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INSPECTION OF

SUTTON

LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under the Local Government Act 1999. 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.

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 learning for life service group 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 62 schools. The response rate was 90 per cent.

3. The inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one first school, three junior schools, five combined schools, four 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 Her Majesty's Inspectors visits to schools within the LEA was also considered.

COMMENTARY

4. Sutton is a relatively small, affluent outer London borough. However, the overall picture masks differences within the borough: a fifth of wards are significantly disadvantaged. Standards in Sutton's primary and secondary schools are well above those found nationally and rates of improvement are in line with, and often above, national rates. It has no schools in special measures or judged to have serious weaknesses. The structure of secondary provision in Sutton is complex. The majority of its secondary schools were at one time grant-maintained; over a third are selective. More than a quarter of the secondary school population comes from outside the borough.

5. Over the last two years Sutton has substantially modified its strategy for supporting schools, aligning it more closely with the LEA Code of Practice. Sutton monitors its schools thoroughly and increasingly the support it provides better matches their needs. When intervention is necessary the LEA is effective and it has been placing more emphasis on evaluation and challenge of school performance. Officers maintain a dynamic and effective relationship with schools. Officers and members have worked successfully to establish a good working partnership with the new foundation schools: the LEA has realigned its service structures and the allocation of school resources to meet their needs. However, there is more to be done. There is scope for a lighter touch for successful schools and the LEA needs to identify and explore opportunities to broker advisory support in order to improve choice and quality.

6. Sutton's Education Development Plan (EDP) is sound and its implementation is monitored effectively. Schools readily acknowledge the impact the LEA's services have had on school improvement. For example, the LEA's academic tutoring scheme has been effective in promoting systematic targeting-setting and evaluation for pupils in secondary schools. The pro-active support of the primary behaviour support team has enabled Sutton's primary schools to avoid permanent exclusions during the past year.

7. Although the LEA's strategic direction for special educational needs (SEN) is now improving, in practice it has failed to take sufficient action to shift patterns of provision and has not yet fully articulated the role of special schools. The number of statements and SEN costs are still rising and Sutton is finding the Government's requirement for inclusion challenging. However, the LEA's work in SEN is improving. It is taking reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory obligations and schools are confident that the Sutton is moving in the right direction regarding pupils' entitlement, on promoting inclusion and in providing efficient support.

8. The LEA discharges most of its functions to support school improvement adequately. Sutton's strengths outweigh its weaknesses. Particular strengths are found in:

- support for early years;
- support for literacy;

- support for school governors;
- support for schools causing concern;
- support from the personnel service;
- the administration of admissions;
- support for attendance;
- monitoring and evaluating the Educational Development Plan (EDP);
- primary behaviour support;
- corporate management;
- partnership with schools;
- liaison with outside agencies; and
- support for Travellers.

9. The weaknesses lie in:

- securing value for money in SEN functions;
- SEN support to children in mainstream schools;
- support for the educational achievement of children in public care;
- management of the pupil referral units;
- support for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the curriculum;
- transparency in financial allocations;
- payroll services; and
- ensuring that schools apply Best Value principles.

10. Sutton's corporate management is strong and its political leadership well-informed. The Council has consistently accorded a high priority to education. Its coherent and structured approach to corporate planning ensures resources are focused on school improvement. Effective consultation mechanisms support good relations between the schools and the LEA. The Council has the benefit of committed and competent senior officers in charge of all of its education functions. In recent years they have provided effective leadership in most areas where change has been required. Nevertheless, the LEA needs to be more pro-active in response to the impact of increasing delegation and school autonomy. More accurate, regular and relevant performance management information is needed to support service monitoring and evaluation and Best Value processes.

11. Change for the better is continuing in support for school improvement and in special educational needs (SEN), but in the latter area improvement is not secure. Members and officers have shown determination in meeting recent challenges. They have the capacity to act on the recommendations in this report to make a satisfactory and improving LEA a good one.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. Sutton is a relatively small, affluent outer London borough. The total population is about 177,000. Eleven per cent of primary and 13 per cent of secondary pupils come from ethnic minority groups. The proportion of pupils in both its primary and secondary schools eligible for free school meals is well below national averages (LEA: 13.5 per cent and 8.3 per cent; national 19 per cent and 16.8 per cent, respectively). However, the average picture masks differences across Sutton's twenty-five wards, five of which are included among the most deprived 20 per cent when ranked by the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions' (DETR) national deprivation index.

13. In January 2000, there were 28,910 pupils in Sutton schools. In May 2000 over three-quarters of three and four-year-olds were on the roll of Sutton's maintained schools. In 1999, 83 per cent of Sutton's year 11 leavers stayed in some form of post-16 education, which is above the national average. Of the primary pupil population, 2.4 per cent have a statement of special educational needs which is above the national average, while 2.8 per cent of secondary pupils have a statement, which is in line with the national average.

14. The LEA maintains two nursery schools, 43 primary schools (including two foundation and nine voluntary aided), fourteen 11-18 secondary schools (of which five are foundation and three voluntary aided) and three special schools. Nine of the secondary schools are single sex (five boys and four girls). All five of the foundation schools are single sex selective schools (three boys and two girls) and one of the mixed community schools has 60 places selected on ability. Non-Sutton residents fill 28 per cent of Sutton's secondary school places. In addition to the special schools there are two specialist facilities attached to secondary schools and six attached to primary schools. There is one Beacon primary school.

Performance

15. OFSTED inspection data show that in Sutton the proportion of primary and secondary schools where standards and the quality of education are good or very good is above similar authorities and significantly above national figures. The proportion of schools where standards and the quality of education are unsatisfactory is below the national average. There has been an improvement in the quality of education provided by Sutton's schools between the first and second cycles of inspection. The proportion of teaching judged as good or very good in its primary and secondary schools is slightly above national averages. At the time of the inspection there were no schools in special measures or judged to have serious weaknesses.

16. OFSTED inspectors judged attainment on entry to Sutton's primary schools to be good in 28 per cent of schools, compared to 23 per cent nationally, and poor in 22 per cent of schools, compared to 33 per cent nationally.

17. Attainment in tests at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics

is above that of Sutton's statistical neighbours and well above national figures. Comparative judgements in the secondary sector are complicated by the existence of a substantial proportion of selective schools. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C is well above national averages and those in statistical neighbours. The proportions achieving one A*-G and five A*-G passes are also above national figures. The average points score for post-16 advanced courses is above the national average.

18. While the picture overall is positive, it masks a very wide variation in schools' performance. For example, in 2000 the proportion of pupils attaining Level 4 and above in English at Key Stage 2 ranged from 60 per cent to over 95 per cent; the proportion of pupils in non-selective mixed schools achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C varied from 25 per cent to 58 per cent.

19. Rates of improvement between 1997 and 1999 in Key Stage tests and GCSEs are in line with, and often above, national rates.

20. Attendance is slightly above both the national rate and that in similar authorities in primary schools and significantly above in secondary schools. Permanent exclusions in secondary schools are in line with national rates. There have been no permanent exclusions of primary pupils this year.

Funding

21. The Council has funded the education service marginally above Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) levels in 1999/2000 and 2000/2001. It is committed to ensuring that future increases in education SSAs are protected. In 2000/2001, the Council's spending exceeded SSA levels for all education sub-groups except the 11-15 age group. This shortfall in secondary funding has been recognised by the Council, and approval has been given to increase spending from 95 to 98 per cent of SSA by 2002/2003.

22. Sutton delegates a relatively high proportion of its local schools budget to schools; in 2000/2001, 84.1 per cent. While this is above the 81.8 per cent average for outer London boroughs further delegation will be required to meet the Secretary of State's target of 85 per cent for 2001/2002.

23. In 2000/2001 Sutton's individual school budget of £2,059 per primary pupil exceeds the average for outer London of £2,028. However, for secondary school pupils the budget of £2,590 is significantly less than the average for outer London secondary pupils, which is £2,750.

24. Sutton's expenditure per pupil on statutory and regulatory duties has been reduced from £72 in 1999/2000 to £64 in 2000/2001, thus already meeting the Secretary of State's target of £70 per pupil for 2001/2002.

25. The Council's centrally retained spending per pupil for 2000/2001 is well within the average for outer London for all services except for:

- asset management, although the average cost per pupil reduced from £42 in 1999/2000 to £26 in 2000/2001, it is still more than double the outer London boroughs average of £12 per pupil. Half of these costs relate to corporate charges.

- education psychology service assessments and statementing expenditure which at £34 per pupil exceeds the figure of £27 for Outer London boroughs. These high costs are being examined as part of a Best Value review.

- Gross capital expenditure per pupil, which in 1999/2000 was £309, around twice as much as the average for other authorities.

26. The Council has maintained a high level of capital investment, which has ranged over the past five years from £4.8m to £10.8m in 2000/2001.

27. Sutton attracts less external funding than other London LEAs owing to a relatively low level of deprivation. Nevertheless, seven of its twenty-five electoral wards are currently benefiting from regeneration funding, some of which relates to schools.

Council structure

28. The Liberal Democrats have had a majority on the Council since 1986. In 1999 the Council modernised its democratic structure and established a multi-party strategy committee as its main decision-making body that meets in public. There are four performance committees, which are responsible for monitoring, reviewing and scrutinising Council strategy, plans, and performance. There are also four area committees with decision-making powers. The Best Value and audit committee and its panels oversee all the Council's Best Value Reviews. Education is well represented on the strategy committee with three education spokespersons.

29. In 1998, Sutton's management structure was revised to fit the proposed changes in council structure and a new corporate planning framework. The new structure avoided re-creation of traditional directorates such as education, which were replaced with groups of service units under four new strategic directors. Education functions fall under the learning for life group, the strategic director of which is the statutory director of education. There are four service units within this group, each headed by an executive director. Three of these, foundation and lifetime learning, parent, pupil and student services and core and support services cover the Council's education functions.

The Education Development Plan

30. The Education Development Plan is satisfactory. In 1999 the Secretary of State approved it for three years. While it is realistic and achievable, it is lacks a clear vision about the future. Despite some unevenness in its presentation of activities and actions, the LEA has implemented the plan efficiently and monitored it effectively.

31. Priorities within the EDP are based on a generally sound and detailed analysis of the performance of schools and the strengths and weaknesses of the LEA. The EDP priorities are:

A. Improving standards in literacy;
B. Improving standards in numeracy;
C. Improving outcomes in secondary schools;
D. Promoting the effective use of ICT;
E. Reducing the effects of disadvantage and disaffection;
F. Developing leadership and management; and
G. Supporting under-performing schools

32. The priorities are generally well defined and largely follow national priorities. Overall schools were clear about the LEA's priorities and their relevance to raising performance.

33. The targets set within the 1999 EDP, based on 1998 performance, were challenging but look increasingly modest in the light of improving school performance. Performance in 2000 has exceeded all but one of the year's targets. The 2001 and 2002 targets for Key Stage 2 English and mathematics retain an element of challenge. However, performance at Key Stage 4 has exceeded most of the targets for 2002, and these that will therefore need to be increased in future plans.

34. The EDP is an integral part of the Council's planning processes. Its priorities and targets are included within corporate action plans. It relates well to national policies, setting out a well-balanced approach to meeting national priorities within a local context.

35. The rationale for the allocation of activities within priorities is not always clear. For example, the inclusion of improving support for gifted and talented pupils under the priority of supporting under-performing schools. Descriptions of planned activity and actions vary in their clarity across priorities. For some, actions are clearly defined and well sequenced with explicit definition of deadlines and responsibilities. Yet activities within other priorities provide little more than a general description of what is intended with insufficient detail of how resources are to be targeted. Across all priorities not enough use is made of performance data to focus support. Nevertheless success criteria are generally clear, and EDP activities have been efficiently translated into business plans and work programmes for service units.

36. The LEA's strategy for monitoring and evaluating the plan is thorough and effective. Succinct, clear, complete and informative termly monitoring reports are submitted to the learning for life performance committee. The year two plan provides a summary evaluation of the impact of EDP activity.

37. The LEA has a well-structured and effective approach to consultation. The range of organisations and groups consulted is broad and they are allowed sufficient time to respond at each stage of development. Headteachers and governors of schools visited understood and approved of the EDP priorities. However, they were less clear as to the vision the EDP provided of the future relationship between increasingly

empowered schools and the LEA.

The Allocation of resources to priorities

38. Sutton's overall procedures for allocating resources to priorities are satisfactory although there is a lack of transparency, both in the allocation of corporate overheads and in Fair Funding allocations. The Council is financially stable with a prudent level of balances. Its devolved financial management is well structured and supported by clear procedures. It exercises effective budgetary control over all education expenditure, both capital and revenue, with the exception of expenditure on special educational needs (SEN) (see section 4).

39. The annual cyclical approach to budget review is undertaken within the context of a three-year medium-term planning cycle. At the corporate level, this process allows for a proper consideration of the allocation of revenue resources to priorities as they emerge. While service unit business plans also have a three-year planning horizon, costings are broad-brush rather than activity-based. The Council has yet to integrate service and business planning at this level. Central recharges made to the learning for life budget, although falling, remain high and represent over 60 per cent of the sum of £64 per pupil spent on statutory and regulatory duties in 2000/2001. These charges are calculated via a variety of measures, principally service level agreements (SLAs), but also *pro-rata* to expenditure, statistics on usage, or staff numbers. These provide an inconsistent and unsatisfactory basis for securing value for money.

40. The LEA pupil-led funding in both primary and secondary sectors has been a low proportion of the delegated education budget, compared with other authorities. Many of the criteria used for the allocation of funding to schools are too complex and the overall scheme for Fair Funding lacks transparency. These deficiencies were highlighted by responses to the school survey and during school visits. To date, the LEA has addressed deficiencies in the secondary funding formula and the relative underfunding of this phase. The fundamental overhaul of the whole formula for all phases is long overdue but following discussions with the schools partnership groups work commenced in autumn 2000.

41. Overall, satisfactory progress is being made by the LEA in putting in place structures for achieving Best Value. While the corporate framework is strong, there are weaknesses in performance management processes. The external audit report on the Council's first Best Value Performance Plan, while giving unqualified endorsement, recommended that Sutton review the adequacy of its arrangements for collecting and reporting performance indicator information. The Best Value performance management framework is accommodated within the Council's corporate planning framework (see section 3). The Best Value review process is well set out and provides for the systematic challenge and evaluation of performance needed to drive continuous improvement. The Best Value review programme is based on clear rationale and areas identified as being a focus for development such as ICT; children in public care and the education psychology service are the subjects of current reviews. Nevertheless, systems for effective performance management, while improving, are not yet fully developed. Officers within LEA services appreciate the need to specify and measure outcomes against the resources expended and

compare and improve performance. An appraisal scheme is well established, but benchmarking, with the exception of that within the advice and inspection service, is not yet in place. Consultation with schools was generally found to be effective during individual Best Value Reviews, but the awareness within schools of the general principles of Best Value was found to be inconsistent and therefore unsatisfactory.

Recommendations

In order to ensure better transparency and value for money in the deployment of resources:
- review and make more transparent corporate charges and maximise the use of interdepartmental service level agreements;
- review and reduce the charges for asset management; and
- revise the scheme for Fair Funding to make it simpler and based on a clearer education rationale.

In order to strengthen education development planning:
- articulate explicitly the impact of increasing school autonomy on the relationship between schools and the Council;
- ensure there is a clearer rationale for the allocation of activities to priorities in the EDP; and
- improve consistency in the presentation of EDP activities and actions.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

42. School improvement is one of Sutton's key objectives. There are a number of services making a significant contribution to its achievement. Personnel services provide high quality training and support to school senior management. Service staff work closely with other parts of the Learning for Life group to support the relevant EDP activities. The Council's commitment to capital spending on school buildings and its success in bidding for New Deal funding have ensured school improvement is not impaired by inadequate accommodation. The LEA has developed strong links at the strategic level with a wide range of voluntary and public sector agencies. This is having a direct and positive impact on schools. There are effective partnerships in pre-school and nursery education, family literacy, healthy schools initiative and in improving attendance.

43. The primary behaviour support team has been effective in preventing permanent exclusions and has provided excellent training for teachers and support staff. In collaboration with community services and an LEA special school it has been successful in achieving progressive integration of pupils with behavioural problems into mainstream schools. Support for schools in managing attendance is very good and has focused on schools causing concern and those in areas of relatively high deprivation. There are weaknesses in support for pupils with special educational needs. Provision for pupils who have no school place at the pupil referral unit is unsatisfactory.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

44. Overall, the LEA fulfils its functions of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention satisfactorily. Monitoring ensures the LEA's knowledge of schools is accurate. Challenge is generally being provided where necessary. Intervention has been effective for schools causing concern. Support provided by the advice and inspection service (AIS) is generally in inverse proportion to success. However, there are weaknesses. Schools' understanding of the definitions of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention is insufficiently clear. Sutton has given insufficient attention to the brokering and procurement of provision. The LEA should inform schools when they are under consideration for inclusion within the causing concern category. There is scope for Sutton to give more of its successful schools a lighter touch.

45. The LEA's strategy for school improvement has undergone major change over the past two years to align it more closely to the priorities of the EDP and the requirements of the Code of Practice on LEA/School Relations. The minimum entitlement from the AIS to cover the monitoring and challenge function has been reduced from ten or more days to three days per school; the budget for the remainder is now delegated to schools. Within the three day entitlement, the link inspectors undertake the core monitoring, challenge and support functions. This involves a mixture of school visits and desk-based analysis and evaluation of performance information.

46. Monitoring of school performance is thorough. The AIS makes effective use of

information from a range of sources to establish an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of schools. It is making good use of performance information to identify strengths and weaknesses and to provide early warning of potential problems. Good links between the AIS and other LEA service units allow relevant information to be shared. Most schools confirmed that over the past two years there has been increased emphasis placed by link inspectors on challenge and it has been appropriate and firm. For example, link inspectors resisted pressure from schools to reduce revised 2000 Key Stage 2 targets.

47. The LEA strategy for intervention is set out clearly in the EDP. Consultation with headteachers and governors has ensured that it is well understood within schools. Schools falling into the causing concern category receive effective targeted support and they are clear about why they are in this category and the level of intervention and support they can expect. The LEA has an unofficial 'under review' category of schools that it monitors more intensively. While the LEA is justified in its intentions, the failure to share concerns explicitly with the relevant schools is ill considered. It inevitably impairs the sharpness and focus of LEA support and challenge. Given the quality of monitoring information, there is no reason for the LEA not to be explicit and open with the school about its concerns. The LEA is currently consulting schools on a more transparent model.

48. The LEA's strategy for school improvement has some weaknesses. It has not updated its guidance to schools on the distinction between monitoring, challenge and support in order to reflect recent changes in practice. It was clear to inspectors during school visits that schools' understanding of the way the LEA fulfilled these functions was inconsistent. The new head of school improvement is reviewing guidance as a matter of priority. The LEA has recognised that it does not need to spend so much time with successful schools. Following consultation there has been a reduction in the allocation for a few secondary schools. More of the LEA's high performing schools justify such a reduction.

49. The AIS is leading the LEA's strategy for school improvement satisfactorily. The team of 24 professional staff, split into a team of seven inspectors with the remainder largely providing advisory support services, is relatively large for such a small authority. Approximately half of service costs is met by income from schools or external sources. Management and service planning are good and business-like and have improved since the appointment of a new head of school improvement. The AIS sets out its intentions clearly within its planning and ensures effective targeting of resources in line with school needs and EDP priorities. There is a good programme for the induction of new inspectors and advisers.

50. The performance management system ensures individual targets and professional development are aligned to the EDP and the service business plan. The service level agreements for the AIS are well structured. The AIS has only recently begun to benchmark itself systematically against other LEAs. Sutton's total net school improvement, EDP preparation, implementation and review costs are in line with outer London borough averages: the LEA provides satisfactory value for money.

51. The LEA has recognised that even such a large team cannot meet all its schools' needs. Staff in schools consider it to be lacking in some curriculum areas and in up-

to-date secondary school senior management expertise. The services offered to schools this year aimed to provide more choice and flexibility. The AIS is increasing its range of partnerships with other LEAs and higher education institutions for the delivery of INSET. However it has yet to develop a more rounded role as broker of support services.

The collection and analysis of data

52. The quality of data collected by the LEA for the purposes of analysing performance and providing comparative information to schools is sound and there are plans in place to make further improvements. Schools are generally given good support in analysing data and using it to set targets and identify priorities for improvement.

53. The LEA provides data to schools analysed by gender, ethnicity, free school meals and special educational needs (SEN). Schools are also grouped into families for the purposes of comparison. The data is made available to schools ahead of that provided nationally. Schools are given electronic copies of the data so they can analyse it in any way they choose. The LEA undertakes some value-added analysis but it does not yet have a database of individual pupil performance. The LEA recognises this shortcoming and is addressing it through its EDP. The LEA's baseline assessment scheme is well established and used by all first and primary schools.

54. Nearly all of the primary schools visited found the data useful and felt that their most recent statistical profile represented a marked improvement on previous years. Most of the schools were making good use of it to analyse performance and set targets. Secondary schools found the comparative data less useful because of the relatively small number and wide range of types of schools within the borough. Most of the secondary schools visited had established their own sophisticated data analysis systems and were less reliant than primary schools on the LEA's data.

55. Primary schools were critical of the LEA's initial approach and support for target setting, in some aspects justifiably so. The aggregated schools' targets in literacy at Key Stage 2 fell short of the LEA's overall targets and it needed to challenge a small number of schools to raise their targets. Schools were not always clear about the basis of the challenge. In reality, relatively few schools failed to reach their targets and most of these were within a ten per cent range. However, a number of schools set targets that proved to be insufficiently challenging. The LEA has recognised the weaknesses in its approach to target setting and has changed its practice for 2000/2001. This involves providing schools with indicative bands within which to set targets and moderation by the LEA of proposed targets before a decision is made whether to accept or challenge them. Most of the schools visited welcomed these developments as a substantial improvement and there was evidence of their adopting a more rigorous approach to target setting.

Support for literacy

56. Support for literacy in primary and special schools is good. It pre-dates the national literacy strategy (NLS) and extends well beyond it. There are good links between the various initiatives to support literacy but while each is well planned, they are not brought together within a coherent strategic framework. The LEA's support for literacy in secondary schools is less well established but there are individual examples of effective work.

57. Performance in national tests in English is above statistical neighbours and well above the national average. The rate of improvement at Key Stage 2 between 1997 and 1999 was above the national average. There has been a slowing down of the rate of improvement between 1999 and 2000 but the LEA still met its aggregate Key Stage 2 target for 2000. Boys perform less well than girls, particularly in writing, but the difference is no greater than that found nationally.

58. Improving standards in literacy is a separate priority in the EDP. As well as implementing the NLS, the LEA is giving targeted support to the development of family literacy under this priority. Under other EDP priorities the LEA has identified support for literacy in secondary schools, support to improve the performance of boys and support for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). The LEA has a clear strategy to support implementation of the NLS. Despite good links between individual initiatives – for example, between the NLS team, the library service, SEN and family literacy – schools see support for literacy as a collection of separate initiatives rather than a coherent whole.

59. The implementation and development of the NLS have been well managed. The strategy manager has a good knowledge of schools' strengths and weaknesses and support is appropriately differentiated. Monitoring by link inspectors is firmly established. The team supporting literacy has a high level of expertise and is highly respected by schools. Training and other support have been well received.

60. Primary and special schools rated the support for literacy highly and above other LEAs in the school survey. Monitoring visits and visits during this inspection confirmed this positive picture. In the schools receiving intensive support, the LEA was effective in helping headteachers sharpen the analysis of performance data to gain a better insight into the specific needs of pupils and identify the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. The performance of schools receiving intensive support has generally improved at a faster rate than the LEA average and the gap between the best and the worst performing schools has narrowed. There is less evident impact of the NLS in secondary schools. A training course on developing the NLS in secondary schools was generally well received. There were a few examples of effective initiatives in the schools visited, for example in the promotion of literacy across the curriculum and in improving the performance of boys. Other schools were making good progress without the need for LEA support.

61. Family literacy is currently focused on parents of nursery-aged children in a small number of schools located in areas of social deprivation. There is a high retention rate of parents involved in the initiative and evidence of them giving more effective support to help develop their children's early literacy skills. The library service is well-

thought of by primary schools and good use is made of its facilities to support the development of literacy.

Support for numeracy

62. The LEA's support for numeracy is satisfactory. The management and implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) are effective. Support in primary schools is well regarded and generally effective. Support in secondary and special schools is less well regarded than in other LEAs.

63. Performance in national tests in mathematics is above statistical neighbours and well above national averages. The rate of improvement between 1997 and 1999 at Key Stage 2 was in line with the national rate. The rate of improvement between 1999 and 2000 has slowed down but the LEA still met its aggregate target.

64. Improving numeracy is a separate priority in the EDP. There are two strands to the support: the implementation of the NNS and targeted support for family numeracy. Other aspects of support, including improving numeracy in secondary schools, feature in different EDP priorities but are not always cross-referenced to each other. The strategy to implement the NNS is clear but in the same way as for literacy there is a lack of an overarching strategy to bring the various initiatives to support numeracy together.

65. Sutton's management of the NNS has been generally effective. Consultants' time is allocated to schools on the basis of need. There is good liaison between link inspectors and the numeracy team. The line manager has kept link inspectors well informed about NNS developments and they monitor implementation. Link inspectors work in co-operation with the numeracy team on booster training and hold joint meetings with headteachers on common issues. The work of the numeracy team is generally well received. Headteachers opposed the normal practice of having a small number of leading mathematics teachers (LMT) and instead helped to fund the training of an LMT in each school. While this has the benefit of training a considerable number of teachers to a high level, it has the disadvantage of not giving all teachers the opportunity to see excellent practice in schools other than their own. Changes of staff have also meant that some schools have been left without a LMT. The development of family numeracy has been delayed, for reasons largely outside the LEA's control.

66. Monitoring visits and visits during this inspection found that LEA support was generally effective in primary schools, although there was some variation. Support was most effective in the schools causing concern. Support in specific aspects of numeracy, such as mental mathematics, often pre-dated the NNS and was impacting positively on standards. Support in secondary and special schools was less well-received. There were mixed reactions to the LEA's training to develop the national numeracy strategy at Key Stage 3. The secondary schools visited either did not feel the need for support in numeracy or mainly went outside the LEA for advice.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

67. Support for ICT in the curriculum is unsatisfactory but shows some signs of recent improvement.

68. Analysis of OFSTED inspection data shows that progress in ICT at Key Stage 2 was unsatisfactory in just under half the schools. This is worse than the national picture. Progress at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 was better than that found nationally but remains unsatisfactory in a substantial number of schools. The most recent inspection reports show improvement in teaching and pupil progress.

69. Promoting the effective use of ICT is a separate priority in the EDP. The strategy to develop the ICT infrastructure is clearly set out and gives emphasis in its early stages to developments in primary schools. The activities and actions relating to improving teaching and learning are less coherent and are in fact unsatisfactory. The LEA has established various working groups to develop a clearer strategy for supporting the curriculum use of ICT.

70. Schools' views about the quality of support are mixed. While overall primary and secondary schools rated it less than satisfactory, almost a quarter of primary schools thought the support was good or very good. At the time of the inspection, ICT was subject to a Best Value review. Initial findings confirm that there is still dissatisfaction with aspects of the service.

71. During visits to schools inspectors confirmed considerable variation in the effectiveness of support. While the LEA's strategy for developing the ICT infrastructure was clear to schools, they were uncertain as to its priorities for supporting the management, teaching and learning of ICT. Experiences of the effectiveness of ICT technical support were mixed. While some schools cited examples of rapid response to problems and good advice on software, at least half were critical of these aspects. Several identified poor communication during the installation of new software and hardware. However, there was some evidence of recent improvement in the quality of technical support. The quality of curriculum advice and support was variable and did not meet the needs of some schools. Most secondary schools and some primary schools did not feel the need for LEA support or had sought help from sources outside the LEA. The LEA is not making sufficient use either of external expertise through brokering arrangements or of the considerable expertise already in its schools.

Support for schools causing concern

72. Support for schools causing concern has improved and is now good. At the time of the inspection there were no schools subject to special measures or with serious weaknesses.

73. One secondary school and two primary schools were subject to special measures. The secondary school was subsequently closed and both primary schools have now been removed from special measures. One primary school and one special school were identified as having serious weaknesses but after second inspections they have been removed from this category. OFSTED inspectors have

identified no schools as under-performing.

74. The LEA was slow initially in providing effective support to its schools in special measures. This was because Sutton did not have a clear strategy for intervention. The LEA recognised this weakness and developed a much more powerful strategy which is clearly articulated in the EDP and elsewhere. More recent support has proved effective.

75. The LEA has identified eight schools that give cause for concern for a variety of reasons. One of these schools has been subject to an official warning. Sutton provides additional support to these schools according to their needs. The executive management team and the head of school improvement, together with the education spokespersons on the strategy committee, regularly review all of these schools. However, the failure to inform some of the schools that they are in an unofficial under review category, and are therefore the subject of additional monitoring, is ill considered. The LEA is addressing this issue.

76. Evidence from OFSTED monitoring visits and from school visits during this inspection shows that support is well managed and effective. The LEA establishes a support group for each school causing concern within which the role of the link inspector is pivotal. This provides a forum to ensure co-ordination between the various services, such as the advice and inspection service (AIS), governor support, personnel, finance, educational psychology, SEN assessment and SEN support services. Headteachers spoke highly of the speed of response, the quality of advice and the effectiveness of the support received from these groups.

Support for school management

77. Support for school management is a mix of strengths and weaknesses but is satisfactory overall.

78. In 1998, the audit for the EDP revealed that 80 per cent of OFSTED school inspections identified a lack of rigorous monitoring and evaluation. The LEA therefore included developing leadership and management as a priority in the EDP. The priority embraces a wide range of activities including developing school self-review, financial benchmarking, support for pupils with SEN and the healthy schools initiative. Overall the coherence of the activities under the priority is weak. However, support for management is better than the strategic planning suggests.

79. The LEA puts emphasis on the development of school self-review. Its training in this area is based on the OFSTED model and is well regarded by primary and secondary schools. The LEA is now increasing its support to develop self-evaluation for middle managers. While the degree to which self-evaluation was fully established varied in the schools visited, the LEA's training was clearly having a positive impact. This is also reflected in recent OFSTED inspection reports. Sutton's joint annual review (JAR) carried out by the link inspector and the headteacher is an effective mechanism for monitoring the quality of schools' self-review procedures. Joint classroom observations, involving the link inspector and senior managers in the school, also help to assure consistency in judgements. The school performance review, a statistical analysis of the school carried out by the link inspector, feeds into

the JAR.

80. The LEA recognises the importance of national standards in its management training. Headteachers and deputies are encouraged and supported to take up the leadership programme for serving headteachers and the national professional qualification for headship. The LEA supports primary and secondary headteachers in organising their own programme of training. There is an induction programme for new headteachers and they are offered an experienced head as a mentor in their first year of headship. This programme, coupled with extra support from the link inspector, is generally well received, although a small minority of new or acting headteachers felt that support was initially slow in coming.

81. There is a good take up of LEA support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs), particularly by primary schools, and it is generally considered to be valuable. The LEA meets its statutory duties in terms of monitoring the support schools are providing for NQTs and moderating schools' judgements about their performance. Almost all NQTs continued to a second year of teaching within the borough.

82. The AIS offers nearly all the curriculum support, apart from that of literacy, numeracy and ICT, to schools on a buy-back basis. Take-up by primary schools is good and they consider the training provides generally good value for money. Feedback from schools indicates some variation in the effectiveness of the training, but there is no set pattern to the criticism. Secondary schools were often critical of the range and quality of curriculum support provided by the LEA and several, particularly former grant-maintained schools, made little or no use of the LEA provision.

Support for governors

83. Support for governors is a strength. Over 80 per cent of primary schools and 50 per cent of secondary schools in the survey considered the support to be good or very good. These findings were confirmed through meetings with governors and visits to schools.

84. Governor services are located within personnel but maintain strong links with the AIS. Governor services use information from link inspectors, personnel, finance and OFSTED inspection reports to identify concerns about the performance of governing bodies. An LEA officer attends governing body meetings. This helps keeps LEA officers in touch with what is going on in schools and enables governors to call for advice on general policy matters. Some governors and headteachers are ambivalent about its value and it is debatable whether this is a good use of officer time. The authority has, however responded to this by producing a summary document on the terms of reference for officer attendance at meetings.

85. The strategy to develop governor support is clearly set out in the EDP and elsewhere. There is a comprehensive programme of training with increasing emphasis being given to whole governing body training. There is good take-up of training by primary school governors and increasing take up by secondary schools. Evidence from the schools visited and recent OFSTED inspection reports suggests it is having a positive impact. Governors are becoming increasingly involved in

monitoring and self-evaluation but there is still considerable variation between schools in how well they fulfil this function. Governors find the JAR useful but make insufficient use of the performance data available to them.

86. Written guidance and other support materials for governors are well regarded. Briefing meetings for chairs of governors and outline agendas are also valued. There is a good take-up of the LEA's clerking service. However, governors would welcome more summaries of key documents and model policies and consistency in the copying of LEA correspondence to the chair of governors. The service is generally considered to provide good value for money.

87. There are relatively few governor vacancies and support is given to those schools experiencing difficulties in recruiting suitable governors. The LEA is attempting to monitor the composition of governing bodies but the response rate has so far been disappointing. Good support has been provided to schools causing concern in helping them strengthen their governing bodies. Selection and recruitment training are strongly supported by personnel and well received. The LEA support during the appointment of headteachers and deputies is valued. Governor services has good links with the London network for governors and national bodies.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

88. The LEA has no clear strategy for identifying and supporting gifted and talented pupils, and therefore support is unsatisfactory. An activity to improve the quality of support for gifted and talented pupils was added to Year 2 of the EDP at the request of schools. However, it has been put inappropriately under the priority of supporting under-performing schools. This commits the LEA to putting in place policy and systems for tracking individual pupil attainment by January 2001, but there are no timescales for targets for pupils with above average attainment. Although the new school performance reviews provide the opportunity for link inspectors to comment on attainment of able pupils, few have done so and the LEA has no clear view of the pupils to be targeted. Headteacher training for both primary and secondary phases includes items on support for gifted and talented pupils. High achieving pupils attend many Sutton schools and there are various initiatives in individual schools to support and develop individual pupil talents. A summer school focusing on humanities has had a positive impact.

Early years

89. The LEA provides very good support to early years. Early years provision has been a priority for the Council since the early 1990s. Partnership working pre-dates the current government initiatives. Joint working between officers in community services and the learning for life groups is effective. The Early Years Development and Childcare Plan (EYDCP) has been agreed by the DfEE and is now in its second year. It has been based on a comprehensive audit involving extensive community consultation. Key priorities for the EYDCP are included in the corporate action plan as a separate objective under social inclusion. The EYDCP and the EDP are linked to ensure continuity in provision and standards. The plan includes targets for maintained, private and voluntary partners. The initial focus has been on building up capacity both in terms availability and quality of provision. All DfEE targets have

been met and there is provision for all four-year olds and 45 per cent of three-year olds.

90. Within the second year plan there is a clear shift in emphasis to the improvement of standards. Activities include improving the availability and quality of training for providers, developing the monitoring role of the link inspector and supporting newly formed cluster groups of providers. A system of pre-baseline record keeping is being introduced with care and sensitivity. Baseline assessment is well established in all LEA first schools and LEA monitoring indicates that it is operating effectively.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the provision of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:
- clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of schools and the LEA's services.

In order to improve the management and delivery of support for school improvement:
- improve the coherence of initiatives supporting improvement in literacy, numeracy and management;
- use the outcomes of the current Best Value review to put in place more effective ways of supporting ICT;
- inform schools promptly when they are placed in the under review category;
- develop the capacity to broker services to improve the choice and quality of services available to schools; and
- develop a comprehensive and coherent strategy for supporting gifted and talented pupils.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

91. The corporate planning framework is satisfactory with few significant weaknesses.

92. The Council has a tradition of consulting with the community and establishing crosscutting initiatives and policies. During the late 1990s the Council incorporated this tradition into a coherent and structured approach to corporate planning. Continuous improvement in education is accorded a high priority within two of Sutton's six corporate goals and action plans: increasing opportunities for young people and achieving social inclusion. Its new member and officer structure defines responsibilities and accountabilities clearly. Each element of the corporate action plan translates into service business plans and ultimately feeds into work programmes. Corporate objectives are clear and well articulated. They provide a sound basis for co-ordinated planning and joint working across the Council. However, targets are not consistently sharp or always sufficiently related to the intended outcome of Council activity, for example to achieve a set expenditure per pupil by a specific date.

93. Corporate decision making is swift open and effective. The Council consults well with all partners who have a stake in the education service both at corporate level and within learning for life. Schools have regular access to members. The advent of both Fair Funding and Best Value has led to openness and so further enhanced the consultation process with schools. However, newly returned foundation schools were highly critical of the fairness and transparency of education funding processes. The LEA has responded effectively to these criticisms but some dissatisfaction, particularly amongst secondary schools, still remains.

94. The Council generally makes decisions in good time and implements them effectively. Elected members are provided with clear and well-informed advice. Options and their implications are reasonably well thought through in reports to members. However, elected members are unable to assess value for money or effectiveness fully because of weaknesses in performance management arrangements. Moreover, the performance committee has yet to be fully effective in scrutinising LEA performance. To date, it has focused on monitoring the implementation of plans rather than outcomes.

95. Commitment to school improvement and social inclusion is shared by all LEA senior managers and is reflected in service and business plans. Senior managers respond to new government initiatives systematically and constructively. Officers maintain a dynamic and effective relationship with schools. Among primary schools there is a strong sense of partnership, and consultation with them generally leads to agreement. Senior officers have worked hard to establish a similar partnership with secondary schools since the return of the grant maintained schools. There is less evidence of senior management commitment to other aspects of the Government's agenda. The impact of the Code of Practice on LEA/School Relations and increasing school autonomy on the relationship between the LEA and schools is not clearly articulated within the EDP, corporate action plans or service plans for LEA services.

This leaves schools uncertain about the future development of their relationship with the LEA.

Liaison with other agencies

96. The LEA has developed strong links at a strategic level with a wide range of voluntary and public sector agencies. There is close co-operation with the health authority, the police service, further education, the Training and Enterprise Council and the Sutton Education-Business Partnership. The LEA has good working relationships with the Catholic and Church of England dioceses and with other religious bodies. The Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) is well established. The LEA is represented in a number of forums that deal with crosscutting initiatives such as early years, post-16 education, health awareness and crime and disorder. These are effective in co-ordinating action and avoiding wasteful duplication.

97. The LEA's 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, health education and in improving attendance. However, while schools reported better co-operation between education, community services and the health authority they also identified some continuing frustrations in communications at the day-to-day operational level.

Management services

98. The quality of management services provided to schools varies but most services are satisfactory or better. Services provided directly by the learning for life group are better than contracted services: personnel services are good; financial services, including Internal audit, and ICT support for school administration are satisfactory. The provision of property services is unsatisfactory overall, and variable within individual schools.

99. There is a high level of buy-back across all management services by primary schools. A majority of secondary schools buy back ICT, personnel services, site security and payroll. All services have service level agreements (SLAs). The SLAs have strengths: they are limited to one year (although some run from September, others April), possess for the most part a common format, are reasonably specific and are subject to annual consultation. However, they do fall short of what is necessary in a climate of Best Value. Not all SLAs contain service options; published performance indicators for services are, for the most part, insufficiently specific; and the overall costs of both central and delegated services are not provided. They do not enable schools to judge whether a service offers value for money or compare the Council against other potential providers. The Council has recently published a procurement strategy but this is yet to be implemented in full and schools are yet to benefit.

100. The LEA's personnel service is highly rated by schools, particularly the general advice and guidance and specific casework. The service has effective working relationships with other parts of the learning for life group. Good personnel performance data is maintained. High quality training has been provided to both

governors and headteachers on such issues as the new threshold arrangements for teachers and performance management. The completion and publication of a revised personnel handbook will further enhance the service.

101.   The personnel service works closely with the payroll service run under contract for Sutton by a private provider. Over a third of primary schools rated the service as less than satisfactory in responses to the school survey and in almost half of the schools visited, where the LEA service was used, the service was found to be unreliable.

102.   Although the financial service is provided to schools on a light touch basis, it monitors school budgets and offers at least satisfactory support where required. There are no schools in serious budget difficulty. The financial service promptly follows up when schools' end of year balance is in excess of 5 per cent. Although future training is planned, little has been done to date to help schools meet Best Value requirements. There is regular internal audit review which schools find helpful.

103.   Support for ICT administration is satisfactory. A full technical service, including strategic reviews, planning and upgrading, is provided to schools on all aspects of ICT including software and hardware support, an electronic communications network and a schools information management system training package. The service is included in a Best Value review currently being undertaken in schools. When responding to questionnaires used for this review, most schools expressed satisfaction with the equipment provided by the LEA and provision for administrative hardware and software support. Plans have been approved to introduce an improved system for electronic data information exchange between the LEA and schools in 2001.

104.   For property maintenance, schools are offered a series of service options by the Council's construction and property consultancy. Evidence from school visits and the school survey indicates that, while some schools are more than satisfied, the quality of the service provided by the consultancy and contractors is inconsistent and unsatisfactory overall.

Recommendations

In order to strengthen strategic management:

- improve the quality of performance management information and service level agreements to provide members and officers with a better basis for evaluating and challenging performance.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

105.   The LEA's strategy for supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is satisfactory. Its policy is well articulated. Its commitment to inclusion is consistent with Government priorities. The development plan sets out a clearly structured well-prioritised approach to the implementation of the policy. The head of the service has an accurate knowledge of the LEA's strengths and weaknesses and provides effective leadership. Monitoring of the plan is good and members are provided with regular progress reports on implementation of the plan. The LEA has recognised a few shortcomings. Certain areas of the development of SEN provision are not covered in sufficient detail, particularly the role of and contribution made by special schools.

106.   Consultation with all schools on SEN issues has been extensive and effective. Regular meetings and conferences of headteachers and special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) provide a forum for sharing information and gathering views on SEN development. Headteacher membership of Sutton's moderation panel has helped to ensure their awareness of SEN issues and of the impact of inclusion. This consultation is providing the foundation for improving the processing of applications for statements and the reconfiguration of support needed for the LEA's inclusion strategy. SENCOs are rightly represented on the moderation panel but not on the provision advisory panel, where they could also make a useful contribution. All those interviewed both in schools and within the LEA expressed the view that the LEA is heading in the right direction regarding pupils' entitlement, inclusion, partnership and efficiency and inspectors endorse this view. Although not explicit within the LEA's plan, special school headteachers see their schools as being integral to Sutton's SEN provision. All confirmed that there have been substantial improvements in SEN provision in Sutton over the last two years.

107.   Despite these improvements, the strategy for supporting pupils at earlier stages of the Code of Practice is not fully in place. Schools and parents are still not confident that pupil needs will be met without resorting to statements. The system of allocating time to schools from the sensory impairment teams, learning support team and the primary language and communication support service does offer flexibility to allow for additional assessment, advice and support to schools causing concern. However, for schools not in this category but with considerable pupil need, this is insufficient. The number of statements and the SEN costs are still rising.

Statutory obligations

108.   The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations. There has been considerable improvement in the timeliness within which pupils have had their special educational needs assessed and, when appropriate, a statement issued. The SEN team has been increased and a recently introduced database has improved the team's efficiency. Officers are confident that they will reach their target of 80 per cent of assessments completed within 18 weeks for the year ended March 2001, up from 78 per cent for the previous year. Difficulties in obtaining advice from health service professionals are delaying assessments but LEA officers are trying to speed up

provision of support by anticipating statements and then amending them, when advice arrives.

109.   The quality of statements has improved and is now satisfactory. They are well written and clearly describe the needs and specification of provision. To ensure consistency, the principal educational psychologist monitors the reports of the team. Headteachers report, however, that some inconsistency persists, owing to variability in the quality of the contributions of individual SENCOs and educational psychologists. The practice of allocating a fixed cash sum for support can lead to variation in the number of hours this represents owing to differing rates of pay of support staff.

110.   Although the efficiency and consistency of the annual review process have improved there are still weaknesses. The new data base system is very effective. In the main schools are alerted when annual reviews are due and letters go out to those involved in good time. A resource panel with headteacher membership meets fortnightly to consider complex placements and requests from schools to change banding levels. It has been effective in identifying gaps in provision for individuals and groups of pupils. Nevertheless, schools commented that suggestions for change or requests for increased levels of support could go unnoticed. Inconsistencies in the information provided by schools have affected the quality of reviews and the LEA is improving the format of its requests for information.

111.   The LEA has faced an increased level of appeals to the SEN tribunal. Of the 28 appeals made since 1998, 12 have been withdrawn and four dismissed. The number withdrawn reflects successful conciliation but officers are aware of the need to improve conciliation still further. Although schools judge most support at Stage 3 to be good, there is still insufficient confidence among school staff and parents that there will be enough support for pupils at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice. A start has been made in improving support for parents by the foundation of a parent partnership. There has already been some positive feedback. Meanwhile, officers acknowledge that written communication with parents needs to be reviewed and improved.

SEN functions to support school improvement

112.   Sutton fails to carry out its various SEN functions to support school improvement consistently, and therefore its performance is unsatisfactory. While the management and quality of LEA provision are improving, mainstream schools do not have sufficient confidence that SEN pupils will receive the support they need. The LEA's strategic focus on support for inclusion has yet to be reflected in coherent support for SEN across special and mainstream schools.

113.   Recently introduced LEA criteria, developed by the principal educational psychologist, and guidance to support decisions regarding the funding and need for statutory assessment, developed by the SEN inspector are clear, fair and well understood by SEN co-ordinators. The improved system has reduced inconsistencies in decision-making, but it requires excessive paperwork and the procedures needed to monitor and evaluate SEN provision are only just being developed.

114.   Training and support for SENCOs are generally good. The LEA has made good use of links with the Institute of Education to provide high quality training and networking opportunities. Other external providers are being sought to enhance the range and quality of provision. Induction training offered to learning support assistants is good and training in autism has begun. Dyslexia training, which is being made available to all primary schools, is highly regarded.

115.   There is insufficient linkage between the different strands of provision and support. For example there are inadequate links between specialist facilities attached to mainstream schools and special schools. One special school is providing outreach support for mainstream schools, and is now only belatedly receiving support from the LEA.

116.   In the course of school visits inspectors were able to confirm the finding of the school survey, that learning and behaviour support is considered by primary schools to be good, while secondary schools are more ambivalent. However, primary and secondary schools rated the provision of educational psychology services as less than satisfactory. The findings of a survey of schools, undertaken in the autumn of 2000 as part of a Best Value Review, suggested that the dissatisfaction was in relation to the quantity more than the quality of provision. Lack of sufficient support from educational psychologists was referred to in six schools visited, problems of discontinuity were identified in three and variable quality was mentioned in three. SENCOs report that quality is variable, but is generally good when available. There is concern from mainstream schools that educational psychologists have not received training in NLS and NNS and so are not in a good position to comment on pupils' progress in these areas.

Value for money

117.   The LEA's arrangements for securing value for money in its SEN functions are unsatisfactory. The LEA has been slow to address the control of SEN expenditure. Well-considered steps have been, or are in the process of being, taken but they have yet to constrain the rise in expenditure. Monitoring use of SEN funds in schools is still inadequate.

118.   The Council's external auditor reported in January l997 on a value for money review of SEN. The report identified rapidly rising costs and inadequate budgetary control of SEN expenditure. A wholesale review of Sutton's policies and procedures for SEN began in 1997. Despite the programme of actions taken since 1997, SEN expenditure has risen by an estimated 24 per cent over the past two years. As a result in 2000 Sutton made a focus on financial issues one of the highest priorities of its SEN strategy. The learning for life senior management team has put in place a comprehensive package of budget control mechanisms, while attempting not to reduce the quality of provision. Activity and financial planning are aligned, budget projections are now more accurate and robust and the financial impact of decisions is clearly identified. Overall spending on SEN in 2000/01 is slightly higher than statistical neighbours, but is within the centrally retained average spending per pupil for outer London. Reining in expenditure on SEN is dependent on the extent to which the LEA succeeds in reducing the number of statements and the level of out-borough

placements.

119.	Both the external auditor's 1997 report and an external consultant's report of 2000 referred to inadequate monitoring of schools' use of delegated funds. Moreover, the LEA is unclear how £2.1m for additional learning support in 2000/2001 is being spent. Now, belatedly, a *pro forma* for monitoring is being piloted in two primary and two secondary schools. The LEA should have acted earlier in relation to this matter.

Recommendations

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

- Secure better value for money and support for school improvement in the area of SEN by:
  - developing better links between all parts of the LEA providing support for SEN pupils;
  - ensuring statements include specific advice in relation to the extent and type of support;
  - improving the deployment of education psychologists; and
  - establishing arrangements to monitor the use of funds delegated to schools to support SEN.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The provision of school places

120.   Sutton manages its provision of school places effectively. An external audit report of January 1998 also took this view and made no significant recommendations for improvement. The London Research Centre provides accurate forecasts of population. Currently, Sutton does not have any particular problems in relation to surplus places and no problems are anticipated. Secondary accommodation needs were fully assessed in 1998 and a development plan agreed for final implementation in 2002. Effective consultation with secondary schools has paved the way for additional forms of entry in several schools.

121.   The LEA has established a school organisation committee although, given the comparatively settled state of school provision in Sutton, it is unlikely to have much to do. The school organisation plan of 1999–2004 lacks detail, whereas the plan for 2000–2005 is better. The LEA's infant class size plan is being implemented successfully.

Admission to schools

122.   The administration of pupil admissions to schools is good and the results of the school survey and inspectors' visits to schools confirmed that it is highly regarded. The external audit report on school places of 1998 was complimentary. Current administration accords with the relevant code of practice in relation to both admissions to schools and appeals. An admissions forum has been established and works effectively. Sutton also produces helpful documents for parents relating to its appeals procedure and casual admissions.

123.   Admissions procedures are clear and the process is well managed. In 2000/2001 90 per cent of parents were successful in their first choice of school. There were 65 appeals, four of which were upheld, from an intake of 1,642.

124.   Sutton's particular success story, in respect of admissions, is its system for secondary school admissions, introduced this year. Its 14 secondary schools are a complex mixture of foundation, grammar, community and voluntary aided schools, with 28 per cent of secondary admissions in 1999 being from outside the LEA. The two-stage admission procedure, which the LEA has adopted, is fair and well organised, and has won widespread support from primary and secondary schools. It replaced a potentially chaotic alternative. Although parents' chances of achieving first preference are inevitably reduced by the grammar school selection process, nevertheless, 79 per cent of parents have secured their first choice this year. There have been 144 appeals heard, 30 of which have been upheld against an intake of 2,536.

Asset management

125.   The Council's approach to asset management is uneven. Over recent years it has had some success in securing funding for capital projects. Its management of building projects has generally been satisfactory but its asset management planning in respect of local implementation of Government policy guidelines has, up to the last few months, been inadequate.

126.   Sutton has maintained a high level of capital investment in school accommodation. It has bid successfully for £3.9m of New Deal funding and has utilised £9.8m of capital receipts between 1995 and 2000 to fund the school capital programme. As a result of this investment, officers and members have not considered it necessary to look towards Private Finance Initiative support. While the school survey suggested that the programming and management of building projects was less than satisfactory, schools with recent building projects made positive comments to inspectors during visits.

127.   The introduction of the LEA's Asset Management Plan has been badly handled. The school condition surveys of 1999 were insufficiently thorough, only allowed for minimal consultation with schools and were not specific as to what maintenance work was needed. Moreover, the total of some £15.6m worth of work did not distinguish between schools' and LEA responsibilities. Although they may have been useful to the LEA in bidding for New Deal funding, the surveys were not helpful to the schools in planning their own responsibilities for asset management. Technical advice is available both to the LEA and to schools to fulfil their responsibilities, however, the evidence from school visits indicates that more than a third are unclear about the consequences of asset management planning for their school. In addition, the financial implications of the Asset Management Plan have not been fully reflected in the capital and revenue estimates for school buildings.

128.   The learning for life management team have recognised the need for improvement for LEA support for property maintenance and Asset Management Planning. There is evidence of recent improvement in the service including the commissioning of further condition surveys.

Provision for pupils who have no school place

129.   The quality of provision for pupils who have no school place is a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. The provision for pupils out of school because of illness is good but other individual tuition is limited to a maximum of ten hours per week. The provision available to address behavioural problems including exclusions, while good in parts, is unsatisfactory overall.

130.   Home and hospital tuition is well organised by the hospital and individual tuition service (HITS). It has good links with the Royal Marsden Hospital and is generally well rated by schools. Support for pupils with mental health problems is also available at the Phoenix Centre. Tuition is provided in the home where a medical condition prevents attendance in a local centre within a small group. The primary behaviour support team takes responsibility for any cases of primary pupils at risk of exclusion from school. Secondary exclusions are managed through the

pupil referral unit (PRU) in co-operation with the tuition arm of the hospital and individual tuition service. Since the primary behaviour support team was set up in September 1999 it has worked closely with the hospital and individual tuition service to provide alternatives to permanent exclusions. There have been no permanent exclusions of primary pupils this year.

131.   The secondary behaviour support service provides full-time programmes for excluded pupils in Years 7-11, including provision at the PRU. This service was reorganised during summer 2000 in response to changing demands and following a justifiably critical report, which had been commissioned by the executive head of parent, pupil and student services from the AIS. The initial development plan intended to address weaknesses in the management of the PRU is weak, with neither intended outcomes nor success criteria clearly identified. At present there are no agreed criteria for re-admitting excluded pupils to secondary schools.

132.   Curricular provision at the PRU is limited, especially at Key Stage 3. Although the current timetable contains some innovative activities, it also includes unidentified curriculum time and lacks breadth and coverage of core subjects. The teachers work hard but there are weaknesses in planning and monitoring. Accommodation is moderate, with a single room space not ideal for individual or small group working and inadequate to meet a wide range of needs, ages and subjects. Year 11 pupils have access to several options, including NVQ Level 1 units in Construction through a link course.

133.   The number of exclusions of secondary pupils has been well within government targets. It is unclear what levels of resources are being deployed to meet the national 2002 targets of 25 hours of supervised provision for pupils out of school. The LEA target only refers to 20 or more hours. The leaver destinations for 2000 show that around three-quarters of pupils on the Year 11 link programme have progressed to further education, training or employment.

134.   The school survey indicated that both primary and secondary schools considered the quality of alternative provision out of school for reasons other than exclusion to be better than satisfactory overall, but alternative provision for pupils excluded from school was rated less than satisfactory. One of the schools visited praised the Year 11 project and also the work of the PRU in helping to prepare temporarily excluded pupils for re-entry to mainstream.

Behaviour support

135.   Support for schools in managing behaviour problems is satisfactory and, in the case of primary schools, has greatly improved over the past year.

136.   Recent OFSTED school inspection reports show procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour to be good in just over two-thirds of primary schools. This is below comparable figures for statistical neighbours and national levels. Of six secondary schools recently inspected, procedures were found to be good in only three. The number of exclusions is not a major problem overall but it is a significant issue in a few secondary schools.

137.   The Behaviour Support Plan is comprehensive. The service provided by the primary behaviour support team has improved since reorganisation in 1999. The service has been providing good support and the use of 'managed moves' (placing pupils at risk of exclusion at other schools) has been an effective strategy within primary schools to prevent permanent exclusions. A multi-agency steering group meets to consider initial referrals, which can be made by schools, the Travellers service or the family centre. It has also provided excellent training for teachers and support staff in schools. The service has been very responsive to schools' needs and it has been pro-active in raising awareness within schools.

138.   Joint arrangements with community services and a particular special school have also been effective in achieving progressive integration of pupils with behavioural problems into mainstream schools. The recent creation of a behaviour support network, bringing together all elements of LEA behaviour support, is belated but is beginning to achieve greater consistency and establish better links across services.

139.   Support from the secondary support service has been patchy. Some outreach work has often been of good quality but has not been consistently monitored. A young offenders project has provided good support to a small number of pupils. Provision has increased to over ten hours and is supporting pupils studying for GCSEs.

140.   In the school survey support for improving pupils' behaviour and advice on exclusion procedures were graded as satisfactory or better for both primary and secondary schools, with primary schools being more positive. These views were confirmed during school visits. One special school reported that while it had needed to seek training outside the LEA in coping with extreme behavioural problems, it had received good support from the educational psychologist and nursing specialist.

Attendance

141.   Support for schools in managing pupil attendance is very good. Attendance levels in both primary and secondary schools have been consistently above those for statistical neighbours and the national average over last four years.

142.   Although attendance is not a major issue in the borough as a whole, poor attendance is an issue in a few schools. Recent OFSTED school inspection reports show procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance to be relatively strong in primary and secondary schools. The strategy of the education welfare service (EWS) has focused on schools causing concern, especially in areas where there are relatively high levels of social deprivation.

143.   Educational welfare officers (EWOs) are deployed efficiently. Good use is made of a range of strategies, including targeting particular year groups, transition work in Years 6 and 7, projects and 'blitz' days. Supporting documentation is good. The service has challenged complacency in some schools. In one school, a first-day contact scheme has helped raise attendance by two per cent. The use of competitions in various schools has contributed to a one per cent improvement in attendance levels. A designated EWO works with the Traveller liaison teacher. The

service is looking to use a new ICT system to build up pupil profiles. There are very good links with both the police and Surrey LEA in setting up joint truancy patrols and protocols. Links with the family support services are also effective.

144.   In the school survey, support for promoting a high level of pupil attendance was graded good overall and good to very good by secondary schools. Inspectors were able to confirm these views during school visits.

Support for ethnic minority pupils and Travellers

145.   Support for pupils of ethnic minority is satisfactory although monitoring of pupil progress is a weakness and Traveller heritage is good.

146.   The proportions of children of ethnic minority origin are below average for outer London. While children of Asian origin make up three per cent of the primary population, the proportion rises to five per cent of the secondary population. In general this group achieves high standards, particularly in the secondary phase where they are concentrated in the selective former grant-maintained schools. Children of African and Afro-Caribbean origin make up three per cent of the primary population but only two per cent of the secondary population. They under-perform against pupils from other ethnic backgrounds. During the last year the LEA has had to cope with a sudden increase in the numbers of refugee children, largely from Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia: 264 arrived during 1999/2000, more than twice the total number for the previous six years.

147.   The small number of pupils with EAL (English as an additional language) receives good attention in the LEA planning. The relevant EDP activities link well to the priorities agreed for the Ethnic Minority and Travellers Achievement Grant (EMTAG). Sutton's strategy involves working with schools to increase the level of fluency in English of EAL pupils so that they are better equipped to achieve their potential in the classroom. The three areas of activity involve direct support for targeted pupils, improving the quality of teaching within schools and the dissemination of good practice. While this strategy has been well thought through, it is weakened by a lack of hard data on the attainment of pupils of ethnic minority origin and by poorly quantified outcomes. In addition, support for these children is not included in the LEA's literacy strategy.

148.   To date, the service has been provided centrally. The LEA has raised the issue of delegation regularly with schools, but there has been very little demand for it. However, in future conditions of the EMTAG will require delegation of part of the budget for this service to schools. The LEA is at an early stage in consulting schools on how to distribute funding to them. It anticipates that pupil-based data analysed by ethnic origin will be available to the service this year. This will provide the basis for a robust distribution formula, allow for effective monitoring of pupils' progress and enable better targeting of central support.

149.   This year a total of 317 pupils of ethnic minority origin are being targeted for support by a team of EAL peripatetic support teachers. This support includes a range of projects in primary and secondary schools in line with the relative needs of pupils. For example, a small project at one primary school supporting five pupils includes

tailored support, the provision of materials and resources for classroom assistants. While the LEA's initial response to the recent influx of refugees was good it has been less helpful to schools in meeting these pupils' longer-term needs. During school visits inspectors confirmed that good support was being provided in four schools for pupils with EAL. However, many schools have not yet given the issue of support for pupils of ethnic minority origin the priority it deserves and most have a long way to go in monitoring progress of these pupils effectively.

150. The LEA strategy for supporting Traveller children is well set out in the EDP. While the overall purpose is similar to that for pupils of ethnic minority origin, the activities also aim to improve their attendance and reduce the rate of exclusion. The strategy benefits significantly from the availability of better data on the smaller number of Traveller children.

151. An evaluation by OFSTED in 1999 of the Travellers service, run jointly by Sutton with Merton, identified effective leadership. The Travellers service is seen as responsive by primary headteachers and provides good training for staff. However, while the LEA has had some success in improving the attendance of Traveller children at Key Stage 4, this is an issue causing continuing concern. Intensive support for pupil transfer at age 11 has been targeted at four schools and support to deter disaffection and exclusion has been provided in two others.

Health, safety and child protection

152. The LEA support for schools in managing health and safety issues and promoting child protection is satisfactory.

153. The corporate health and safety unit provide advice on health and safety issues. The unit has good links with the AIS regarding curriculum issues and provides risk assessment training on a regular basis. The LEA's auditing of health and safety in schools by the Council has been weak.

154. The child strategy group, supported by the Quality Protects working party, is the main multi-agency forum promoting cross-service collaboration to support vulnerable children. It provides an effective impetus for senior staff to work together notwithstanding a vague joint protocol. There is multi-agency involvement in both the planning and delivery of training on child protection. The LEA conducts regular reviews of pupils on the child protection register and the checking of staff that come into contact with pupils is thorough. The list of designated teachers in schools with responsibility for oversight of child protection is updated regularly. Child protection guidelines have been issued to all schools and the LEA identifies and follows up where schools are not appearing to give this area sufficient priority.

155. In the school survey, support for health and safety and advice on child protection procedures were graded as satisfactory or better in primary and secondary schools. Inspectors confirmed these views during the course of school visits. The LEA had helped schools resolve problems that they had identified.

Children in public care

156.   Support for the education of children in public care is unsatisfactory. Sutton is a caring authority, but insufficient attention has been given to improving children's attainment. The need to focus on educational issues of children in care was highlighted in 1998, but progress on addressing these has been slow. Much of the development in this area has been recent and, at the time of the inspection, it was too early to judge the impact of the latest initiatives. The EDP activity on promoting social inclusion provides a coherent strategy for improving the attainment of these children. It included a commitment to complete a policy on the education of children in public care by September 2000 and revise targets for the children's attainment by July 2000, but both were deferred to November 2000.

157.   The LEA is lagging behind many other LEAs in only just appointing a post funded through Quality Protects. The support team is, however, small and turnover of staff and recruitment difficulties have delayed progress. The Council has recently given appropriate recognition to increasing support for children in public care by including it within the new corporate goal of achieving social inclusion.

158.   Arrangements are in place to ensure schools know which of their pupils are in public care and the LEA is in the process of completing the register of designated teachers in order to arrange and deliver a specific training programme. Funding to support these children is pooled and an education support officer post has recently been created in community services to work closely with colleagues in education. The newly appointed postholder is working well with educational psychologists and other support services.

159.   Emphasis is now being given to planning personal education plans (PEPs). Social workers will have a lead role and the target is for all children in public care to have a PEP in place by the end of March 2001. Officers acknowledge the need for a clearer joint protocol, better communication with schools and joint training.

160.   Sutton has recognised the need to improve educational attainment of children in public care. It has made a start but much more is needed. GCSE results for children in public care are not good when compared to other Sutton pupils. In the academic year 1999-2000, only 43 per cent of Year 11 children in the Council's care achieved a GCSE or GNVQ at grade A* - G, compared with 97 per cent for the rest of the Sutton Year 11 population. However, the proportion of children in public care with SEN is higher than that for all children in Sutton schools. The LEA has put in place tracking of pupils' achievement. Currently, detailed information is only available for those at the end of key stages. Evidence is not yet available on pupil progress between key stages and therefore no corporate judgement can be made on whether individual pupils are underachieving. In 1999, the LEA developed a screening system to identify children who were in need of additional support to improve their attainment at their key stage assessments. The LEA has used Standards Funds to provide different types of support for individual pupils. It is not clear how use of these funds is being evaluated or the extent to which the support has had any impact.

161.   Despite the deficiencies identified above, the responses to the school survey indicated overall satisfaction with support for children in public care in both primary

and secondary schools. Inspectors found a mixed picture in their visits to schools. Schools differed in their views on the effectiveness of links with social services and the quality of information flow about individual children. One school praised recent work by the newly appointed education support officer in helping with the preparation of PEPs.

Combating social exclusion and racism

162. LEA support for schools in helping combat social exclusion and racism is satisfactory. An implementation plan to address the recommendations of the Macpherson report has been agreed with schools and race awareness training is being delivered to clusters of schools. Schools have also been encouraged to develop their own race equality policies, but racist incidents are not yet consistently recorded and reported. At the time of the inspection, an equal opportunities policy, including guidance on racial harassment issues, was in the final stage of preparation. The LEA's moves towards inclusion are recent and consideration of the implications has not yet gone beyond headteachers.

Recommendations

In order to strengthen Asset Management Planning:
- improve the quality of Asset Management Plans to meet school and LEA needs to plan and prioritise building maintenance and development, and to support bids for government grant.

In order to improve provision through the pupil referral units:
- clarifying management responsibility and lines of accountability at the PRUs; and
- drawing up a service level agreement relating to outreach work by the secondary support service.

In order to improve support for the achievement of children in public care:
- monitoring individual pupils' progress rigorously and challenging schools to raise standards of attainment for them.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ensure better transparency and value for money in the deployment of resources:

- review and make more transparent corporate charges and maximise the use of interdepartmental service level agreements;
- review and reduce the charges for asset management; and
- revise the scheme for Fair Funding to make it simpler and based on a clearer education rationale.

In order to strengthen education development planning:

- articulate explicitly the impact of increasing school autonomy on the relationship between schools and the Council;
- ensure there is a clearer rationale for the allocation of activities to priorities in the EDP; and
- improve consistency in the presentation of EDP activities and actions.

In order to improve the provision of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:

- clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of schools and the LEA's services.

In order to improve the management and delivery of support for school improvement:

- improve the coherence of initiatives supporting improvement in literacy, numeracy and management;
- use the outcomes of the current Best Value review to put in place more effective ways of supporting ICT;
- inform schools promptly when they are placed in the under review category;
- develop the capacity to broker services to improve the choice and quality of services available to schools; and
- develop a comprehensive and coherent strategy for supporting gifted and talented pupils.

In order to strengthen strategic management:

- improve the quality of performance management information and service level agreements to provide members and officers with a better basis for evaluating and challenging performance.

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

- Secure better value for money and support for school improvement in the area of SEN by:

- developing better links between all parts of the LEA providing support for SEN pupils;
- ensuring statements include specific advice in relation to the extent and type of support;
- improving the deployment of education psychologists; and
- establishing arrangements to monitor the use of funds delegated to schools to support SEN.

In order to strengthen Asset Management Planning:

- improve the quality of Asset Management Plans to meet school and LEA needs to plan and prioritise building maintenance and development, and to support bids for government grant.

In order to improve provision through the pupil referral units:

- clarify management responsibility and lines of accountability at the PRUs; and
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In order to improve support for the achievement of children in public care:

- monitor individual pupils' progress rigorously and challenging schools to raise standards of attainment for them.