# Sefton

# Local Education Authority

# Inspection Report

**Date of Inspection:** October 2004

**Reporting Inspector:** Garry Jones HMI

A report from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Audit Commission (AC) under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

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## Basic information

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| Name of LEA: | Sefton Local Education Authority |
| LEA number: | 343 |
| Address of LEA: | 9$^{th}$ Floor<br>Merton House<br>Stanley Road<br>Merseyside, L20 3JA |
| Reporting Inspector: | Garry Jones HMI |
| Date of Inspection: | October 2004 |

## Summary

### Introduction

Sefton is a diverse metropolitan borough on Merseyside. One-third of the borough suffers severe socio-economic disadvantage, with the most deprived wards concentrated in Bootle in the south of the borough. Addressing the impact of this concentration of deprivation is the greatest challenge facing the council. By contrast, the centre and north of the borough, the communities of Crosby, Formby, Maghull and Southport, are areas of greater prosperity. The percentage of the population drawn from minority ethnic groups is well below that found nationally.

Sefton is suffering from net emigration and a declining birth rate leading to falling primary school rolls. This has led to a proposal for primary reorganisation with a significant number of school closures.

The attainment of pupils was slightly above the national average at the time of the previous inspection and remains so. Standards of attainment are rising and the rates of improvement since the previous inspection are broadly in line with those nationally and in similar authorities.[1] Although attainment at Key Stage 4 is slightly above the national average, value added data in 2002 and 2003 suggest that attainment should be even higher at Key Stage 4.

Since the previous inspection there has been a significant change to the organisation of the education and children's social services departments. After a period of review between 2000 and 2001, a new children, schools and families service (CSF) was established in May 2003. This anticipated government's thinking on the greater co-ordination of the delivery of children's services outlined in the green paper *Every Child Matters*. Political leadership within the council continues to be shared between three political parties which requires consensus for decision-making.

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[1] Sefton LEA's statistical neighbours are: Bolton, Bury, City of Bristol, Enfield, Solihull, Southend on Sea, Stockport, Stockton on Tees, Trafford and Wirral.

## Main findings

**Summary:** Sefton local education authority (LEA) has improved since the previous inspection and is now highly satisfactory. The initial response to the findings of the previous inspection was slow. However, decisive action by members, including the creation of the children, schools and families (CSF) service and the appointment of a strong senior management team, has resulted in rapidly accelerated progress over the last two years. The greatest change has been a more focused approach to school improvement, including tackling primary reorganisation. There have been significant improvements in support for social inclusion. Effective co-ordination of national initiatives, including Excellence in Cities, is helping to raise attainment across the borough, particularly in those areas in the most challenging circumstances. The LEA still needs to do more, in particular, defining more clearly the outcomes for young people to be achieved by the CSF service. The strengths in leadership, and the effective partnerships with schools and other stakeholders mean there is good capacity to improve further.

| Areas of strength | Areas of weakness/for development |
|---|---|
| **Corporate leadership of education** | |
| • Clearly identified priorities for education that are linked closely to the community strategy<br>• Improved consultation and very good working relationships with schools and other partners<br>• Transparency of decision-making and the leadership of senior officers and councillors | • Clarity of success criteria in plans in defining the intended outcomes for children and young people<br>• Insufficient focus on the attainment of young people by age 19 |
| **Strategy for education and its implementation** | |
| • Implementation of the school improvement strategy<br>• Arrangements for supporting schools causing concern<br>• Asset management planning | • Focus in the annual review of schools on the progress of all groups of pupils and involve all teams in preparing for the review |
| **Support to improve education in schools** | |
| • Integration of support for national initiatives and targeted support for literacy and numeracy<br>• Very good support for school governors<br>• Very good support for assuring the supply and quality of teachers | |
| **Support for special educational needs** | |
| • Widespread support for the SEN and inclusion strategy<br>• The quality and range of support provided by the parent partnership service | • Quality of SEN statements and reviews<br>• Monitoring and challenge of pupils' outcomes including schools' effective use of delegated funding |
| **Support for social inclusion** | |
| • Comprehensive monitoring of pupils out of school<br>• Highly effective support to reduce exclusions from schools and to make alternative provision<br>• Effective support to improve attendance | • Lack of systematic and purposeful action to combat racism and promote racial equality<br>• Evaluation of the comparative effectiveness and value for money of the range of provision for pupils educated outside school |

## Recommendations

**Key recommendations**

**Corporate Strategy**: Develop clearer success criteria in plans to identify the outcomes that the CSF service intends for children and young people.

**Social Inclusion:** Implement urgently the proposed racial equality plan and establish rigorous monitoring and review procedures.

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**Other recommendations**

**Corporate leadership of education**

**Scrutiny of decisions:** Develop the role of the scrutiny and review committee for the CSF service by providing additional support and training from officers.

**14 – 19 strategy:**  With partners, review current plans and learner's entitlements in order to develop a more coherent strategy for maximising the achievement of young people by the age of 19.

**Strategy for education and its implementation**

**Review of schools:** Improve the annual review of schools by involving all relevant service teams in preparation, including a detailed review of provision for vulnerable groups of pupils and ensuring that appropriate targets have been set.

**Support to improve education in schools**

**Support for special educational needs**

**Statutory requirements:** Improve the quality and usefulness of statements by making objectives more specific and ensuring that reviews lead to changes which reflect pupils' progress.

**Value for Money:** In consultation with schools, link the new system for allocating delegated funding for SEN to a rigorous and transparent system for monitoring and evaluating its impact on pupil outcomes.

**Support for social inclusion**

**EOTAS:** Ensure that the comparative effectiveness and value for money of the range of provision for pupils  educated other than at school is reviewed

**Combating Racism:** Review the current system for schools' reporting of racist incidents to ensure a robust and accurate process.

# Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

## Summary table of judgements
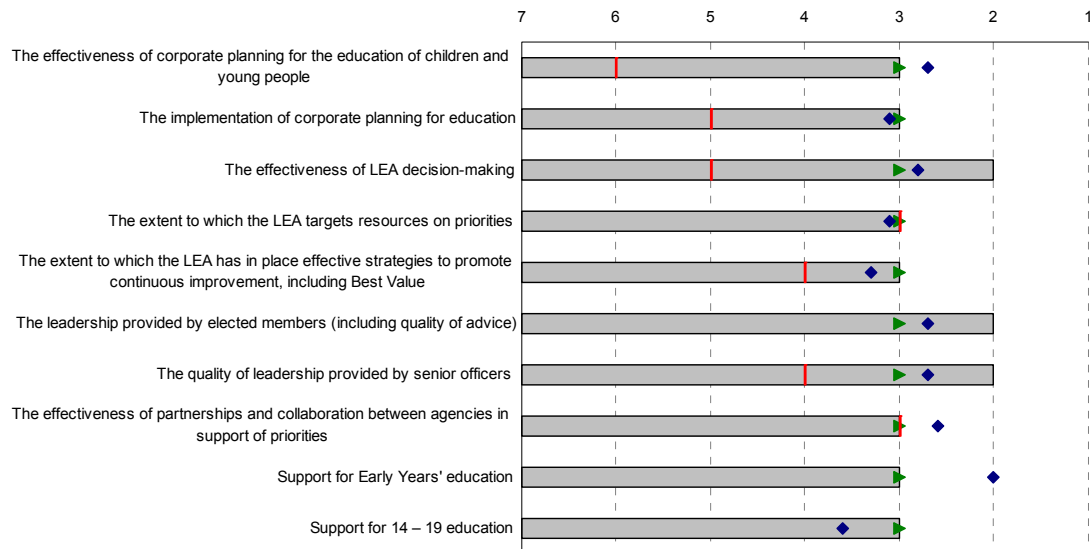
| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people | | | | | | | |
| The implementation of corporate planning for education | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of LEA decision-making | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value | | | | | | | |
| The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice) | | | | | | | |
| The quality of leadership provided by senior officers | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities | | | | | | | |
| Support for Early Years' education | | | | | | | |
| Support for 14 – 19 education | | | | | | | |

The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

## Corporate planning for education and its implementation

1.      This key function was poor at the time of the previous inspection. The council has acted decisively to improve its planning which is now highly satisfactory. There is a coherent corporate plan with clearly identified priorities for education which link closely to those in the community strategy. The emerging vision for education has begun to give clear direction to the work of the authority and its schools, resulting in improvements in provision. The initial developments of the children, schools and families (CSF) service have been successful, morale is high and the council is well placed to continue with its plans to refine the structure and work towards a children's trust in 2006. The implementation of plans is on track and is highly satisfactory.

2.      Education is a high priority for the council and features in two of the key strands of the corporate plan: creating learning communities and providing services for children and young people. There are clear aims to raise attainment, particularly for the most deprived children and young people, and to improve the provision for inclusion through partnership working and extended schools. Education is expected to contribute to other corporate priorities, for example, in creating inclusive communities, through raising attainment in the most deprived wards in the borough.

3.      Planning is well co-ordinated across the council by a corporate performance team, which works in close partnership with the CSF service strategic support team. The strategic map for the CSF service provides a clear framework that identifies the

relationships between community, corporate and departmental plans and sets out systems for monitoring and performance management.  Priorities are translated into achievable activities in the education development plan (EDP) and service plans, but success criteria frequently lack precision and fail to specify intended outcomes for all children and young people.  Strategies to ensure departments co-operate to deliver corporate priorities are developing.   However, the teams for social inclusion and school improvement are not yet working sufficiently closely to deliver a fully coherent service.

4.      Good leadership and decision-making by elected members have led to improvements in corporate planning.  This, together with the strong leadership of senior officers and the effective partnerships between the LEA and other stakeholders, illustrate that there is good capacity to improve further.  There are clearly defined, shared priorities which are being delivered through co-ordinated work that is carefully monitored and evaluated.  This is evident in the solid foundations laid for the curriculum for 14-19 year olds and in the highly satisfactory provision for early years education.

*Recommendation*

- Develop clearer success criteria in plans to identify the outcomes that the CSF service intends for children and young people.

## Decision-making

5.      Decision-making has improved significantly and is now good.  It is open and transparent, with the cabinet member for CSF taking advice from officers, the spokespersons for the other parties, and parent and governor representatives in public decision-making meetings.  There is extensive and detailed consultation with stakeholders before important decisions are taken and this is greatly valued by schools.  After a period when some decisions were avoided or subject to delay, decision-making is now timely and members have shown their willingness to act on advice from officers and to take difficult decisions.  This was evident in the formation of the CSF service and in the ongoing primary reorganisation.  Members and officers are rigorous in evaluating the impact of key decisions.

6.      The power sharing arrangement within the council ensures that all decisions are subject to detailed review and analysis by a number of groups of elected members. The management board, the decision-making committee for the CSF service and the cabinet all contribute to this process.  However, the role of the scrutiny committee has not been reviewed to reflect this.

*Recommendation*

- Improve the effectiveness of the scrutiny and review committee for the CSF service by providing enhanced support and training from officers.

**Targeting of resources**

7.      The allocation of resources to priorities remains highly satisfactory.  The council has consistently funded education at higher than the Standard Spending Assessment and Formula Spending Share levels.  A medium-term financial strategy has been developed and this helped to improve local authority budget-setting in 2004/05.  Children's social services and education budgets have been effectively integrated in setting up the CSF service, but processes for fundamentally reviewing expenditure and the value for money of services are not yet fully developed.

8.      There is now good consultation with schools on funding issues and the Schools Forum works well.  Historic problems with the school funding formula are being addressed.  For example, agreement with schools is nearing conclusion on the redistribution of delegated SEN resources to better fit priorities.  However, new arrangements for the distribution of individual schools' budgets through the fair funding formula have not achieved the desired outcome yet, primarily due to the overriding imperative to achieve minimum funding regulations.

9.      Support for schools to ensure that they do not incur deficits is good, but there is insufficient rigour in challenging those schools with surplus balances.  As a result, overall school balances are unduly large.

**Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value**

10.     This aspect is highly satisfactory.  Service improvement is a priority within the corporate plan.  The creation of the corporate performance team and the CSF service strategic support team reflects the strong commitment of members and officers to continuous improvement.  The LEA is willing to act decisively to secure improvement, as seen in its intention to improve provision for information and communication technology (ICT).  The LEA knows itself well and its self-evaluation for this inspection was largely accurate.  The capacity for further improvement is good.

11.     Effective use is made of external consultants to review progress, to develop strategies and complete risk assessments of initiatives.  A review of the development of the CSF service by the University of Liverpool highlighted barriers to improvement, which have been subsequently tackled.  The European Foundation for Quality Management excellence model provides a useful framework for rigorous self-evaluation by service teams and informs effective planning for improvement.

12.     Senior officers are held to account for the delivery of service plans and priorities through detailed individual work plans.  The systems of performance management for education and social service staff are currently being revised to ensure a consistent approach across the new service.

13.     Best Value reviews have been used well to inform the development of the service.  This has continued through the more recent cross-cutting reviews of council services such as transport, ICT and regeneration.  The department is aware that the

use of comparative data for other providers is underdeveloped and is working to address this.

## Leadership by elected members and advice given to them

14.    This aspect was unsatisfactory at the previous inspection.  It has improved significantly and is now good.  In a council where power is shared between three parties, members have worked hard to create a culture of collaboration and consensus in establishing a shared vision for education.  There is a determination, reflected in the formation of the CSF service, to improve the quality of education and tackle issues of social inclusion.  Elected members are strongly committed to developing partnerships to achieve this vision and this includes working closely with schools.  The executive member provides very good leadership by working closely with the strategic director of the CSF service to achieve improvement of the service.

15.    There are effective procedures for monitoring the work of the department and holding officers to account, based on clear reporting mechanisms and on the careful review of performance data.  As a result, members have an informed view of the strengths and weaknesses of the department.  Good quality advice is provided to members that meets their needs well.

## Leadership by senior officers

16.    Leadership by senior officers has improved and is now good.  A relatively new senior team, ably led by the strategic director, has succeeded in gaining the confidence of headteachers.  Improved consultation and a genuine willingness to listen have established an excellent partnership with schools and a shared vision for school improvement.  The quality of leadership and management in the department's middle management team is particularly impressive and there is proven capacity to deliver quality services.  This provides a strong foundation for future development.

17.    In developing the new service, the leadership team has set high standards and provided clear direction.  There is increasingly consistent and rigorous challenge to schools based on the effective use of performance data.  This is starting to be extended to improve the effectiveness of inclusion.  This level of challenge is also being applied to service delivery and senior officers have not held back from taking difficult decisions, such as in the restructuring of the advisory service.  The strategic director is committed to tackling rigorously the remaining areas of weakness.  In so doing, he works well with the chief executive, who, for example, is committed to driving key developments in 14-19 education.

## Support for Early Years

18.    Support for early years provision is highly satisfactory.  Plans closely align to corporate priorities for inclusion and early intervention.  Integrated early years strategies to raise achievement and improve the quality and range of provision are a high priority in the EDP and the authority's Compact with the DfES.  The strategy is

well led by officers.  Early years initiatives are widely understood and supported by partners and elected members.

19.    The CSF service provides good support to partners and successfully steered the formation of the Sure Start Partnership in April 2004.  The sharp focus of the Sure Start Strategy on meeting local childcare preferences is underpinned by thorough research and extensive consultation.  There are comprehensive information and support services for parents, providers and potential providers.

20.    The range of early years provision is improving.  Based on widespread provision in schools and growth in other sectors, Sefton has exceeded targets to provide nursery education places for all three- and four-year-olds whose parents' want places.  An extensive range of effective support, through link teachers, 12 cluster groups, flexible training programmes and co-ordination of the work of special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinators is leading to improvement.  Best practice is effectively disseminated to improve performance.  Providers value the advice from a range of specialists.

21.    Managers in the CSF service have begun to collaborate in targeting support to settings, in line with the strategy for raising attainment in the Foundation Stage. The use of Foundation Stage profiles (FSP) to plan effectively is well established in schools.  However, while training is underway across the remaining sectors, the comprehensive use of FSP across the growing range of early years settings is not yet fully exploited by the CSF service.

**Support for 14-19 education**

22.    Support for 14-19 education is highly satisfactory.  With its partners, the LEA has responded vigorously to the recommendations of the 2003 area inspection.  A clear strategy for 14-19 education and training has been set out in the post-inspection action plan 'Working Together for Excellence'.  This is aimed at improving attainment and learners' breadth of choice through greater collaboration and better quality provision.  The LEA has also contributed fully to the recent area review of post-16 provision.  Standards are rising and senior LEA officers, elected members and headteachers share a determination that this should continue, as is evident in the LPSA target for Key Stage 4.   However, there is still too much variability in schools' performance at Key Stage 4 and value-added indicators show that overall performance should be higher.  The area review highlighted the issue of small sixth forms and schools understand that some rationalisation is necessary.  Staying–on rates for post-16 continue to be high but, although improving, retention is still a significant issue.  Only an estimated 71% of young people achieve a qualification equivalent to five GCSE grades A*-C by the age of 19 in 2000.

23.    The LEA has adopted a measured approach to 14-19 development, building good management capacity both in the authority and in schools as the basis for sustained collaborative partnership.  The LEA's partnerships with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Connexions service and the local further education colleges are strong.  Collaboration among the schools to deliver the 14-19 curriculum is still developing.  The DfES Increasing Flexibility programme is well established and

there are a number of networks and working groups which help schools to challenge and review their current provision.  Guidance to young people, to inform decisions at 16, is now much improved and the Excellence in Cities 'Aim Higher' initiative is helping to raise further pupils' aspirations.

24.      However, actions in the latest EDP lack a coherent 14-19 focus and are not linked sufficiently to overall 14-19 strategic planning.  The LEA's document on the entitlement of 14-19 education does not address the needs of 100% of the cohort or specify clearly enough the outcomes for young people, including key skills that should be achieved by the age of 19.

*Recommendation*

> - With partners, review current plans and learners' entitlements in order to develop a more coherent strategy for maximising the achievement of young people by age 19.

# Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

## Summary table of judgements

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The LEA's strategy for school improvement | | | | | | | |
| The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement | | | | | | | |
| The performance of schools | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in under-performing schools | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools | | | | | | | |

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## The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

25.      The strategy for school improvement is now highly satisfactory and implementation of the strategy is good.  Both aspects have improved significantly since the previous inspection and capacity for further improvement is good. Strategic planning is much more robust and actions are now more tightly focused on improving schools and raising standards.  The LEA has built good partnerships with its schools.  Headteachers and governors are now much more effectively consulted on planning for school improvement, for example, through the School Improvement Panel and the new super cluster meetings.  Better quality data have helped to focus the work both of schools and the LEA.

26.      The latest EDP builds on a sound analysis of the success of the previous plan and is feeding directly into schools' own development planning.  While many of the success criteria in the plan are imprecise and not easily measurable, all the actions reflect the LEA's headline targets for improving pupils' attainment and the detail on how these are to be achieved is provided in individual action plans.  Good links are made with other plans and many initiatives are integrated into the work of Excellence in Cities and those funded by the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG), thus improving their effectiveness.

27.      Schools' targets are aligned well with those of the LEA, but in 2004, the LEA failed to meet almost all its targets.  However, the process of target-setting is now more robust and support to schools to meet more realistic targets is being effectively

targeted in line with the LEA-schools Code of Practice. The LEA is on line to meet national floor targets. Implementation of the school improvement plan, which began in September 2004, is on schedule with some actions being completed ahead of time. Mechanisms for reporting progress are robust and much improved.

## The LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support

28.    The LEA's definition of how and when it will monitor, challenge and intervene in schools is much clearer than at the time of the previous inspection and is now good. The procedures for monitoring schools and challenging them to improve are much more robust and support is more precisely targeted on areas of greatest need. The LEA's work on these aspects is much better informed by school and pupil performance data and is now highly satisfactory. The capacity for further improvement is good.

29.    The introduction of the protocol for monitoring and supporting those schools which are causing the LEA some concern has been a significant and positive development. Priority is given to early identification of needs and support is well targeted to address issues of leadership, management and governance. The progress of all schools, but particularly those with difficulties, is effectively monitored and schools are speedily removed from categories of concern once problems have been resolved.

30.    Partnerships, such as Network Learning Communities and LIG clusters, are a key and valuable feature of the LEA's support. Staff from beacon schools and Advanced Skills Teachers are also effectively deployed to support schools with the greatest need. As a result of the LEA's strategies, the need to intervene in schools is reducing.

31.    The LEA has developed a good knowledge and understanding of its schools, built around improved monitoring processes. This has been accompanied by a determination to promote greater school autonomy and encourage school self-evaluation. However, all schools currently receive the same number of monitoring visits and there is opportunity for greater differentiation of the focus and extent of such monitoring visits for the most successful schools.

32.    Advisers' notes of visits show that the extent to which the performance of schools has been challenged in the past has been too variable and target-setting discussions with schools have not been of even quality. The latest processes are more robust, with the school effectiveness team having access to better quality data and being more tightly focused and intent on achieving consistency. There are now also clearer lines of accountability. However, during annual reviews, there is still insufficient focus on the progress of specific groups of pupils, including children with SEN, minority ethnic pupils, looked after children and gifted and talented pupils. The increasing involvement of other teams to inform the reviews requires further development.

*Recommendation*

- Improve the annual review of schools by involving all relevant service teams in the preparation, including a detailed review of provision for vulnerable groups of pupils and ensuring that appropriate targets are set.

## Asset management planning and property services

33.     Asset management planning is good.   The processes for collecting information on the condition of schools have been improved and the LEA now has good quality information on the condition, suitability and sufficiency of school buildings.  Substantial progress has been made on the highest priority category of repairs.

34.     There is effective consultation with schools on asset management planning issues and as a result, priorities for investment are clearly set.  Systems for liaising with schools for the use of devolved formula capital are good and help to ensure that these resources are spent in accordance with asset management planning priorities.    There are effective links with school place planning and school improvement priorities.

35.     Property services are highly satisfactory.   Liaison between schools and Sefton architects' department on major capital projects is very good.  Schools feel that the architects understand their needs and that their views are translated into the building design.  Major building projects are handled effectively, are delivered to time, and building defects are resolved.  Performance on minor contracts, however, is more variable.  There are examples where excellent support has been provided to deal with building emergencies.  Steps are being taken to improve communications between schools and technical services on more routine issues.

36.     Capacity for managing major building schemes is stretched.   This will become particularly significant when resources become available for the Building Schools for the Future initiative.

## Providing school places

37.     School places planning has improved and is now highly satisfactory.   The School Organisation Committee works effectively.  It has been well serviced by the LEA and has been prepared to take difficult decisions on school reorganisations.  Forecasting pupil numbers has been sufficiently accurate.

38.     Primary pupil numbers are declining substantially particularly, but not exclusively, in the south of the borough.  Action to tackle surplus places is overdue, but the issue is now being tackled energetically.  A thorough borough-wide review has been carried out and has led to consultation on potential closure or amalgamation for 12 primary schools.  There is good support from members and schools for the necessity to carry out a substantial reorganisation.  The overall strategy is clear and well considered; consultation is being carried out effectively.
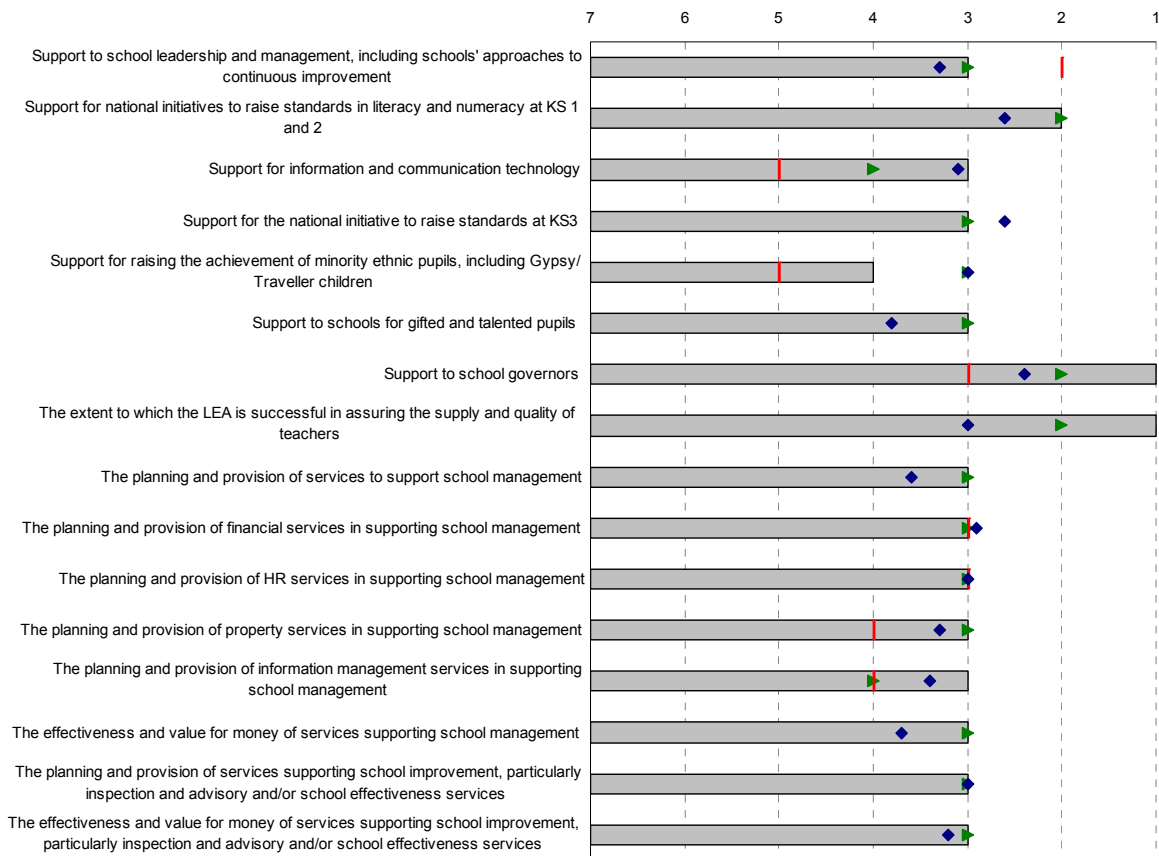
Support for admissions is highly satisfactory and contributes to effective provision of places.

39.      The supply and demand for places in the secondary sector are also managed satisfactorily.   Secondary pupil numbers have recently peaked.   One secondary school currently has more than 25% surplus places.  Plans to address this are in hand.

# Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

## Summary table of judgements

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Support to school leadership and management, including schools' approaches to continuous improvement | | | | | | | |
| Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2 | | | | | | | |
| Support for information and communication technology | | | | | | | |
| Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3 | | | | | | | |
| Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children | | | | | | | |
| Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils | | | | | | | |
| Support to school governors | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers | | | | | | | |
| The planning and provision of services to support school management | | | | | | | |
| The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management | | | | | | | |
| The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management | | | | | | | |
| The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management | | | | | | | |
| The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management | | | | | | | |
| The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services | | | | | | | |

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## Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

40.      This aspect is highly satisfactory.  Progress in many areas has been good, but in others, it has been slow or limited until very recently.  Relationships with schools are good.  Officers, headteachers and governors have a shared vision and a willingness to work together to raise standards for all pupils in Sefton.  Services to support the leadership and management of schools, including governors, are well developed and contribute to the improvement of schools.

41.      School self-evaluation is well established, integrated into all new aspects of LEA support and the basis for most of the interaction between the authority and schools.  Training relating to whole school self-evaluation is currently being revised and extended and a helpful, electronic version of the LEA's self-evaluation tool is being introduced.

42.     A variety of strategies are used to disseminate good practice.  These include well planned use of school staff, including consultant leaders and leading teachers, and secondments from schools, including Beacon schools.  There is a strong network of cluster and super cluster meetings, instigated by the LEA and by schools, which are well supported by officers.  These strategies are providing quality support to schools in delivering the national initiatives.  Good links between national strategies, including Excellence in Cities and LIG initiatives, are increasing the impact of these initiatives.

43.     The CSF service provides highly satisfactory support for the effective management of schools.  These include services for finance and human resources which are highly satisfactory.  The support for information management has improved significantly to provide effective technical advice and electronic communication.

44.     There are good systems in place for ensuring that governors and headteachers are kept informed about the quality of services provided.  The majority of schools buy additional support from the LEA through negotiated service level agreements that are well understood by schools.  The LEA recognises that there are benefits to schools in enabling them to access a wider range of services than just its own to ensure best value.  It supports schools in achieving this; schools, however, are well satisfied by the services provided by the LEA.

**Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2**

45.     At the previous inspection, support to raise standards in literacy was highly satisfactory; in numeracy it was good.  Support in both areas has continued to improve and is now good.  Attainment at Key Stage 2 in 2003 was above that nationally and in similar authorities.  Particularly good progress has been made in mathematics where attainment at Key Stage 2 has improved year on year.  Schools value highly the support provided to them by the consultants.  Those schools targeted for intensive support have made significantly more progress than other schools.

46.     Collaborative working across teams, the establishment of effective mechanisms for sharing good practice, and a clear focus on improving teaching and learning are helping schools become increasingly self-sufficient.  Consultants and leading teachers are deployed effectively.  They are managed well and a common system of working between strands of the Primary Strategy is helpful to schools.

47.     The establishment of a joint strategy advisory group, together with the appointment of a full-time Primary Strategy manager, provides a good base for further improvement.  The manager of the Primary Strategy is working to develop close links with the Foundation Stage and the Key Stage 3 Strategy.  This is helping to secure progress and attainment during transition between phases.

## Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

48.     In the previous inspection, support for ICT was unsatisfactory.  Initial action taken to secure change was slow, but has accelerated and support is now highly satisfactory.  Senior staff took control of the situation, appointing key staff who have, in a short time, made considerable progress at both strategic and operational levels.  The secondment of a headteacher has further strengthened this team by providing understanding of schools' ICT needs within the curriculum and at a whole school level.  Schools report a fundamental change in attitude, improved access to technical advice and, in particular, the increased effectiveness of basic electronic communication.  National targets are being met, in some cases ahead of time.

49.     The ICT consultants are held in high regard by schools and have a good understanding of the training needs of teachers as well as the attainment and capability of pupils.  Their analysis is used to target support appropriately across the phases.  Good practice is regularly disseminated through well attended co-ordinator meetings.  Expertise in Beacon schools and in the City Learning Centres extends the support available to schools.  This has encouraged the successful introduction of formal accreditation in ICT in all secondary schools alongside the wider use of ICT as a whole school planning and curriculum tool.  Development has been facilitated by close working links between the ICT consultants and colleagues leading on the Primary and Key Stage 3 Strategies.

50.     While good progress has been made, there is a need for continuing improvement.  Further work needs to be done in the primary sector to secure teachers' confidence in assessing standards in ICT and additional development is required on the authority's intranet and website before they can be fully effective in supporting curriculum development.  The LEA is taking action to address these issues.

## Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3

51.     Support for Key Stage 3 is highly satisfactory.  There is a clear strategy in the EDP for raising standards that has been embraced by schools.  The implementation of the strategy and the specific targeting of support have been based on a comprehensive and systematic audit that was undertaken in collaboration with schools.  In 2003, good progress was made and the national target for 2004 was met early in English, mathematics and science.  In ICT, while not yet meeting the target, considerable progress has been made.

52.     Schools have confidence in the Key Stage 3 consultant team and recognise the significant impact that their work is having on the thinking and planning across the phases.  Consultants have worked closely and effectively with their Primary Strategy colleagues, and other services such as SEN support teachers, to secure coherence and consistency in support.  They have also worked with strategy managers in schools to ensure that the training and development of middle managers are based on self-evaluation and the individual school's priorities.  Extremely helpful networks have been established which enable all schools to have access to good practice.  This has been particularly effective in raising the profile of

teaching and learning and in supporting Year 6 and Year 7 teachers to work collaboratively.

53.     The change in management focus this year, to a whole school strategy, is building on the team approach to supporting cross-curricular issues such as literacy and the use of ICT.   This puts the authority in a good position to develop a secondary strategy embracing Key Stage 4.

## Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children

54.     The LEA has moved forward on most of the recommendations of the previous inspection and work in this area is now satisfactory.  The rate of progress until recently has been slow, except in relation to Traveller children, but the capacity to improve further is now highly satisfactory.  Attainment for the majority of minority ethnic pupils is in line with, or above, similar authorities, although data on the rate of improvement and progress of all pupils are not yet secure.  The support provided to Traveller children, which was judged to be quite good at the previous inspection, has continued to improve.  It has been effective in increasing their attendance, attainment and engagement in learning.  Appropriate training has been provided for school staff, including teaching assistants, and for governors to raise awareness and to improve the skills needed to support specific groups of pupils.

55.     The numbers of Traveller children and pupils from minority ethnic groups remain small but there is an increasing recognition of the importance of monitoring provision and pupils' progress.  However, in view of the small numbers in each cohort the LEA has still not set targets for the attainment of minority ethnic pupils, but is beginning to monitor the progress of individual pupils using value added data. The EDP now includes direct reference to the need to target pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL).  Resources are allocated and monitored appropriately and there is good cross-agency support to secure early placement of asylum seekers and refugees.  Imaginative use of ICT and effective links with a local college have extended the nature of EAL provision and work within Excellence in Cities has had a positive effect on the attainment of more able pupils from minority ethnic communities.

## Support for gifted and talented pupils

56.     Support for gifted and talented pupils is highly satisfactory.  Although there is no written strategy, the LEA provides clear advice and guidance to schools on identifying the pupils and offers or brokers activities to support them.  The LEA has conducted an audit of strengths and weaknesses of schools' provision and used this information effectively to plan support, in close collaboration with Excellence in Cities.  Ofsted school inspections show that gifted and talented pupils make good progress in primary schools but that this levels out at Key Stage 3 and tails off at Key Stage 4.  Unvalidated results for 2004 show that, in several schools, targeted support has made an impact on the number of pupils achieving higher grades at GCSE.  However, it is too early to say whether this represents a longer term trend.

57.    Activities to support gifted and talented pupils are carefully evaluated and the benefits of summer schools have been clearly identified, for example in helping to raise self-esteem.   Support for secondary pupils has built successfully on the Key Stage 3 strategy.  The LEA encourages high achievement in sport and the arts and the music service provides high quality support.  Networking is a key feature of the LEA's approach, with the gifted and talented support group aiding joint planning and the co-ordinators' cluster groups disseminating good practice.  Good use is also made of regional support groups.  However, the progress of gifted and talented pupils is not automatically included in annual school reviews.

58.    Building on a successful initiative for able pupils in secondary and special schools, the LEA is currently developing an approach to 'challenge' all Sefton pupils to improve their performance.  This is an exciting initiative that should encourage all pupils to develop their problem-solving skills, while also promoting good attendance and behaviour.

**Support for school governors**

59.    Support for governors has improved significantly since the previous inspection.  It is now very good and is highly rated by schools.  Recommendations in the previous report to improve consultation and governors' capacity to evaluate their own effectiveness have been fully addressed.  Governors have a clear awareness of the LEA's categorisation of their schools and are in a good position to challenge school managers.  Setting up the governors' association and the provision of regular newsletters and governors' briefings have greatly improved the information flow to governing bodies.  There is an excellent programme of support for new governors and the monitoring of governing bodies is now systematic and effective.  Chairs of governors are encouraged to attend training activities jointly with their headteachers.

60.    The governors support team is well led and provides a comprehensive mix of generic training and guidance, and a wide range of activities that are specially tailored to individual governing bodies.  Locating the support team in the advisory service helps ensure good liaison with other teams supporting school improvement.  The team reacts quickly to new initiatives; all the governors interviewed were well acquainted with recent national developments and the implications for their schools.  Although there are few governors from minority ethnic groups, the take-up is monitored and positive steps are being taken to encourage wider participation through various local networks and dialogue with community groups.   Governance of schools, and governor recruitment and retention are given high priority by elected members.   Experienced governors are appointed to schools needing particular support, and retention is encouraged through a Certificate of Long Service.

**The supply and quality of teachers**

61.    Support for the supply and quality of teachers is very good.  The LEA's strategy is clear, supported by a thorough analysis of need and excellent co-ordination by the Recruitment Strategy Manager.   Although recruitment and

retention are not major issues in Sefton, the relatively high number of primary headteachers approaching retirement and difficulties in securing appointments for some heads of department posts in secondary schools are receiving careful attention. New and acting headteachers are offered a systematic induction programme, together with mentoring provided by experienced headteachers. Excellent links have been established with several of the local higher education institutions. This has helped schools in recruiting newly-qualified teachers (NQTs), including some through the graduate teacher scheme. The NQTs are offered a good induction programme and comprehensive support is provided for NQT moderation tutors. Retention of NQTs beyond their first year is high.

62. The LEA encourages teachers and headteachers to take up places on national training programmes and enrolment levels are high. The LEA is committed to long-term professional development of teachers and headteachers. Secondments are used extensively and effectively to allow them to develop their own skills and knowledge while sharing their expertise with colleagues in other schools. Dialogue between the CSF service and adult social services has been helpful in sharing knowledge and helping to develop a more corporate approach to tackling recruitment and retention issues. The LEA also brokers a teacher supply service which is highly rated by schools.

63. Workforce remodelling is actively supported by the LEA. A remodelling adviser has been appointed and all secondary headteachers have been briefed on implementation of the national changes proposed for 2005. The LEA has actively encouraged schools to invest in the development of support staff and provides opportunities for joint training with teachers.

**Planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management**

64. The planning and provision and the effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management are highly satisfactory. Processes for reviewing the quality of management support services have improved. Some services, such as financial support services and building design have consistently been good for some years. In other cases, such as information management radical action has been taken to make necessary improvements.

65. Effective mechanisms are in place to evaluate the quality of services with schools. Service level agreements are satisfactory, but are being reviewed for 2005/06 with an aim to standardise the format and increase the range of options for schools. Schools are provided with good support on procurement through the council's central procurement unit (CPU). This provides effective purchasing of furniture and supplies. In addition, the CPU has provided good support to schools on the commissioning of services such as catering and grounds maintenance.

66. Information management has improved and is now highly satisfactory. Progress for the first two years following the previous inspection was poor. There was insufficient investment to keep pace with the rapidly increasing demands in this area. As a result, until recently, the technical infrastructure to support schools was

not reliable enough.   This situation has now been turned around.   Change was started with the employment of external consultants to review the education ICT strategy; good quality staff were then recruited.

67.      The infrastructure for electronic communication is now reliable and all schools have broadband connections.   A school intranet has been set up, but although this has some useful information, there is some way to go before it has adequate overall content.  The capacity to meet the developing information needs of schools is good.   There are plans to develop a single point of entry for data and a single child record.   Progress in these areas is being accelerated through the effective commissioning of consultants.

**Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement**

68.      The effectiveness of services to support school improvement is highly satisfactory.   Overall, costs are in line with those for metropolitan LEAs and the services give highly satisfactory value for money.  Capacity for further improvement is good.   The recommendation of the previous report, to provide differentiated services with greater transparency, has been addressed.  The recent reorganisation of the advisory service has meant that it now has a much sharper focus on improving standards in schools and deployment of staff is more consistently targeted at areas of greatest need.   Service planning has been strengthened since the previous inspection and is now highly satisfactory.  Improved monitoring of schools' progress has helped ensure that no Sefton school is currently in any of the Ofsted underperforming categories, including special measures and serious weaknesses.
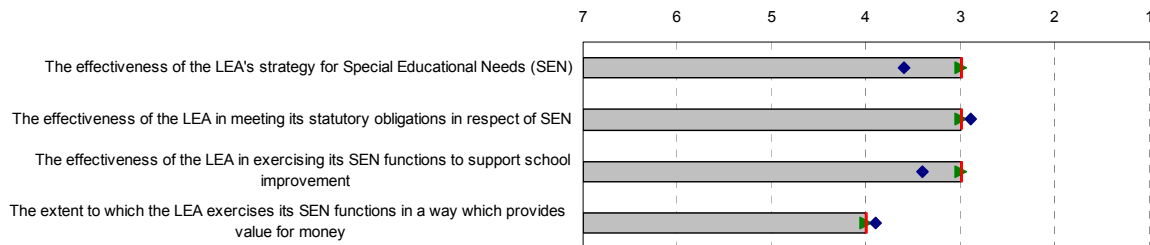
69.      Since January 2004, advisers have been deployed either in monitoring and challenging the work of schools, or in providing support commissioned by schools through the service level agreement.   The current model is one that many LEAs adopted some time ago and the new structures are still bedding down.  The support arrangements are currently subject to review and further changes are likely. Innovative and effective use is already made of consultants and secondments to supplement the capacity of the service and the LEA is keen to develop these further.

70.      The advisory service experienced various capacity problems earlier in 2004, but the resources available were deployed efficiently and schools report that the quality of service was not materially affected.   The school effectiveness team has recently been strengthened by the recruitment of several former primary headteachers.  Induction arrangements for these new colleagues were well planned. However, performance management arrangements are still at an early stage of development, but individual work plans are not yet linked to the CSF service strategic map.  Workload monitoring is in place and there are indications that the restructuring of the service has made these more manageable.

71.      The range of services supporting school improvement, including support for self-evaluation and monitoring of progress for SEN and for behaviour are also effective and provide value for money.

# Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

## Summary table of judgements

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for Special Educational Needs (SEN) | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money | | | | | | | |

The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year.  1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

## The strategy for SEN

72.     The strategy for SEN remains highly satisfactory.  A strategy in line with the revised SEN Code of Practice was adopted after widespread consultation in June 2003.   It was further amended during 2004 to ensure close alignment with developing government policy.   The latest version reflects corporate planning objectives and is well understood and supported by schools.  The strategy provides a clear direction for the future development of inclusive provision in the borough, although many success criteria are not sufficiently precise and action plans lack detail.

73.     External evaluation in early 2004 indicated a lack of a shared definition of inclusion in the borough.  Officers have since worked very effectively to promote understanding of the vision set out in plans.  There is now a high level of consensus about the broad nature of inclusion and schools show confidence in the LEA's approach.

74.     Planning is based on a sound evaluation of overall inclusion indicators in Sefton.   Improvements since the previous inspection have led to a dramatic reduction in the use of statements; the rate at which new statements are issued has reduced by 70% since 2000.  As a result, the overall total of statements has reduced in the last four years.   Sefton now has a smaller number of statements in the primary age-range than comparable authorities.  Since the previous inspection, there has been a reduction of 30% in the numbers of pupils placed in independent special schools, although the number is still high.  The number of children in Sefton's special schools has also reduced slightly and at the same time the LEA has increased the scale and range of resource units in mainstream schools.   Despite this good progress, there remains real uncertainty about how future developments will be secured and there is no clear financial plan for increased inclusion.

75.     The LEA has developed a good disability access plan and funding for the access initiative has been appropriately targeted at developing geographical clusters

of primary, secondary and special schools.  Effective working with children's social services within the CSF service is supplemented by good partnerships with health. One positive outcome has been a sound approach to joint funding of individual placements.

## Statutory obligations

76.    The LEA continues to take highly satisfactory steps to fulfil its statutory duties.

77.    Administrative processes are efficient and joint working with other agencies is secure.  The percentage of statutory assessments completed within the specified time limits is now above the national average.  Objectives specified in statements are clear but are often too general and sometimes poorly focused on pupils' needs, limiting the extent to which they can be used to measure progress.  The processes associated with annual reviews are carried out efficiently and meetings are appropriately targeted for attendance by officers.  Major changes to statements, including cessation when appropriate, are promptly made.  However, most reviews do not lead to clear updating of descriptions of need or provision.

78.    The LEA provides good information and guidance to parents of children with SEN.  Required information is available on the local authority website.  The parent partnership service, which is directly managed by the LEA, provides very high quality support under determined and independent leadership.  Disputes are mostly resolved without using formal processes.

*Recommendation*

> • Improve the quality and usefulness of statements by making objectives more specific and ensuring that reviews lead to changes which reflect pupils' progress.

## SEN functions to support school improvement

79.    Overall performance in this area is highly satisfactory, as it was at the time of the previous inspection.  Officers have a good understanding of the quality of provision made in individual schools, but the monitoring of inclusion is not yet sufficiently embedded in the LEA's approach to school improvement.  Special educational needs co-ordinators report that they are beginning to be held accountable.  However, schools are not yet routinely subject to sufficiently robust challenge in relation to SEN, nor are there any regular evaluative reports to members on the performance of schools in furthering inclusion.  The planned use of data within an SEN 'profile' for each school has the potential to secure significantly more rigour in monitoring and challenge.

80.    Schools are being encouraged to develop self-evaluation of SEN provision, and this is being supported by the LEA's purchase of materials to assist with target-setting and monitoring progress of pupils with SEN.  Special educational needs coordinators in schools are very well supported, with a good induction programme

and a range of professional development opportunities.  Special schools are playing a developing role in supporting mainstream schools.  They are committed to supporting inclusion, although the detail of how this might affect current practice has not yet been worked out.  The LEA is actively involved in a regional partnership for SEN, and this is well used as a mechanism for joint evaluation of independent special school placements

## Value for money

81.     The LEA continues to provide satisfactory value for money in this area. Spending on SEN is now broadly in line with comparable authorities and with the national picture.  School inspections indicate outcomes that are at least as good as in comparable authorities and nationally.

82.     Since the previous inspection, there have been major changes to the system that was then being introduced for allocating resources to schools.  Following a needs-led review, additional funding was allocated to resourced units in mainstream schools.  Both these changes produced significant discontent among headteachers, many of whom could not understand the LEA's rationale for the allocation of funding.  In this context, the LEA has been unable to undertake any meaningful evaluation of the effectiveness of delegated funding on improving outcomes for pupils, but is developing procedures to address this.

83.     Very effective consultation has now taken place with a view to securing widespread agreement to changes for next financial year.  The proposed changes would remove the current perverse incentives for schools to identify more pupils with higher levels of need.

*Recommendation*

> - In consultation with schools, link the new system for allocating delegated funding for SEN to a rigorous and transparent system for monitoring and evaluating its impact on pupil outcomes.

# Section 5: Support for social inclusion

## Summary table of judgements
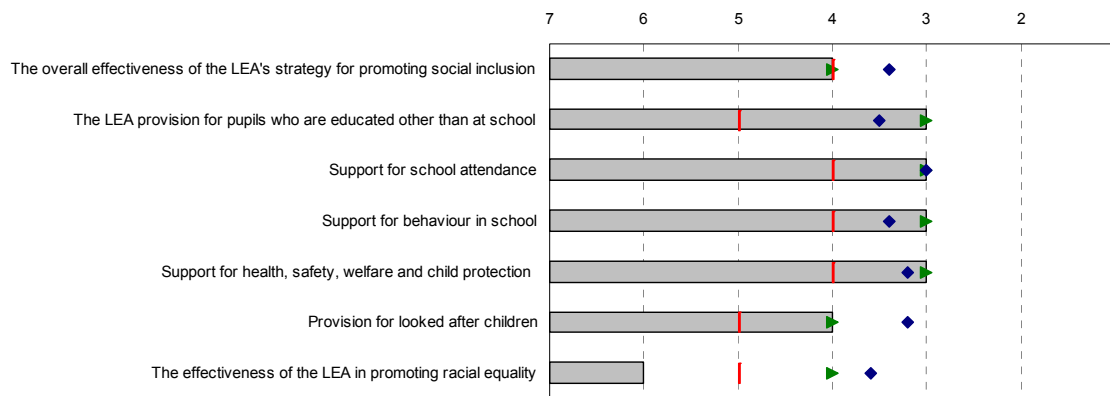
| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion | | | | | | | |
| The LEA provision for pupils who are educated other than at school | | | | | | | |
| Support for school attendance | | | | | | | |
| Support for behaviour in school | | | | | | | |
| Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection | | | | | | | |
| Provision for looked after children | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality | | | | | | | |

The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year.  1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

## The strategy for social inclusion

84.      The overall strategy for promoting social inclusion is satisfactory.  Significant progress has been made in some important areas, including behaviour and provision for children out of school.  Support for attendance, which was not subject to fieldwork in this inspection, has also improved.  However, the LEA's work to promote racial equality has not improved and is now poor.   An overarching social inclusion strategy for education, which brings together the existing and updated elements into a more coherent whole, has just been approved.  This provides a sound basis for the necessary development of a shared definition of social inclusion and an approach to its promotion shared by the LEA and schools.

85.      There is a clear focus on inclusion within corporate and departmental plans. Schools recognise the strength of the LEA in forming effective partnerships with other organisations to gain funding and develop services.  Plans are in place to make a start on multi-disciplinary working in neighbourhoods.  Sound joint working with other agencies in the health and social care sectors contributes to the emerging coordinated strategy for preventive services.

86.      A strategy for supporting educationally vulnerable children has been approved as part of the recently-adopted social inclusion strategy.  It documents the LEA's very effective approaches to monitoring and tracking placements and provision for children who are out of school or at risk of formal exclusion.  It also proposes a range of reviews and developments which are necessary to establish baselines and secure appropriate service structures and approaches.  Planned developments during the next year have the potential to significantly improve the quality of provision.

87.     A start has been made on tracking the progress of individuals and groups at risk of social exclusion.  However, there has been little consultation with children and young people or with their parents.  Officers undertake systematic monitoring and provide appropriate challenge to schools in relation to the main indicators of attendance and formal exclusion.  Work in this area is beginning to be linked to the wider school improvement strategy, but schools are not yet systematically evaluated on their contribution to the full range of social inclusion issues.

## Provision for pupils educated other than at school

88.     The LEA makes highly satisfactory provision for education otherwise than at school.  This is a very significant improvement on the position at the time of the previous inspection, when this was unsatisfactory.

89.     The greatest improvement has been in the pupil referral units (PRUs).  Under the determined and committed leadership of effective headteachers, provision has been reorganised and refocused.  Elected members have actively scrutinised and supported developments, and it has been helpful that the cabinet member for the CSF service chairs the PRU management committee.  Evidence from inspections supports schools' increasingly positive evaluations of PRUs.  Provision at Key Stage 4, in particular, is now flexible and highly effective, with the involvement of a wide range of voluntary and commercial partners.  Key Stage 3 provision is less well developed, and its position within a continuum of support and mainstream school placements is not clear.  The PRUs are now well supported by both education welfare and educational psychology services.

90.     Provision for pupils who are excluded or otherwise without a school place is very effectively secured and monitored by a multi-agency panel.  The complementary education service provides a good service, including innovative use of ICT, for individual children unable to attend school.  School age mothers are well supported by flexible and effective systems.  However, little work has been done to establish the comparative effectiveness of different provision, or to determine whether the LEA is getting value for money.

## Support for behaviour

91.     The support for behaviour has improved since the previous inspection and is now highly satisfactory.  A wide range of support strategies and services is available, together with specialist provision through mainstream resource units, the Key Stage 4 PRU and a special school.  There is evidence of effective working across agencies to secure appropriate provision for individuals.

92.     The rate of permanent exclusion from school is low compared to similar authorities and the national position.  In the last three years, while permanent exclusions have been maintained at a low level, the LEA has successfully supported and challenged schools to secure a significant reduction in the use of fixed-term exclusions.  Parents are well supported in the event of exclusion, and the very low

rate of appeals is an indication of the LEA's success in working with schools to avoid unnecessary exclusions.

93.     The newly-revised behaviour support plan maps the range of provision that exists, but is insufficiently developed for creating an increasingly integrated service. However, schools are generally supportive of the LEA's approach to behaviour support.  In part, this is due to productive work within the behaviour improvement project linked to Excellence in Cities, with evidence of good target-setting and of productive work by learning mentors.  Links between officers responsible for behaviour and SEN are good, and they now offer coordinated training programmes. Behaviour does not yet play a sufficiently important role in the formal processes for school evaluation and improvement.

## Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

94.     Support for these areas has improved and is now highly satisfactory.  The linkages established through the formation of the CSF service have assisted with co-ordinating and communicating effective procedures to safeguard children.  The local Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) is chaired by a senior member of staff from the CSF service.  There is effective joint working by the range of agencies involved, and plans for 2004/05 include appropriate multi-agency training.

95.     Comprehensive guidance and advice are provided for schools by the ACPC, and designated teachers are monitored and well supported.  Despite sound efforts by LEA officers to promote the issue, about one-quarter of schools have yet to designate a governor to oversee child protection and more than half of governing bodies have not sent a member on training.  A significant minority of secondary schools have been identified in inspections as having unsatisfactory procedures for child protection.  These findings were not anticipated by the LEA, but these schools have been appropriately targeted for additional input.

96.     Clear guidance has been given to schools on a range of health and safety issues.  Some of this guidance relies too heavily on schools using the LEA's services, and does not encourage the safe use of alternative contractors.  Helpful training events are planned for later in the school year to promote the role of the health and safety coordinator.

## Provision for looked after children

97.     The provision for looked after children has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory.  The recommendation that the LEA should establish attainment targets and a strategy to raise achievement has been addressed.  Elected members take their corporate parenting role seriously; however, detailed reports to elected members have been irregular.  The 'No Limits' project provides some good support to nearly half of the looked after children and helps celebrate their achievements.  The proportion in education, employment or training by the age of 19 is good in comparison with national figures.

98.     Exclusions of looked after children and their attendance are carefully monitored and appropriate action is taken when concerns arise.  The LEA now has sound data on the attainment of these children, but is not yet able to monitor progress in a range of achievements and determine the effectiveness of provision in schools and elsewhere.  The large majority of the children (83%) have personal education plans and the LEA is beginning to focus on improving their quality.

99.     Senior officers are seeking to work together effectively.  All direct responsibilities for looked after children are now within one service, which gives some clear priority to education.  A team leader post has been established within the service and this will help bring together activities to improve educational outcomes.  Designated teachers receive adequate support and there are plans to make this more systematic.

**Promoting racial equality**

100.    The LEA's work to promote racial equality is poor.  At the time of the previous inspection, it had been slow to respond to the findings of the MacPherson Enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.  Although some recent steps have been taken to establish a planning structure, its response is still inadequate.

101.    The council adopted a race equality scheme in 2002, but this has had very little impact on the CSF service.  An action plan to implement the scheme within the CSF service has only just been produced, when the council is about to undertake a review of the scheme's final year.  Schools have been given generic guidance on race equality, but this is not tailored to the circumstances of Sefton's schools where the large majority of pupils are white.  There has been no consultation with organisations representing minority ethnic groups in the area to ensure that the perspectives of parents and pupils are considered.

102.    The large majority of schools complete racist incident reports.  Only a very small number of incidents from a few schools are reported and all are recorded as having been satisfactorily resolved.  The LEA has accepted this without challenge.

103.    Community projects, including those with the local football teams, as well as links with schools abroad, are being successful in raising the profile of work in support of minority ethnic groups and, in particular, targeting race awareness.

104.    The LEA has made a first attempt to monitor the ethnic composition of its workforce.  There are no strategies to promote the professional development of staff from minority ethnic groups.  A good range of strategies has been used by one officer to improve the recruitment of governors from minority ethnic backgrounds, but this approach has not been generalised into other areas.

**Recommendations**

- Review the current system for schools' reporting of racist incidents to ensure a robust and accurate process.

- Implement urgently the proposed racial equality action plan and establish rigorous monitoring and review procedures.

## Appendix A

**Record of Judgement Recording Statements**

| Name of LEA : | Sefton Local Education Authority |
|---|---|
| LEA number: | 343 |
| Reporting Inspector: | Garry Jones HMI |
| Date of Inspection: | October 2004 |

| No | Required Inspection Judgement | Grade | Fieldwork* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Context of the LEA** | | |
| 1 | The socio-economic context of the LEA | 5 | |
| | **Overall judgements** | | |
| 0.1 | The progress made by the LEA overall | 3 | |
| 0.2 | Overall effectiveness of the LEA | 3 | |
| 0.3 | The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection | 2 | |
| | **Section 1: Corporate strategy and LEA leadership** | | |
| 1.1 | The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people | 3 | |
| 1.2 | The implementation of corporate planning for education | 3 | |
| 1.3 | The effectiveness of LEA decision-making | 2 | |
| 1.4 | The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities | 3 | |
| 1.5 | The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value | 3 | |
| 1.6 | The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice) | 2 | |

| 1.7 | The quality of leadership provided by senior officers | 2 | |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------|---|---|

| 1.8 | The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities | 3 | NF |
|------|---|---|---|
| 1.9 | Support for Early Years education | 3 | |
| 1.10 | Support for 14 – 19 education | 3 | |
| | **Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation** | | |
| 2.1 | The LEA's strategy for school improvement | 3 | |
| 2.2 | The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement | 2 | |
| 2.3 | The performance of schools | 3 | |
| 2.4 | The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention | 2 | |
| 2.5 | The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data | 3 | |
| 2.6 | The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need | 3 | |
| 2.7 | The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools | 3 | NF |
| 2.8 | The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning | 2 | |
| 2.9 | The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places | 3 | |
| 2.10 | The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools | 3 | NF |
| | **Section 3: Support to school leadership and management, including schools' efforts to support continuous improvement** | | |
| 3.1 | Support to school leadership and management, including support for schools' approaches to continuous improvement | 3 | |

| 3.2 | Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2 | 2 | |
|------|------|------|------|
| 3.3 | Support for information and communication technology | 3 | |
| 3.4 | Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3 | 3 | |
| 3.5 | Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children | 4 | |
| 3.6 | Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils | 3 | |
| 3.7 | Support for school governors | 1 | |
| 3.8 | The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers | 1 | |
| 3.9 | The planning and provision of services to support school management | 3 | |
| 3.9a | The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management | 3 | NF |
| 3.9b | The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management | 3 | NF |
| 3.9c | The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management | 3 | |
| 3.9d | The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management | 3 | |
| 3.10 | The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management | 3 | |
| 3.11 | The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services | 3 | |
| 3.12 | The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services | 3 | |
| | **Section 4: Support for special educational needs** | | |
| 4.1 | The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs | 3 | |

| 4.2 | The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN | 3 | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| 4.3 | The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement | 3 | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 4.4 | The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money | 4 | |
| | **Section 5: Support for social inclusion** | | |
| 5.1 | The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion | 4 | |
| 5.2 | The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place | 3 | |
| 5.3 | Support for school attendance | 3 | NF |
| 5.4 | Support for behaviour in schools | 3 | |
| 5.5 | Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection | 3 | |
| 5.6 | Provision for looked after children | 4 | |
| 5.7 | The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality | 6 | |

*NF' under fieldwork means that no fieldwork was conducted on this function during this inspection.*

**JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 7-point scale:** Grade 1: Very good; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Highly satisfactory; Grade 4: Satisfactory; Grade 5: Unsatisfactory; Grade 6: Poor; Grade 7: Very poor

**Note:** in the case of JRS 1: socio-economic context of the LEA and JRS 2.3: performance of schools, grades relate to comparisons against national averages:

- Grades 1-2: Well above

- Grade 3: Above

- Grade 4: In line

- Grade 5: Below

- Grades 6-7: Well below.

# Appendix B

## Context of the inspection

This inspection of Sefton LEA was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

This report provides a commentary on the inspection findings, including:

- the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in 2000;

- the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;

- the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;

- recommendations on areas for improvement.

The summary is followed by more detailed judgements on the LEA's performance of its individual functions, which sets the recommendations for improvement into context.

All functions of the LEA have been inspected and judgements reached on how effectively they are performed. Not all functions were subject to detailed fieldwork, but in all cases inspectors reached their judgements through an evaluation of a range of material. This included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, data (some of which were provided by the LEA), school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports, and audit reports. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA and a questionnaire seeking the views of all schools on aspects of the work of the LEA. In those areas subject to fieldwork, discussions were held with LEA officers and members, headteachers and governors, staff in other departments of the local authority, diocesan representatives, and other agencies and LEA partners.

The functions that were not subject to detailed fieldwork in this inspection were:

- the effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities;

- the effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in underperforming schools;

- the effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools;

- the planning and provision of financial services and human resources services;

- support for school attendance.

Inspection judgements are made against criteria that can be found on the Ofsted website.  For each inspected function of the LEA an inspection team agrees a numerical grade.  The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are to be found in Appendix A.  These numerical grades must be considered in the light of the full report.  Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment profile for the education service.

**Context of the LEA**

Sefton is a Merseyside authority serving a population of just under 290,000 people. The 2004 index of multiple deprivation indicates that Sefton has areas with very high levels of deprivation that are masked when looking at deprivation levels for the whole area.  The greatest deprivation is concentrated in the south of the borough. The number of adults and children recognised as income deprived is 48,945.  Adult unemployment is above the national average, but fell from 5.1% in 2002 to 3.6% in 2003.

The school-age population (44,979) has fallen since the previous inspection and is set to fall further over the next five years.  Lower birth rates and migration out of the area have meant a significant number of surplus places in the primary sector, although a continuing 'cross border' influx of pupils means that the impact in the secondary sector is not as marked.  Minority ethnic communities remain a small proportion of the school age population (2.3%) although, an increasing, but fluctuating, number of asylum seekers puts intermittent pressure on some schools. The percentage of children for whom English is an additional language is below the national average at 0.8%.  The percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals are in line with national figures.

The number of pupils with statements of SEN in primary and secondary schools has fallen since the previous inspection.  In primary schools it is well below the national average and in secondary schools is in line with national figures.  The proportion of primary-aged pupils placed in special schools (0.8%) is below the national average, while that for secondary pupils (2.0%) is in line.  Nursery places are available in 47 of the LEA's primary and infant schools.  Currently, 98% of four-year-olds and 69% of three-year-olds receive at least part-time nursery provision.

Sefton has 120 schools; comprising four nursery schools, five infant schools, four junior schools, 80 primary schools, 22 secondary schools (of which 12 provide for pupils aged 11-18) and five special schools.  There are three pupil referral units. Nine schools have specialist status and there are 12 extended schools. and 13 Beacon schools.  A further 46 schools, including 22 secondary and 24 primary schools are involved in Excellence in Cities. There are three education action zones.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment for education, published in December 2003, gave the education service 2 stars (upper) for current performance and rated its capacity to improve as secure.

**The performance of schools**

The overall picture of pupils' performance in Sefton schools is positive with attainment at least in line with national averages and those of similar authorities.

Attainment on entry to schools is broadly in line with the national baseline. In primary schools, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2 and above at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2003 was broadly in line with national averages and averages in similar authorities. At Key Stage 2 the proportion of pupils gaining Level 4 and above was higher than the national average in English and science and well above in mathematics. The progress pupils make between Key Stage 1 and 2 was above that found nationally. Unvalidated data for 2004 show further improvement in attainment at Key Stage 1 and at Key Stage 2.

At Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils gaining Level 5 or above in 2003 was higher than found nationally for English and mathematics and in line for science. Pupils make progress in line with that found nationally within the key stage. At Key Stage 4, attainment in 2003 was in line with that found nationally for all indicators. Unvalidated data for 2004 show further improvement for most indicators. However, although the progress made by pupils within Key Stage 4 is in line with that found nationally, value added data for 2003 shows that pupils should be attaining more highly. The LEA has targeted this as an area for development.

The LEA has failed to meet almost all of its attainment targets in 2004. The authority is reducing the number of schools failing to meet the national floor targets at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. In 2004, 92% of primary schools achieved the minimum target of 65% of pupils gaining level 4 and above in English at Key Stage 2 and 88% of schools in mathematics. At Key Stage 3, 18 of the 22 secondary schools meet the 2007 national target of 60% of pupils attaining level 5 and above at KS3 and the number failing to achieve the target has fallen steadily. All secondary schools achieved the 2004 floor target of 20% of pupils achieving five A*-C grades at GCSE and are on track to meet the 2006 target of 25%. The LEA has achieved the national 2004 target of 38% of pupils achieving five A*-C grades.

The proportion of primary and secondary schools graded good or very good in Ofsted inspections is above average compared to both similar LEAs and nationally. There are currently no schools in any Ofsted category of concern.

Attendance rates in primary and secondary schools have remained steady since the previous inspection and are in line with the national average. The rates of unauthorised absence are below national level. Permanent exclusions were in line with national rates and those of similar LEAs in 2001. LEA data for 2003-2004 show that permanent exclusions have declined significantly in secondary schools and remain very low in primary schools.

## Funding data for the LEA

| Schools budget | Sefton | Statistical neighbours average | Metropolitan Average | England Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil |
| Individual schools budget | 2,845 | 2,789 | 2,812 | 2,900 |
| Standards fund delegated | 42 | 46 | 62 | 63 |
| Excellence in Cities | 53 | 30 | 54 | 35 |
| Schools in financial difficulty | 0 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Education for under fives | 51 | 61 | 50 | 85 |
| Strategic management | 40 | 32 | 34 | 30 |
| Special educational needs | 110 | 146 | 118 | 126 |
| Grants | 34 | 27 | 31 | 26 |
| Access | 54 | 54 | 56 | 60 |
| Capital expenditure from revenue | 12 | 22 | 19 | 24 |
| **Total schools budget** | **3,242** | **3,209** | **3,239** | **3,354** |
| Schools formula spending share | **2,970** | **3,038** | **3,066** | **3,197** |

*Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04*

| LEA budget | Sefton | Statistical neighbours average | Metropolitan average | England average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil |
| Strategic management | 75 | 104 | 119 | 99 |
| Specific Grants | 0 | 11 | 11 | 14 |
| Special educational needs | 28 | 29 | 27 | 36 |
| School improvement | 38 | 29 | 36 | 38 |
| Access | 95 | 109 | 108 | 142 |
| Capital expenditure from revenue | 23 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Youth and Community | 47 | 57 | 77 | 75 |
| **Total LEA budget** | **306** | **339** | **379** | **406** |

*Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05*

***Note: All figures are net.***
***Funding for schools in financial difficulties excludes transitional funding.***
***Averages quoted are mean averages; the original DfES Comparative Tables quote median average figures, not the mean average.***

## Notes