasing net inflow of secondary pupils from outside of the borough.

124. The school organisation committee has met once a term since September 1999. There is close and effective liaison with the dioceses and with neighbouring LEAs.

Admissions

125. Despite the complex nature of the process, particularly at secondary level, Southend makes sound arrangements for admissions to schools. However, the weak co-operation between the secondary phase admissions authorities in both Southend and Essex has slowed progress towards closer co-ordination. There are 12 primary and 11 secondary admissions authorities in Southend, and ten of the 12 secondary schools were grant-maintained until 1999. The LEA has made reasonable progress in improving the co-ordination of admissions in all maintained secondary schools in the face of an evident climate of distrust between schools, but it still has some way to go in persuading the four grammar schools to co-operate more closely with their secondary colleagues. There is a recently established admissions forum that has the potential to address the issue, and there are good links with Essex.

126. Literature on admissions and appeals is clear and accessible, and meets the demands of the Code of Practice. The small team is responsive and supportive to parents. For the first time, the LEA included all maintained secondary schools in its admissions booklet for 2001/2002 and all schools are following a common admissions timetable that is in line with that in Essex. However, a lack of the co-ordination of the flow of information on offers of places by some foundation secondary schools contributes to delay and uncertainty for parents and pupils. The grammar schools will only share information on accepted, not offered, places, leading to a delay in the allocation of places at non-selective schools, which means appeals cannot be held until May. Until this year, information on places accepted was co-ordinated and shared between Southend and East Essex schools by SEEASH – the South East Essex Association of Secondary Headteachers, but this process was slow and often inaccurate. The LEA is now rightly proposing to run a

clearing house for admissions to non-selective and voluntary-aided schools in Southend and has put its proposals before the admissions forum.

127. While the number of appeals for places at community schools increased between 1999/2000 and 2000/2001, the number upheld declined. Most applications for appeals over secondary places were heard by early June, although appeals from late applicants were not complete until August.

128. The value for money study of planning school places conducted by external auditors reported favourably on admissions and cited examples of good practice. However, the Audit Commission school survey indicated that primary schools and particularly secondary schools were unhappy with the appeals process. Most community schools visited believed that current arrangements meant that they were required to take too many pupils who had been excluded from other schools.

The Best Value review of admissions

129. The LEA has recently completed a Best Value review of admissions. Although considerable resources were put into it, the review had some weaknesses: it was narrow in scope, weak on challenge and comparison, and the resulting action plan was insufficiently focused on achievable outcomes. However, the process has resulted in considerable reflection about the development of the service and, as such, it will probably contribute to further improvement.

130. The review covered the management of the admissions and appeals process, but its scope was restricted to the service received by parents, and the views of schools as users were inadequately canvassed. As a result, the review failed to address the major issue of co-ordination facing the service. While the review team was appropriately led by a manager from outside the directorate and included a scrutineer from another department, the team did not include service user representatives.

131. The consultation covered a wide range of stakeholder groups but failed to include the headteachers of the primary and secondary schools which are not admissions authorities. It was carried out through a questionnaire survey of 1000 parents of Year 6 and 7 pupils (which had a 20 per cent response), interviews with representatives of other council departments and a focus group of parent governors. While users considered the service generally good, there was dissatisfaction with some aspects of customer care, especially access to information, and the quality of information on appeals could be improved.

132. Although it contacted 18 other comparable LEAs, the team found that very little comparative information was readily available on admissions. However, there was little attempt made to request specific information, for example on the timing of the process or on appeals, which should have been readily available. The comparison process provided some examples of good practice and led to the intention to set up a benchmarking group.

133. The challenge was unimaginative, identifying no alternative service providers and concluding there was an immature market. As a result, the appraisal of options concluded that the service should continue to be delivered in-house, but that alternative providers should be encouraged.

134. The LEA drew up a set of targets for the service and an action plan to follow up on the review findings. The five-year plan incorporates a long and detailed set of

tasks and completion dates. While many of these are appropriate and incorporate good practice from other LEAs, they are too numerous and insufficiently linked to the targets or to other measurable outcomes, making it difficult to monitor whether they have been successfully achieved. There is over-reliance on qualitative surveys as evidence of improvement. Good elements are the planned focus groups looking at particular aspects of the service, including the appeals procedure.

135. There have been some positive outcomes of the process, for example, the appeals booklet has been redesigned on the basis of examples from another LEA. Asking for their views has raised parental expectations and this is expected to be a driver for improvement. Communication with a wider audience about the admissions process has broadened the debate and raised its profile. The process has led to the development of contacts with other LEAs and the exchange of information and good practice.

Asset management planning

136. Southend's asset management planning is very good, with its school-centred approach being a particular strength. The local policy statement is well written, clearly addresses the needs and role of schools and is well linked to other plans. An asset management working group with several headteacher members led the consultation with schools on the priorities and all schools visited were clear on these. Floor plans, condition and suitability surveys are complete and schools have been effectively involved throughout. The DfES has graded the authority's asset management planning as satisfactory overall. The LEA is currently piloting five-year school asset management plans covering items which are the schools' responsibility and will ask all schools to report on their plans as a means of monitoring progress against the LEA's asset management plan.

137. The LEA's recent New Deal for School bids have been approved in their entirety. Much capital expenditure has been focused on providing additional places in primary and secondary schools, but condition projects such as roofing work, boiler replacement and emergency lighting have also been funded. Southend is well on the way to meeting the works identified within the two highest priority categories. Projects are generally effectively managed by the council's property services and schools are rightly involved in planning and monitoring work from the beginning. Schools were positive about the asset management planning process and the management of building projects, and felt the capital priorities were fairly applied.

Provision for pupils who have no school place

138. The management support for pupils who have no school place in Southend has strengths. However, the LEA had not registered a centre providing education out of school as a pupil referral unit, which meant that the centre was not subject to inspection, and that its legal status was uncertain.

139. The interim education support (IES) team works with 45 pupils not attending school as a result of medical reasons, school phobia or through permanent exclusion. In the current year 79 children are being taught at home. The special educational needs adviser is responsible, with other advisers, for monitoring, evaluating and recording the education provided at home. This monitoring is undertaken on a regular and appropriate six monthly basis.

140. The authority's Children Out of School panel makes placements and monitors a range of cases including permanent exclusion, school attendance orders and

pupils who do not have a school place. Currently there are no headteacher representatives on the panel, but officers plan to widen membership.

141. Of the 45 pupils with whom the IES is currently working, 13 are receiving home tuition and 32 receive 12.5 hours per week support in the IES centre based at 'The Focus Youth Centre'. At the time of the inspection of the LEA, this provision was not registered with the Department for Education and Skills as a pupil referral unit or a school. Monitoring and evaluation systems have been established, but at present there is no external validation of the quality of provision in the centre. The authority has stated in its annual service plan 2001/2002 that it is on target to increase the number of hours of tuition per week in this project to 25 from 2002, in line with statutory requirements. This level of provision is in line with the anticipated demand for places as a result of exclusions.

142. There has been a decrease in permanent exclusions since 1997/1998, and the 29 permanent exclusions in 1999/2000 were ten fewer than the LEA's target. No minority ethnic pupils were permanently excluded during 1999/2000. The group most at risk of exclusion was young people in public care. In recognition of this, since June 2000, the education welfare officer designated to provide support for children in public care has monitored and intervened in cases where a school proposes to permanently exclude a young person in public care.

143. The authority has been active in trying to secure external funding to develop projects that target young people at risk, particularly of disaffection. For example, the education welfare service's 'Next Step' project aims to improve the attendance and rate of return of disaffected and permanently excluded pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4, who are not attending mainstream education.

Attendance at school

144. The education welfare service is becoming increasingly effective in supporting schools to improve attendance and undertakes its functions well. The recently appointed principal education welfare officer is providing good leadership and management and has quickly gained the confidence of many schools.

145. As a result of sound strategic and operational planning, the service is grasping the need to provide new models of delivery. It is innovative in its approach to addressing attendance issues and to securing external funding which adds value to its statutory work. Good practice is disseminated effectively.

146. A monthly programme of training is being delivered within the service to develop the skills to monitor and challenge schools' attendance targets. Although attendance levels are rising, the LEA is still not meeting its targets on the reduction of unauthorised absence. Data collection and analysis are being developed to enable the better targeting of the service on schools where there is high unauthorised absence. A draft attendance policy is currently out in schools for consultation.

147. Schools regard education welfare as an improving service. There are good relationships between the education welfare officers (EWOs) and schools, and the EWO team is growing as a result of schools buying additional time as well as the imaginative use of Standards Fund money. The service works well with a range of other agencies and, for example, undertakes an effective liaison role between schools and social services to underpin support for young people in public care. Recent bids for Single Regeneration Budget funding have been successful and the

Next Steps project, in particular, is intended to ensure the service plays a key role in promoting social inclusion.

Behaviour at school

148. The LEA's support for improving behaviour is unsatisfactory. Although the LEA goes to considerable lengths to provide support, many schools' needs are not met. The present behaviour support plan (BSP) is comprehensive, with realistic targets, and there is a new draft BSP for the period 2001 to 2004 which takes account of changes in the LEA such as the start of the new Education Action Zone and other social inclusion projects. However, the behaviour support for schools does not deliver all the practical help and advice schools need.

149. Behaviour support is part of the provision made by the integrated support service (ISS) and the educational psychology service. Currently there is a small team involved with this work, but the mechanisms to assess the specific needs of schools and develop services to meet them are underdeveloped. The authority intends to use its Standards Fund for 2001/2002 to appoint two further behaviour support teachers. This is much needed practical assistance to schools to help with their management of behaviour and should afford a good opportunity for schools and the authority to reconsider the way schools are supported. The authority rightly feels that it needs to be careful not to take away from schools their primary responsibility for supporting EBD pupils. However, in responses to the Audit Commission school survey two thirds of secondary schools and almost half of primary schools considered support for improving pupils' behaviour unsatisfactory. Staff in almost all schools visited during the inspection complained that there was insufficient support available from the LEA and it was difficult to access what there was. What support was available did not focus sufficiently on prevention and early intervention, and the quality of support provided by behaviour support teachers and educational psychologists was variable. Furthermore there were gaps in the support available, for example, there was no separate provision for Key Stage 1 pupils with extreme behaviour.

150. A minority of secondary schools are being asked by the LEA to admit pupils excluded by other schools and the numbers involved reportedly impact adversely on the schools' ability to manage particularly difficult behaviour. This is exacerbated by the frequently inadequate support which they often subsequently receive. Moreover, an appropriate framework for the managed transfer of pupils at risk of exclusion has not been established.

151. The ISS has provided training on behaviour management for 150 learning support assistants and for some newly qualified teachers. Training is targeted at a small number of schools that have some pupils with significant behaviour problems. The service is actively involved in the EAZ social inclusion programme, for example, one project provides two workers who focus on home school liaison in eight schools. There are existing links with social services through the education of looked-after children forum but the evidence from school visits and the Audit Commission school survey indicates liaison is unsatisfactory overall.

Health and safety, welfare and child protection

152. The LEA fulfils its statutory requirement in respect of child protection procedures and provides health and safety guidance to its schools. The South East

Essex Trident Trust undertakes health and safety audits on employers where work experience is likely to take place.

153. The authority has very recently issued new child protection guidelines to chairs of governors and headteachers, and is underpinning these with multi-agency training for named contacts during February and March 2001. Headteachers are represented on the area child protection committee (ACPC) and the voluntary sector, represented by the NSPCC, is involved in the ACPC's training sub group.

154. The LEA holds up-to-date records of child protection contacts in each school and the education welfare service (EWS) service monitors all child protection cases with an education welfare officer (EWO) attending all initial meetings. The service's policy and practice document clearly sets out the role of the EWS in child protection and offers guidance on how to make referrals.

155. The health and safety service to schools is offered as an insurance-type service level agreement. This is a good service that includes an audit of a minimum of every three years on a risk basis, a newly revised policy and handbook on CD, regular bulletins and a helpline for schools. Training is also offered. Schools that do not buy back the service receive the policy, bulletins and an annual risk assessment questionnaire, but have little contact with the health and safety officer.

Children and young people in public care

156. Despite recent improvements, support for children and young people in public care remains unsatisfactory. The council's social scrutiny committee has met twice to discuss matters relating to young people in public care and officers report that it is the council's intention to establish a corporate parenting body. This is now an urgent task for the council, as the corporate parenting role has not sufficiently extended to the monitoring of educational achievement. Only 13 per cent of young people in public care have a personal education plan (PEP).

157. Nevertheless, there has been considerable progress recently. A joint education and social services forum, the education of looked-after children, chaired by the corporate parenting lead officer, works to support the young people and to ensure that the two services work together effectively. Following the publication of national guidance in May 2000, the authority published its own guidance in February 2001, after consultation with schools and others on procedures and support networks for those working with children in public care. The authority is committed to reducing the numbers of children in public care and the figure has fallen from approximately 300 to 248 during the last three years. This reduction is credited to: more robust care planning; improved support for adoption; and improved family support networks. Further work is intended in earlier identification of those children who will not be returning home so that appropriate support mechanisms can be put into place.

158. The EWS has only recently become well organised to respond to children in public care. An EWO has only been assigned to this work since June 2000. Yet in only a few months the postholder has had a substantial impact. The officer acts as liaison between schools and social services and has visited all schools to introduce herself, meet each school's designated teacher for children in public care and to ensure schools are familiar with the procedures. Schools value this work and are familiar with the procedures. They are asked to contact the officer if there is the intention to exclude permanently a child in public care; this is because the authority

will, if appropriate, support the child's retention at a school in order to preserve stability in the child's life.

159. The designated EWO also works closely with foster carers to develop their understanding of the corporate parent expectations on foster carers and to support foster carers with their educational parenting tasks. The EWO similarly works with social workers to enable them to be more knowledgeable about education, and effective advocates of learning for young people in their care.

160. The council's current performance on the completion of personal education plans (PEPs) is unsatisfactory. Despite the requirement to complete a PEP after a child has been in care for 20 days, at the time of the inspection only 13 per cent of young people in school had a PEP. However, the LEA is committed to ensuring all children and young people in public care to have plans by December 2001. From April 2001 all new cases were to have their plans completed in 20 working days. There are also plans to use the Standards Fund to finance a 0.4 FTE appointment to visit children out of borough and act as an advocate of PEPs.

Minority ethnic children including Travellers

161. The authority's support for minority ethnic children is unsatisfactory overall, although support for Traveller education is satisfactory. A number of LEA services are involved in supporting this area of work, but there is a lack of clear, overall leadership. A strategy for developing the provision and setting challenging targets for the achievement of minority ethnic young people is missing.

162. The LEA's ethnic minority and Travellers achievement grant (EMTAG) plan states that 3.3 per cent of pupils attending schools in the borough are of ethnic minority heritage. These are mainly of Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian and Pakistani heritage. In addition, increasing numbers of asylum seekers and refugees have arrived in the borough over the past year.

163. Most schools have a negative perception of the LEA's support for minority ethnic pupils. In part, this stems from the way grant regulations prevented the LEA from securing EMTAG funding in its first year. However, in 2000/2001, the LEA was able to acquire £17,000 which, with the agreement of schools, was not devolved but was spent on central projects. Some £31,000 of EMTAG money has been obtained for 2001/2002 and is designated for expenditure on training. This year, the LEA is spending £140,000 in addition to its EMTAG on support for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) of which £110,000 is devolved to schools. The authority employs one advisory teacher to support EAL provision and most of this resource is used to target 12 schools. There is a mixed view among schools regarding the extent of support available, but general approval of its quality. In response to the arrival of a number of children of asylum seekers and refugees the authority made available an extra £50,000 in 2000/01 which was, following consultation with primary and secondary headteachers, devolved to schools to support the needs of these young people.

164. There is insufficient monitoring of or challenge to schools' efforts to raise the achievement of minority ethnic pupils. The EMTAG plan commits the LEA to identifying and supporting pupils of ethnic minority heritage at risk of underachievement. However, the EMTAG plan targets for 2001 for the achievement of minority ethnic pupils show no differentiation for any ethnic group at any key

stage. Insufficient progress has been achieved on this and the attached advisers' involvement in monitoring achievement is underdeveloped.

165. The Traveller education service (TES) is a consortium of Essex and Southend LEAs and is a well-organised service received positively by schools. Schools requiring support enter into a service agreement with the consortium that is able to draw on the resources of seven FTE teachers and 2.5 FTE support assistants, approximately five per cent of which resource is currently deployed in Southend. The main focus of work of the TES has been with Roma asylum seekers.

The effectiveness of measures to combat racism

166. The council has not given sufficient priority to addressing the recommendations of the report of the Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson report) and has failed to show leadership to schools on the need to combat racism. The lead for combating racism lies with the education department senior management team, but there is no named officer with responsibility for progressing this important aspect of the LEA's work. At the time of the inspection, the LEA had not produced an action plan in response to the recommendations of the Macpherson report, although a commitment to produce one was added to the annual service plan shortly afterwards.

167. Responsibility for responding to the recommendations of the Macpherson report has largely been placed on schools and governing bodies. The LEA wrote to governing bodies in July 1999 requesting that they record racist incidents and report them to the LEA. There has been no further advice to schools on combating racism. Schools have reported only two incidents to the LEA since 1999, both of which were recorded in 2001.

168. There has been no discussion with governors, headteachers and staff on combating racism. Most schools have not taken note of the request that they should be reporting racist incidents to the LEA. A number of schools do not record racist incidents separately from bullying in the school's own recording system and some believe the incidents that have taken place are too minor to be worthy of record. There is some monitoring by the attached adviser of what schools are doing to support pupils with EAL. However, this falls far short of the monitoring necessary to provide LEA officers and members with assurance that the measures to combat racism in schools are sufficient and effective.

169. There are a relatively small number of minority ethnic young people in the authority. Nevertheless, equality targets needed to protect a potentially isolated minority and to ensure that the workforce and governing bodies reflect a multi-ethnic society are not in place.

The effectiveness of measures to combat social exclusion

170. The LEA's work on social inclusion is developing, but the weaknesses in its strategy for inclusive education means that its overall effectiveness is unsatisfactory. The LEA has recently succeeded in securing single regeneration budget funding for projects targeted at groups at risk of disaffection and social exclusion. For example, the Next Step project works to enable permanently excluded and disaffected young people to attend college, gain work experience and complete their education. The Escapees project, based at Southend Women's Refuge, aims to provide emotional and therapeutic support and guidance for children and their mothers during a time of trauma to minimise its effect on the continuity of education for the children. These

projects are well targeted to support specific groups at further risk of disadvantage and exclusion.

171. The EAZ is piloting innovative strategies to tackle underachievement of children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The council is working effectively with a range of partners in its endeavours to secure external funding and these include the health authority, business and the voluntary sector. Despite the promise offered by these developments, the LEA's measures to combat social exclusion are undermined by the weaknesses in its strategy for inclusive education.

Recommendations

In order to ensure education provision for pupils who have no school place has a clear legal status and is subject to inspection, register the Focus Youth Centre with the Department for Education and Skills as a pupil referral unit.

In order to strengthen behaviour support:

- establish better arrangements to identify and meet the full range of schools' needs.

In order to improve the support for young people in public care:

- ensure that all young people already in the public care of the council have a personal education plan and ensure that all children coming new into public care have a completed plan after 20 days; and
- regularly report the educational attainment of young people in public care to the corporate parenting body.

In order to improve support for minority ethnic pupils' achievement:

- clarify strategic responsibility for this activity;
- establish robust systems to set targets and monitor progress; and
- target the authority's ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grant funding to support schools to raise the aspirations, expectations and achievement of these pupils.

In order to combat racism more effectively:

- allocate responsibility for combating racism to a named senior officer;
- put in place a robust system for monitoring racial harassment; and
- develop and implement a strategic response to the recommendations arising from the Macpherson report.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve accessibility and relevance of the Education Development Plan:

- provide a summary of the planned support for disadvantaged groups.

In order to improve the quality of Best Value reviews:

- broaden the scope of reviews; and
- focus action plans more clearly on measurable outcomes.

In order to improve the strategy for supporting school improvement:

- reduce the time allocated for monitoring effective schools;
- improve the communication with secondary schools and their involvement in the LEA's school improvement strategy;
- increase support for school self-evaluation and incorporate the results of school self-review in LEA monitoring;
- clarify the criteria used to place schools into the passing difficulties category; and
- increase the delegation of funding for services to support school improvement and develop the role of broker of support services.

In order to improve support for ICT in schools:

- bring forward the planned formulation of a detailed ICT development plan clearly linked to a corporate ICT strategy.

In order to strengthen corporate planning:

- establish a corporate ICT policy and strategy.

In order to improve performance management:

- strengthen management information systems and service level agreements to provide members and officers with a better basis for evaluating and challenging performance.

In order to improve the quality of information given to schools:

- ensure schools are given clear details of the centrally funded LEA support and the services offered for purchase for each of the management service.

In order to improve its strategic planning for SEN:

- the LEA should complete its deliberations on the future of inclusive education and set out a clear, coherent and transparent strategy for SEN.

In order to ensure that all mainstream schools have the resources and the expertise to implement fully inclusion:

- develop better links between all services, including special schools, providing support for pupils with special educational needs;
- draw up service level agreements for all services supporting schools educating pupils with SEN;

- improve the consistency of the education psychology service; and
- improve systems for monitoring the effectiveness of support purchased by schools from their SEN funding.

Ensure resources are used to support inclusion by better matching delegated funding to the needs of schools.

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