



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF  
STOCKTON ON TEES  
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PARAGRAPHS</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1 - 3
<b>COMMENTARY</b>	4 - 10
<b>SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</b>	
Context	11 - 14
Performance	15 - 18
Funding	19 - 23
Council structure	24 - 26
The Education Development Plan	27 - 30
Progress in implementing the EDP	31 - 34
Excellence in Cities	35 - 40
The allocation of resources to priorities	41 - 47
Approach to Best Value	48 - 50
<b>SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</b>	
Implications of other functions	51 - 52
Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention	53 - 60
Collection and analysis of data	61 - 63
Support for literacy	64 - 67
Support for numeracy	68 - 72
Support for information and communication technology	73 - 77
Support for schools causing concern	78 - 81
Support for governors	82 - 86
Support for school management	87 - 90
Support for early years education	91 - 93
<b>SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT</b>	
Corporate planning	94 - 98
Partnerships with external agencies and other local government departments	99 - 103
Management services	104 - 114
<b>SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</b>	
Strategy	115 - 118
Statutory obligations	119 - 121
Improvement and value for money	122 - 126
Best Value review of special educational needs support service	127 - 129

## **SECTION 5: ACCESS**

The supply of school places	130 - 134
Asset management planning	135 - 138
Admissions	139 - 141
Provision of education otherwise than at school	142 - 148
Attendance	149 - 153
Behaviour support	154 - 158
Health, safety, welfare, child protection	159 - 160
Children in public care	161 - 164
Support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage, including Travellers	165 - 168
The effectiveness of measures taken to combat racism	169 - 171
Support for gifted and talented pupils	172
Social inclusion	173 - 175

## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

## INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* (September 2000) which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA elected members, focus groups of headteachers and governors, staff in the education department and in other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all its schools. The response rate was 64 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 14 primary schools, four secondary schools, one special school and one pupil referral unit (PRU). The visits tested the views of headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money. The inspection also took account of relevant evidence from HMI's national monitoring work.

## COMMENTARY

4. Stockton-on-Tees became a unitary authority in April 1996. The borough is a mixture of urban, industrial and rural areas and exhibits diverse socio-economic characteristics within a small geographical area. The council has been very successful in attracting funding for regeneration. Nevertheless, unemployment stands at eight per cent. Despite this comparatively high level of social deprivation, educational attainment has improved steadily. Pupil attainment is in line with the national average at the end of all key stages. The rate of improvement is also generally in line with the national picture, except at the end of Key Stage 2 where, in all three core subjects, it is above the national trend.

5. Education has a central role within the corporate strategy for regeneration, the keynote of which is 'promoting achievement and tackling disadvantage'. Corporate planning is a strength of the authority. The commitment and leadership of elected members and officers are clear. Their aim is to make Stockton-on-Tees 'the best possible place in which to be educated'. The council is keen to take on national initiatives, such as local public service agreements, viewing them positively as opportunities for improvement. The LEA has made a clear statement that raising educational standards in schools is its top priority.

6. The LEA has many features which mark it out as effective. It works successfully with a range of partners to achieve its goals for social and educational inclusion. Relationships between the LEA and schools are good; consultation is purposeful and there is a high level of trust. National strategies, such as those for literacy and numeracy, have been well implemented. Partnership with the Education Action Zone (EAZ) is productive, particularly in relation to support for these strategies. The LEA's support for the early years development and childcare partnership demonstrates a firm commitment to securing quality provision. Support for behaviour and special educational needs is effective, and the number of permanent exclusions is below the national average.

7. The LEA carries out the majority of its functions effectively and there are few areas of major weakness. The LEA performs the following functions particularly effectively:

- provision of data on pupil attainment;
- support to schools for raising standards of literacy;
- support to schools for raising standards of numeracy;
- support for the development of information and communication technology (ICT) within the primary school curriculum;
- support to governors;
- support for early years;
- corporate planning;
- partnership with other agencies and groups;
- support to schools from financial and personnel services;
- the exercise of special educational needs functions in a way that supports school improvement; and
- support and training for child protection.

8. The LEA has not, however, moved quickly enough to define and implement the new relationship which the Government seeks to promote between local authorities and schools. The overall level of delegation of funding is high. However, members, officers and schools have recently recognised the need to delegate more of the responsibility for school improvement to the schools themselves and, with it, more of the resources to support school improvement. The LEA, through its advisory service, is currently providing schools with support on demand. This potentially undermines the development of school autonomy.

9. A few functions are not performed effectively:

- aspects of challenge and support to schools;
- aspects of support for provision of education otherwise than at school; and
- support for ethnic minority children.

10. The senior officers of the LEA provide effective leadership and management, and are aware of the weaknesses identified in the report. Since 1996, the LEA has demonstrated a commitment to development and a capacity for continuous improvement. The inspection team is confident that it is capable of responding to the recommendations in this report.

## SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

### Context

11. The borough of Stockton-on-Tees became a unitary authority in April 1996. Before that it was part of Cleveland County Council. The main centres of population are the towns of Stockton, Billingham, Thornaby and Yarm. The borough exhibits an extreme range of socio-economic characteristics within a small geographical area. It is the 26<sup>th</sup> most deprived district of 354 English local authorities<sup>1</sup>. Eleven of its thirty wards rank in the most deprived ten per cent nationally and 36 six per cent of the population live within these wards. In contrast, an above average proportion of wards are amongst the most affluent.

12. The population of Stockton-on-Tees is about 177,800<sup>2</sup>, with approximately 33,000 children of school age. While some parts of Stockton-on-Tees are experiencing significant demographic decline, the population in the south of the borough is expanding rapidly. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly above the national average. A very small proportion of pupils, three per cent, are of minority ethnic heritage. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need in primary and secondary schools and the percentage of primary-aged pupils educated in special schools is similar to that found nationally. However, the percentage of secondary pupils educated in special schools is well above the national figure.

13. The LEA maintains 65 primary schools and 13 secondary schools, only two with sixth forms. It inherited five special schools. There are two residential special schools for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and one for children with moderate learning difficulties and associated behavioural difficulties. These three schools provide places for pupils from across and beyond the Tees Valley area and are currently the subject of a proposed reorganisation. There are two pupil referral units. Six secondary and 12 primary schools have additional resource bases to provide for pupils with special educational needs. Two primary schools have Beacon status and four secondary schools have specialist school status. One special school has achieved specialist status in partnership with a similar school in a neighbouring local education authority. 67 per cent of students remain in full time education post-16, which is slightly below the national average. They attend a school sixth form, one of two sixth form colleges or the college of further education. 86 per cent of three year-olds attend early years provision on a part-time basis if their parents wish.

14. An EAZ comprising three secondary, 13 primary and two special schools has been established in the north of the borough. Secondary schools are in the first year of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative and performance targets have been enhanced to reflect this. Targets for achievement at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 have been further enhanced as part of the local public service agreement which the council has recently entered into with the government.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Indices of Local Deprivation 2000

<sup>2</sup> Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit

## Performance of schools

15. Overall, performance is in line with the national average and with that found in similar authorities<sup>3</sup>. Details are given below.

- OFSTED inspection data show that the attainment of pupils on entry to primary schools is slightly below the national average.
- Attainment at Key Stage 1, in all core subjects, is in line with statistical neighbours and national averages. The rate of improvement is also in line, except in writing, where it exceeds the national figure.
- At Key Stage 2, attainment in English is in line with the national average and above that of statistical neighbours, with 77.3 per cent of pupils gaining level 4 or above. In mathematics, 74.1 per cent of pupils reached level 4 or above which is in line with the national average and statistical neighbours. Attainment in science is a strength. The rate of improvement in all three core subjects is above the national trend.
- Attainment at Key Stage 3 in all core subjects is in line with the national average and that of its statistical neighbours. However, in English, fewer pupils achieve the higher levels of attainment than is found nationally or in similar authorities. Results at GCSE are in line with similar authorities and the national average. A higher percentage of pupils leave school with a qualification than is the average nationally. The rate of improvement at GCSE is above the national average.

16. OFSTED inspection data indicate that the percentage of primary and secondary schools judged good or very good (71 and 67 per cent respectively) is in line with the national average. Few primary schools have been identified as requiring much improvement.

17. Attendance in primary and secondary schools is above the national figures and is improving at a faster rate. Unauthorised absence is below the national average in both phases and is reducing at a faster rate than is found nationally and in similar authorities. The level of permanent exclusions in primary schools is in line with national figures. In secondary schools, the level is below that found nationally and well below the level found in similar authorities.

18. Since the LEA was established, four schools (three primary and one special) have been found by OFSTED to require special measures and one primary school to have serious weaknesses. Two schools have been removed from special measures and the other one was closed. In addition, the LEA has identified one special, two secondary and six primary schools as causing concern.

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<sup>3</sup> Stockton-on-Tees' statistical neighbours are Darlington, Rotherham, North Tyneside, Bolton, Bury, Calderdale, Wigan, Tameside, Wakefield and Doncaster.



## Funding

19. The Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for Stockton-on-Tees in 2001/02 is above its statistical neighbours but below the national average by 5.6 per cent. The council has received an education SSA increase below the national average for the past two years, mainly owing to a decline in the pupil population.

20. The council's policy is to spend 0.7 per cent above the education SSA each year, with the flexibility to carry forward any underspends to future years. However, since 1996, the council has spent marginally below SSA in all financial years apart from 2000/01 when it spent 1.9 per cent above. In 2001/02 the council passed on the SSA increase through to the education budget. Stockton-on-Tees has taken up all of its Standards Fund options.

21. The level of delegation for 2000-2001 was high at 85.7 per cent, compared with an average of 84.2 per cent in unitary authorities. This is set to increase further in 2001/02. In comparison with other unitary authorities the level of funding per pupil within the Individual Schools Budget ISB is better for primary schools than secondary schools. Details are shown below.

£ per pupil (ISB)	Primary Funding (£)	Secondary Funding (£)
Stockton-on-Tees	1,852	2,420
Statistical Neighbours	1,705	2,417
Unitary	1,807	2,524
England	1,869	2,559

*Source CIPFA Section 52 2000/2001 database*

22. Centrally retained funding is low at £380 per pupil compared to the unitary authority average of £427 and £446 nationally. The cost of individual services is generally well below the unitary and national averages.

23. The education budget benefits extensively from major programmes of government funding focused on urban deprivation and community regeneration, including EAZ and Excellence in Cities (EiC). The council has maximised funding available for building work so that total education capital expenditure amounted to over £7million in 2000/01.

## Council structure

24. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has 55 members comprising 38 Labour, 12 Conservative and five Liberal Democrats. The council adopted an interim structure in November 1999 under proposals for modernising local government. Following consultation, a revised structure is due to be implemented from October 2001. Currently, the cabinet consists of the leader, deputy leader and five cabinet members. Political responsibility for education rests with the cabinet and, in particular, the cabinet member for education, leisure and cultural services.

25. An executive scrutiny committee examines decisions and proposals made in cabinet. The education and lifelong learning select committee is responsible for monitoring the progress of the education elements of the community plan. Parent governors and the dioceses are appropriately represented on this committee. In June 2000, the improvement and development agency reported that the scrutiny function was not yet fully effective. Aspects of the revised council structure, together with further training opportunities, have been designed to address this.

26. The education, leisure and cultural services department is one of seven directorates under the line management of the chief executive. The department has a large senior structure which includes a director, a senior assistant director who leads the planning and review group and the lifelong learning division and five assistant directors responsible for the advisory service, resources, pupil services, leisure services and cultural services.

### **The Education Development Plan**

27. The EDP has seven priorities:

- school evaluation;
- developing people;
- literacy;
- numeracy;
- ICT;
- improving the learning environment; and
- inclusion.

28. The strategy for school improvement as outlined in the EDP is for the most part sound. It is based on a detailed audit of schools' performance and a thorough analysis of OFSTED Section 10 reports and school development plans. National priorities are well covered. Local priorities are addressed in 'developing people' which covers professional development and 'improving the learning environment' which focuses upon issues such as continuity and progression and curriculum enrichment. The school survey indicates that schools consider the clarity and relevance of the EDP to be better than satisfactory. Consultation on the original EDP was thorough. The EDP was approved by the Secretary of State for three years.

29. Links with corporate aims and plans are made explicit. Links between the EDP, EAZ, EiC and other major initiatives such as Sure Start, the health action zone and Single Regeneration Budget 6, 'write to read', are clearly identified and coherent. The 2001/2 plan includes appropriately increased targets of attainment to reflect existing improvements in results and developments, such as, the EAZ and EiC initiatives.

30. The EDP has some weaknesses. Overall the targets set are challenging, but activities are not consistently well focused on meeting these targets because groups of pupils or schools who need the most support are not identified sufficiently clearly. In some cases, the activities themselves are too general. Evaluation of the outcomes and impact of some activities is difficult to achieve given the absence of

detail in the tasks and the lack of sharp evaluative criteria. The plan does not include targets for the attainment of pupils of minority ethnic heritage; those for children in public care are not yet based on individual pupil performance.

### **Progress in implementing the Education Development Plan**

31. Overall, progress with implementing EDP activities is satisfactory and good in literacy, numeracy, ICT and early years. Arrangements for the monitoring of progress are satisfactory and appropriately involve headteachers. An annual report is presented to the education, leisure and cultural services select committee. The EDP working group meets termly to monitor progress.

32. The up-dated 2001/2 plan retains the original priorities. The layout of the plan has been amended to improve accessibility and a small number of activities have been deleted or reorganised. A significant but overdue addition to the inclusion priority is the recognition of the need to develop anti-racist policies and practices in education.

33. Progress against the EDP targets set for 2002 is good. In 2000, Key Stage 2 results in English exceeded the LEA target and are now just 2.7 per cent below the target set for 2002. Key Stage 2 results in mathematics exceeded the LEA target and are now 5.9 per cent below the 2002 target. GCSE results in 2000 showed satisfactory improvement. The target for 2002 has been increased by two per cent to 50 per cent to reflect the additional 'value-added' elements brought to the school improvement process by EAZ and EiC initiatives. One outcome of the recent local public service agreement is to increase that target by a further two per cent by 2003.

34. Good progress has been made towards the targets set for exclusions and attendance. The 2000 target for unauthorised absence was met by primary schools and exceeded by secondary schools.

### **Excellence in Cities**

35. The LEA has participated in EiC initiative from September 2000. The initiative is appropriately managed although the partnership board does not include representatives from the primary or tertiary phases, or from local industry. It has provided a valuable opportunity for secondary headteachers to work together on developing strategies to raise levels of achievement. Links have been established with phase one partnerships, related particularly to the development of city learning centres (CLCs) and learning mentors. Links have also been established with partnerships in the second phase.

36. Targets have been enhanced as a result of contributing to this initiative but do so using a relatively unsophisticated approach. Moreover, a comparatively unchallenging target for the percentage of pupils achieving A\*/A grades at GCSE has been set which represents an increase of only one per cent. Targets for the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grades have been increased across all secondary schools. However, insufficient account has been taken of the differential impact of various initiatives on both schools and individual pupils.

37. In the first instance, progress was slow. However, clear progress has now been made on three of the seven EiC strands. Learning mentors are working effectively, and in line with schools' priorities, in all schools. Five schools have set up learning support units and in doing so have relinquished casework support from the behaviour support team. Two schools reported an improvement in the attendance of pupils in these units.

38. Schools have used common criteria to identify their gifted and talented pupils with distinct programmes developed for each year's cohort. A number of activities including university summer schools and master classes have been organised for these pupils but these activities lack coherence and have yet to impact on classroom practice. A more focused LEA-wide approach is planned for next year.

39. Progress on the other strands is more limited. Two small EAZs are being set up, but there have been difficulties in recruiting one of the managers. Maximising the expertise of the specialist and Beacon schools is at an early stage of development.

40. The two CLCs are expected to be operational from early 2002 although some problems are being experienced with planning permission at one of the sites. The focus of one is appropriately on the production by schools of resources related to an agreed subject specialism<sup>4</sup>.

### **The allocation of resources to priorities**

41. The LEA's allocation of resources to priorities has some strengths, and is satisfactory overall. The council has effective procedures in place to control revenue and capital budgets and has healthy general fund balances. There is a clear scheme for financial management largely devolved to departments and medium term financial planning is good.

42. Education has been a priority for the council since its inception, and this is recognised by schools. School budgets have been protected against any council budget reductions. All SSA increases have been passed on and the education service has benefited from some growth and from the recycling of resources made available from a recent revision of rateable values.

43. The council has consistently set budgets for education above SSA and, in 2001/02, at more than one per cent above SSA. The council's managed transfer resource scheme allows the carry forward of underspends or overspends. Annual underspends resulted in a balance of £2.6million in 2000/01. Education spending is now benefiting from this accumulated balance.

44. Corporate services charged to the education department are regulated by detailed service level agreements. The charges for corporate personnel are too

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<sup>4</sup> Four of the secondary schools in Stockton-on-Tees are specialist schools in Arts, Languages, Technology and Sport. One special school has specialist status for Technology.

high. The basis for corporate and central charges is not sufficiently transparent either to central departments or schools.

45. Consultation on budget issues is thorough and timely. In discussion with the local management of schools working group, the LEA has made satisfactory progress in simplifying the funding formula and continues to do so. Agreement was reached in 1999 on a funding model to allocate future growth in funding on a 3:1 ratio between primary and secondary schools. However, this decision did not take sufficient account of the financial comparisons for individual school budgets set out in the funding section of this report.

46. Good use is made of external funding to support local education priorities with £28million of capital and revenue funding coming into the LEA. A substantial minority of schools indicated that they receive insufficient advice on how they could individually access more external funding. The financial benefits of the public service agreement entered into by the council between 2001 and 2004 have not yet impacted on schools.

47. The aggregate primary school balances at the end of 1999/2000 were too high at 7.5 per cent of the total delegated budget. Secondary school balances were 2.2 per cent in aggregate for the same period.

#### **Recommendations:**

##### **In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:**

- review corporate charges made to the education service in time for 2002/03;
- review the allocation of any growth funding between the primary and secondary sectors, taking account of all aspects of delegated school budgets; and
- monitor school balances more closely and take further action to reduce primary schools' year end balances.

#### **Approach to Best Value**

48. Arrangements for Best Value within the council and education department are satisfactory. Significant progress has been made in establishing a culture of performance management though there are still some weaknesses in target-setting in service plans. Education service planning is clear but there are weaknesses in the extent to which it is aligned to financial planning.

49. The council began to use the Best Value process before its statutory introduction and has rightly reduced the number of reviews originally planned, now concentrating on a thematic approach. The Best Value Performance Plan is a well-produced and clear document, setting out the context in which education reviews will operate. Two education pilot reviews of the special educational needs support services and governor services have been carried out. The framework against which future reviews will take place is sound and the revised governmental

structures proposed for introduction within the council in November 2001 are intended to ensure greater participation of elected members in the process.

50. The LEA has organised training for schools and provided advice on their responsibilities for Best Value, including model school policies. However, there remains a mixed understanding in schools of what is expected.

### **Recommendations**

#### **In order to improve the approach to Best Value:**

- align education service planning more closely to financial planning; and
- improve schools' understanding of their Best Value responsibilities.

## **SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Implications of other functions**

51. Management services, in particular the effective support provided by financial and personnel services, allow headteachers to concentrate on raising standards and provide an effective infrastructure which assists headteachers in managing schools.

52. The strategy and services for special educational needs and the majority of services supporting social inclusion are effective. However, currently there are weaknesses in the LEA's management of education other than at school and its support for children of minority ethnic heritage.

### **Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention**

53. The LEA's strategy for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention to schools is satisfactory overall, but has some significant weaknesses. The LEA has shared a definition of challenge and support with schools, but it is not sufficiently comprehensive. Monitoring is sound. There is good quality support for schools but it is not sufficiently well targeted at those most in need. Furthermore, owing to a lack of delegation of advisory service funding, schools have too few opportunities to choose alternative providers. Challenge is too narrowly confined to the target-setting process and not sufficiently applied to aspects of leadership and management in schools. Criteria for intervention are appropriate and are identified in the EDP.

54. Schools are clear about the purposes of LEA monitoring and sound procedures are in place. The LEA has a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of its schools. The performance of all schools is monitored through an analysis of performance data and information and through termly visits, which include moderated self-evaluation procedures. This enables the LEA to identify accurately schools for intensive support from literacy and numeracy consultants, who constructively report back to advisers on the impact of their work in schools. There are regular cross-divisional meetings with officers from personnel and finance to review school performance. However, this monitoring has not identified successfully all aspects of school performance that cause concern. The LEA has not always used its knowledge of schools, for instance, to extend challenge from target-setting into other aspects of leadership and management. The LEA has not identified any school as a cause for concern in terms of leadership and management, even when inspection reports highlight this as an area of weakness.

55. The quality of support is good, but there are weaknesses in its deployment. A strategic statement on support to schools indicates that support will be differentiated in inverse proportion to need and that self-managing schools will be promoted. In practice, these intentions are undermined by a culture of support on demand with the result that support is not always sufficiently well targeted at schools most in need. All schools have a basic, annual entitlement of the equivalent of three days of visits by their attached adviser to cover monitoring of standards, involvement in a local model of school self-evaluation and issues determined by the school.

However, some schools, for example, Beacon schools and those identified through inspection as having no key issues, do not need this level of support.

56. Overall, leadership of school improvement is satisfactory. The school improvement division includes the advisory service; the management information service; the governor support service and support for literacy; numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Elected members and senior officers are aware of the need to review the advisory service in the context of the Government's Code of Practice on LEA/School Relationships. A Best Value review of school improvement is timetabled for April 2002, which is too late. Although many headteachers expressed a wish for the advisory service to remain centrally funded, there is growing recognition amongst them of the need for change.

57. Headteachers receive a written record of advisers' visits to schools, but these are often too descriptive. They do not always identify strengths, weaknesses and action points clearly enough and they are not routinely copied to the chair of governors. These weaknesses limit the impact of these reports and undermine the management role of the governing body.

58. In addition to their attached role, most advisers spend approximately one-third of their time delivering well-supported in-service courses which are highly regarded by schools. The advisers have, collectively, appropriate expertise covering primary and secondary phases, early years, literacy, numeracy and ICT. Gaps in subject expertise, particularly for the secondary phase, are appropriately covered by joint arrangements with neighbouring LEAs and good practitioners from Stockton schools. Outside consultants are occasionally bought in.

59. Performance management of the advisory service is effective in ensuring a match to identified priorities and contributing to an evaluation of progress with the EDP. There are good induction procedures for advisers and all receive appropriate training in literacy, numeracy and other national initiatives.

60. In view of the average cost of the service and the good quality of support received by schools the advisory service gives satisfactory value for money.



## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:**

- bring forward the Best Value review of school improvement;
- produce a strategy for the future development of school improvement which reflects the code of practice on LEA-school relationships, spells out what is intended and how it is to be achieved, covers how staff are deployed, distinguishes between those activities which are funded centrally and those which schools are able to purchase and enables schools to have greater choice;
- extend the provision of challenge to the leadership and management of schools; and
- ensure that written records of visits to schools identify clearly strengths, weaknesses and points for action and that they are routinely sent to headteachers and chairs of governing bodies.

## **Collection and analysis of data**

61. The LEA provides schools with a good range of useful performance data. The management information service provides performance, local benchmarking and comparative data that complements national data. This includes a three-year performance review and value-added analyses for Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 at pupil level, school level and LEA level. Analysis is also provided by gender and free school meals entitlement. The LEA is moving towards building up individual profiles to track pupils' progress and is funding schools to do the optional Year 4 national tests. Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and those in public care are tracked individually, but no overall data are collated or analysed to determine a profile of their progress, trends or improvement needs.

62. The support given to schools and the use made of the data are satisfactory and improving. Data are circulated at appropriate times and in a sequence that enables schools to make good use of them. The analyses are clearly explained. Increasingly, the service is customising the data it provides to show a more accurate picture of individual schools. Training is provided for governors and headteachers so that they can use data more effectively. The transfer of data electronically is at an early stage but is being developed at points of transfer across the key stages.

63. The target-setting process is a key element of the school self-evaluation programme and the attached advisers' visits to schools. The process is well understood by schools, who accept the challenge it presents. Schools are becoming increasingly skilled at using and analysing the data independently. Indicative targets are set centrally, based on information about individual pupils'

prior attainment. These are accompanied by details of individual pupils who need to improve for the schools to meet the targets. Schools are satisfied that most discussions with attached advisers are both rigorous and realistic.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the support to schools for the use of performance data:**

- Collate data on the attainment and progress of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and pupils in public care and share them with schools so that they can monitor the performance of their own pupils.

## **Support for literacy**

64. The LEA's support for literacy is good. The LEA is well on its way to achieving its realistic key stage 2 target of 80 per cent of pupils achieving at least level 4 in 2002. Implementation of the national literacy strategy is well managed by a general adviser with two full-time primary consultants. A post of secondary consultant is currently vacant. Schools commented on the high quality of the support and training provided. Appropriate priorities and development tasks are clearly defined in the EDP. All schools know that they have a basic entitlement and access to training. Data are used effectively to identify groups of pupils in need of extra support. The emphasis on improving the teaching of writing and the attainment of boys in Key Stage 1 is already having an impact on rates of improvement at levels 2 and 3.

65. About two-thirds of consultants' time is spent on training and monitoring progress by observing literacy lessons. These visits usually result in detailed and challenging reports, which provide the schools with a clear agenda for improvement. Furthermore, as a result of the support of the literacy adviser and the consultants, teachers are more comfortable using data to set school-based targets.

66. In addition to the national training, the team has developed courses to meet schools' needs, identified through systematic data analysis. A strong feature has been the way in which subsequent classroom observations have focused on the particular aspect of the training to evaluate its impact. The team has made substantial and positive contributions to LEA intervention programmes. In addition, 18 'expert' teachers are involved in delivering well-received demonstration lessons. Training has also been provided for English as an additional language (EAL) team and for headteachers of schools where numbers of pupils with EAL are the greatest.

67. Support for the development of literacy in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Summer schools have taken place in all of the 13 secondary schools, in four special schools and a PRU. Training for Key Stage 3 has already started in some schools and secondary teachers are making visits to primary schools to see expert literacy practitioners. Training has also been provided for secondary teaching assistants. The approach is appropriately and firmly based on developing language across the curriculum.

## **Support for numeracy**

68. Support provided for numeracy is good. The LEA has a challenging task to help its schools reach the 2002 target of 80 percent, but it is very well placed to do so. The management of the implementation of the national numeracy strategy is efficient and effective. The numeracy team is appropriately staffed and there is a clear definition of roles and responsibilities. Schools value the team's enthusiasm, commitment, focused support and high-quality training. The LEA provides good and effective intensive support to approximately 16 per cent of its primary schools.

69. Currently there are 19 trained primary leading mathematics teachers. They provide good demonstration lessons and are in increasing demand. Schools have welcomed the programme to train leading mathematics teachers, and teachers have been eager to participate.

70. Prior to the official start of the strategy, six schools were involved in a pilot project in which master-classes for gifted and talented Year 6 pupils developed open-ended exploration. As a result, targets in those schools were increased by 15 per cent and a transition co-ordinator is now in post to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the project.

71. A particular strength is the way in which the numeracy team members work with other teams in the LEA. They work in close collaboration with the literacy consultants so that support and training are sensitively managed to avoid undue pressure on schools. They have also developed informative and attractive 'bookmarks' to develop pupils' use of appropriate language in mathematics. A monthly meeting with the information and communication technology (ICT) curriculum team has resulted in the recent creation of a very good website. Consultants and advisers monitor numeracy developments effectively.

72. The LEA's approach to raising achievement in Key Stage 3 has been very good, comprehensive, prompt and well considered. Early training has been provided to raise awareness in secondary schools. Twilight training sessions have been held for staff covering aspects of numeracy and governors have been kept well informed. A secondary consultant works with an established curriculum consultation group. Year 7 teachers have been enabled to observe mathematics lessons in key stages 1 and 2. The numeracy team ensured that secondary departments received all the primary training materials. Master-classes in mathematics for gifted and talented Year 6 pupils have been held. The LEA intends to train at least eight leading mathematics teachers (LMTs) for Key Stage 3 by September 2001.

## **Support for information and communication technology**

73. A small, dedicated and enthusiastic team of advisers and consultants provide very good support to primary schools for the development of ICT in the curriculum. Support to secondary schools is variable in quantity and in some cases inadequate. ICT rightly features as a priority in the EDP with an appropriate emphasis on using ICT to raise standards in literacy and numeracy and to improve the quality of teaching in other curriculum areas. The ICT team's annual service plan is consistent

with the priorities identified in the EDP. Nevertheless, no targets have been set by the LEA for raising standards in ICT at the end of each key stage. 'Levelling' of pupils' work is still in an early stage of development. The ICT team has produced good guidance for schools on ICT development planning, internet policies and the use of software. Leading ICT teachers have been identified and are used to provide demonstration lessons and a secondary Consultation Group for ICT provides a mechanism for sharing good practice.

74. OFSTED school inspections show a greater proportion of schools that are making good progress at ICT at Key Stages 1 and 2 than is found nationally. However, half of the LEA's secondary schools were found to be making poor progress at Key Stages 3 and 4; this is a worse situation than found nationally and reflects a lack of intervention by the LEA in secondary schools with inadequate ICT provision. Several secondary schools have recently received well-focused targeted technical support. The LEA does not know how many secondary schools are meeting statutory requirements for the teaching of ICT at Key Stage 4. Nevertheless, the ICT team is working with ICT teachers in the development of Key Stage 3 assessment materials. The LEA organised road shows of New Opportunities Fund (NOF) providers, although schools have not always made good use of this.

75. Primary schools have received good support for the purchase and location of National Grid for Learning (NGfL) funded computer hardware. In particular, schools have appreciated sound advice on networking arrangements. Primary ICT co-ordinators are well supported. Unusually, but very wisely, the LEA has also begun to monitor the impact of NGfL funds in schools through a programme of visits to each primary school. The LEA has entered a partnership with a leading NOF provider and has effectively supported the primary schools participating in this scheme.

76. The ICT team offers a broad range of training to primary schools, including courses focused on developing teachers' ICT skills as well as supporting the development of ICT in different curriculum areas. The European computer driving license course for headteachers was particularly appreciated. Courses for secondary school teachers are more limited, but include targeted use of the internet and support for gifted and talented pupils.

77. The ICT team has developed a very useful and interesting web-site which contains teaching resources and information as well as a virtual teachers' network. Although this was used by a number of the primary schools visited, several schools complained that access to the site was too slow.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the attainment of secondary school pupils in ICT:**

- Establish, in consultation with secondary schools, a plan of support to:
  - develop an appropriate training programme in the use of ICT within the secondary curriculum to complement NOF provision;
  - support schools in developing arrangements for 'levelling' and moderating pupils' work at Key Stage 3;
  - provide intensive support to those secondary schools who require it most, determined after an audit of schools' needs and in consultation with headteachers; and
  - ensure schools meet their statutory requirements at Key Stage 4.

### **Support for schools causing concern**

78. Support for schools causing concern which are identified by OFSTED inspection is satisfactory, but early identification of schools' difficulties is unsatisfactory. It is not based on a sufficiently rigorous application of the comprehensive list of criteria for identification which is included in the EDP. A relatively small number of schools have been identified by OFSTED as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses since the LEA was formed in 1996. Two schools, which were judged to require special measures in the period 1996 to 1998, made the progress necessary and were removed from this category; another school was closed after six months.

79. The LEA has recognised the need to improve its procedures for identifying schools causing concern. In the last 12 months, one special school has been deemed by OFSTED to require special measures and one primary school to have serious weaknesses. The LEA had concerns about both schools prior to their inspections, but had placed neither on the list of schools causing concern to the LEA. The special school was aware of and shared the LEA's concern, and was receiving additional support. In the case of the primary school, the LEA's monitoring was not sufficiently rigorous to identify the lack of progress since its previous inspection and provide officers with the confidence to act on these concerns. Furthermore, an analysis of the main findings of Section 10 inspection reports, indicates that LEA procedures are not yet sufficiently robust in identifying concerns, such as insufficient progress on key issues or weaknesses in the evaluation of performance, and then supporting improvement in leadership and management.

80. Procedures for support once a school is placed in special measures or is identified as having serious weaknesses are clear and appropriate. For each school an action group is established and additional funding is identified appropriately to support the implementation of an action plan. The link adviser is allocated additional

time to support the school and, where appropriate, subject/phase advisers and consultants are involved. The quality of support for management and quality of teaching is satisfactory. Regular reports on progress go from the action group to the director of education who, in turn, reports to elected members.

81. Nine schools are currently deemed to be a cause of concern to the LEA. Through the self-evaluation process, schools are involved in the identification of concerns. The process is effective when concerns relate to standards of attainment and the quality of teaching and learning. For each school an appropriate action plan is put in place and the LEA provides satisfactory support in the form of additional adviser time and additional funds although schools in this category continue to receive other support on request.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to improve support for schools causing concern:**

- ensure that schools' difficulties are identified at an early stage and that monitoring arrangements are sufficiently robust to identify concerns about leadership and management in schools.

### **Support for governors**

82. The support provided for governors is good. It is very well received by governors and headteachers. The clerking and training services are both traded and all schools, bar one, purchase the clerking service, which is seen as indispensable. An extensive, well-targeted programme of training is offered, based on a thorough identification of needs. Buy-back arrangements are appropriately differentiated to enable schools to purchase support at a level relevant to their needs. Governors report that they make an effort to attend training and briefing sessions, because they rate them highly.

83. The governor support service is working appropriately with governing bodies to improve their capacity to support school improvement. The quality of information provided to governors is good. Governors appreciate the regular newsletter and the easy access to telephone advice, the focus groups and termly briefings with the director of education, senior officers and advisers. They feel well informed about national and local priorities.

84. Considerable efforts have been, and are continuing to be, made to recruit new governors. These have successfully reduced the percentage of unfilled vacancies from over 20 per cent in 2000 to approximately seven per cent. One of the many successful strategies has been a 'one-stop' shop which enables schools to co-opt governors. This has resulted in 18 new governors. The service has developed a website and is currently working with the ethnic minority community to encourage greater representation. The latter is a notable strength.

## **Best Value review of governing bodies support and training services**

85. A pilot best value review of the governing bodies support and training service began in July 1999 and was completed in December 2000. The review followed the corporate council guidance available at the time and included a realistic challenge about the need for the service. However, the review took too long to complete and was not sufficiently thorough in separating the statutory and traded elements of the service.

86. There is limited competition to provide governors' support services. The review compared the cost and quality of the service with other LEA providers. This resulted in a benchmarking club being formed to assist future appraisal of the service. Consultation was limited. However in the school survey, the governor service received the best score of the 96 LEAs inspected to date. The review resulted in a set of relevant recommendations most of which were to develop or enhance existing activities. The service clearly has the capacity to continue to improve. The two most substantial recommendations, to establish a governing body focus group and to encourage schools to use their allocated standards fund grant to purchase governor training, were implemented by the service in April 2000, eight months before the review was finally published.

### **Support for school management**

87. Support for school management is satisfactory. The LEA's training strategy is clearly articulated and is tailored appropriately to generic and school-specific issues. Appropriate improvement strategies are threaded throughout the EDP. There is an appropriate emphasis on improving the quality of teaching. The school self-evaluation programme has successfully concentrated schools' efforts and headteachers value the external verification that it provides. However the approach to the leadership and management aspect is not sufficiently rigorous.

88. A satisfactory range of management training is provided for headteachers and deputies. The authority encourages aspiring and existing headteachers to participate in the national leadership programmes. The induction programme for new headteachers is thoughtfully constructed and seen as effective. Headteacher mentors are provided with training and are well used and appreciated. Support is continued more informally beyond the first year. However, acting headteachers have not been involved in this training. Support for middle managers is limited.

89. Support for newly-qualified teachers is good. The induction programme is thorough and well regarded in schools. In-school mentors are well trained by the LEA.

90. A satisfactory range of training opportunities is provided for teachers, mostly by appropriate LEA advisers and officers, enhanced by external providers. Good use is made of advisers from neighbouring LEAs and of the expertise of advanced skills teachers, leading mathematics teachers and secondary heads of department. The LEA has recently set out and begun to implement a strategy for the dissemination of good practice in an attempt to bring together a number of separate initiatives.

## **Recommendations:**

### **In order to improve support for school management the LEA should:**

- strengthen the leadership and management element of the school self-evaluation programme; and
- provide or broker more opportunities for middle managers to develop leadership and management expertise.

## **Support for early years**

91. The LEA's support for early years education is good. The comprehensive early years development and childcare plan is based on a thorough audit of local needs. It identifies an appropriate range of targets for improvement in the quality, quantity and variety of provision, and activities to achieve these targets. The LEA and early years development and childcare partnership have fulfilled their duty to provide places for all four year-olds and are on course to meet their target for places for all three year-olds by 2004.

92. The LEA has made a significant contribution to the partnership. The senior assistant director acts as chairperson. A multi-disciplinary corporate team, located within the department of education, leisure and cultural services, supports the implementation of the plan and ensures effective co-ordination with other relevant plans such as the EDP, other statutory plans and the Sure Start initiative. The education and lifelong learning select committee receives regular updates on progress.

93. LEA evidence, based on the findings of inspections, shows that all non-maintained settings are at least satisfactory. For those settings which have been inspected twice, it is clear that previous key issues have been addressed and further improvement has taken place. OFSTED reports show that in almost all schools pupils in the early years make good or satisfactory progress. LEA analysis of baseline assessment scores suggests that the rate of improvement is above the national average. Support for early years education is included in the EDP priority on inclusion. There is an appropriate emphasis on raising standards of attainment, particularly for pupils entering reception classes by improving the quality of teaching and learning in early years settings. All settings have adopted the early learning goals following well received, cross-sector training on the implementation of the foundation stage. Staff in private and voluntary settings have access to well-targeted support from a qualified teacher and opportunities to work with staff in maintained settings.



## **SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

### **Corporate planning**

94. Corporate planning is good. The council's community plan sets out clearly the key priorities for the borough for the next three years within the context of 'promoting achievement and tackling disadvantage'. The priority given to education by elected members and officers is strong and well known to schools. Improving opportunity and achievement in education and lifelong learning has a central place within the corporate strategy of regeneration. The council welcomes and responds well to external evaluation. For example, an improvement and development agency review of the council took place in June 2000 and was followed by a timely and appropriate action plan. Furthermore, the council is keen to be involved in national initiatives. In April 2001, it entered into a local public service agreement with the government with the prime aim of finding innovative ways of tackling social exclusion. The agreement has clear links with the community plan and enhances the council's existing targets for improving the educational attainment of 14 and 16 year-olds. At the time of the inspection, the effect of the agreement on LEA services was not yet clear.

95. Effective procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate and departmental plans are in place. There is coherence between the priorities identified in the strategic plans of the council and those of the education, leisure and cultural services department. There is a sound, borough-wide approach to performance management. This approach ensures that departmental plans are regularly monitored, reviewed and reported to the education and lifelong learning select committee.

96. The leadership of the department of education, leisure and cultural services is effective and well regarded by the majority of schools. It has a number of strengths. Lines of communication and accountability between members and officers are clear and the respective responsibilities of members and officers are well defined. There is a well understood scheme of delegation of decision-making to senior officers which ensures that all decisions, financial and otherwise, are taken at proper speed. The rationale behind decisions is transparent. Officers provide clear, detailed information for elected members who report that they find informal briefings helpful.

97. The department's planning and performance management are effective and fit within the council's good planning framework. An annual service plan is produced which describes the contribution that the department will make to corporate aims and helpfully identifies linkages with other corporate and departmental plans. The organisation and management of the department ensures effective cross-service working to deliver the school improvement strategy.

98. There is good consultation and communication between the LEA and its schools. Useful documents and proposals for improvements have emanated from recent headteacher secondments to look at aspects of partnership working and primary-secondary transition. There are regular, appropriate opportunities for headteachers, teacher associations and governors to meet purposefully with officers.

## **Partnership with external agencies and other local government departments**

99. Partnership working is a strong and key element in the strategy for 'promoting achievement and tackling disadvantage'. The council has set up appropriate and very effective fora for partners to contribute to policy and to make a meaningful contribution to its work. In particular, at a strategic level, there are good and productive links between education and social services, although at an operational level, possibly owing to staff shortages, schools have experienced occasional breakdowns in communication. There are effective consultation mechanisms, for example, in relation to the behaviour support plan, which is currently being reviewed.

100. Links with the health authority are also good in the main, although an agreement on joint funding protocols between education, social services and health has been held up. Schools are particularly appreciative of the support they receive from doctors and other health officials for only certifying pupil absence for illness in the most justified of cases. Ten schools are participating in the healthy schools award and a further 16 have signed up for the second cohort.

101. The LEA has good working relationships with the local dioceses, demonstrated by effective co-operation in relation to an aided Private Finance Initiative scheme. There are good links with the police who have an officer dedicated to work with primary schools and have supported the LEA in truancy patrols.

102. The LEA has made significant and positive contributions to several Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programmes. The adult education service is involved in family learning initiatives focusing on helping parents/carers to support childrens' learning. The LEA has an effective working relationship with the North Stockton community Education Action Zone. The Director of the EAZ is a member of the EDP working group and meets regularly with senior officers. There are examples of effective collaborative work between the LEA and EAZ, in particular to support leadership and management, literacy and numeracy.

103. The LEA makes an effective contribution to learning partnerships in the Tees Valley region, in particular the development of the Connexions network and liaison with the learning and skills council. The LEA is purposefully trying to co-ordinate the growing number of post-16 initiatives and programmes and demonstrate their relevance to schools.

## **Management services**

104. Management support services are satisfactory overall, with strengths in finance and personnel services. The LEA produces detailed service information, in a consistent corporate style, well in advance of the start of the financial year. This gives schools sufficient time to make informed choices on which services to buy-back. However, service specifications offer limited choice for schools, packages lack differentiation and there is some confusion between statutory and traded services. Furthermore, the arrangements used to sign up for traded services, though agreed with headteachers, are cumbersome, too bureaucratic and take too long to complete.

105. The LEA agreed with schools to offer a simple one year buy-back arrangement for services delegated to schools for the first time in 2000/01. The documentation clearly stated that a charge equal to the sum delegated would be made for the first year only. For 2001/02 the LEA has offered schools a two-year service level agreement but it is not clear if the simple buy-back arrangements have continued or if the charge for individual services is different from the original budget delegated.

106. Currently information is not supplied to schools on other service providers, although the LEA is investigating offering a brokerage service to schools. Although the council has a procurement strategy in place, it does not include schools and it has not been embedded into education service practice.

107. **Financial services** for schools are good. Schools rightly value the service which is customer-focused and of a high quality. The service is offered at two levels; financial services, which is bought back by all schools, and an additional bursary service purchased by 91 per cent of primary schools and 38 per cent of secondary schools. A weakness of the financial service level agreement (SLA) is the packaging of support as a single service restricting schools' choices to buy separate elements of the service. Moreover, packages have been constructed to cater for the current situation where no school has an external bank account.

108. The finance team works with schools to improve the quality of Best Value statements submitted by schools as part of the budget process. Written guidance has been issued to all schools including a suggested model Best Value statement. Training courses aimed at linking financial and strategic planning have been delivered jointly to schools by the finance team and the advisory service. Recommendations made in school audit reports are constructive and helpful to schools. The school audit programme checklist is thorough and relevant. Internal audit services are rated as generally good in the school survey.

109. **Personnel services** to schools are good. The school survey rated all aspects of the education personnel service as good and this confirms the LEAs own previous service evaluation. All schools buy-back the service, but officers are not complacent and continue to look for ways to improve the service. Officers in the personnel team work well with the school improvement team to provide support to schools giving concern and to schools tackling staffing reductions.

110. Development of the personnel service is restricted by out-dated personnel system software, which inhibits, for example, statistical and trends analysis on teacher absence. Stockton had the highest teacher absence of all unitary authorities in 2000, but the service plan for personnel does not currently have reducing teacher absence as an issue or an area for development. This is a clear weakness.

111. **Payroll services** to schools are good and this is confirmed by the school survey. The service is located with the education personnel team and schools benefit from the close working relationship of the two teams. Education personnel are taking on the responsibility of providing payroll services for the whole council in order to reduce the overall payroll cost to the council, which is too high.

112. **ICT administration** support to schools is satisfactory overall, although there are some weaknesses. From April 2001 the ICT administration staff have amalgamated into one team within the education service. Prior to April there was confusion about who was providing different elements of the service and a lack of co-ordination. The LEA has not delegated any funding to schools for ICT administration support. This is unsatisfactory. Stockton schools are connected to the council's wide area network and this is partly the reason given for not delegating any funding to schools. However, the ICT administration budget also supports maintenance and development of schools' individual software and administration hardware.

113. The ICT administration strategy has been slow in developing, although there are now signs of co-ordinated direction. The LEA has made progress in working in partnership with schools to ensure data rich management information systems exists in schools. Pilot projects have demonstrated that the LEA is in a good position to undertake the pupil level annual census data return for January 2002 for all schools. Plans are in place to implement fully integrated computer networks in schools, covering both curriculum and administration and to provide a single point for support for ICT.

114. **Property services** to schools are satisfactory; buy-back of services offered by the LEA is high and schools rated the services as generally satisfactory in the school survey. **Grounds maintenance** and **cleaning services** to schools provided by the LEA are satisfactory and confirmed as such in the school survey. Catering services to schools are satisfactory overall.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve management services:**

- offer schools greater choice and differentiation by packaging service level agreements at a more detailed level and by providing a menu driven approach for individual services;
- streamline the procedure in place for schools to sign up for LEA services by combining the service proposal stage and the service level agreement documentation;
- ensure greater transparency between budgets delegated to schools and the cost of services offered by the LEA;
- set a target for, and work towards a reduction in, teacher absence; and
- consult with schools on the method of delegation to be used for ICT administration and ensure relevant budgets are delegated, as soon as possible.

## **SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

### **Strategy**

115. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs (SEN) is satisfactory and includes a clear commitment to the promotion of inclusion by supporting more pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. However, it also recognises the continuing role of special schools and resourced provision in mainstream schools. Schools generally support the principles of the strategy, which was subject to widespread consultation. Much of the work to date has related to the establishment of baseline figures in order to set targets against which to measure progress. There are now appropriate targets and timescales for development.

116. The LEA currently maintains five special schools which cater for 43 per cent of pupils with statements of SEN, and resourced support bases attached to 16 primary and seven secondary schools. As a result of less demand for places, both from within Stockton-on-Tees and from neighbouring LEAs, the LEA has produced proposals to re-organise the three residential special schools into two to reduce surplus places. It was slow to do this. This delay has resulted in some schools and pupils being adversely affected with, for example, the individual learning centre being used to house secondary statemented pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) on a long-term, but temporary, basis.

117. The LEA is attempting to reduce the number of statements and to make provision to support pupils, in mainstream or at a resource base, without issuing a statement. These measures are being introduced at a reasonable and moderate pace in order to retain the confidence of schools. A multi-agency moderating group evaluates all requests for statutory assessment to ensure that the evidence provided meets the LEA's criteria. Over the three years that this group has been operating, there has been a significant increase in the number of requests for pupils to be supported at a mainstream school without statutory assessment. This has been mirrored by a decline in demand for places in resourced units and the LEA is planning to consult with headteachers on the future of these units in the new academic year.

118. However, the rate of reduction in the overall number of statements is slow. Although there has been a significant fall in the number of primary aged children with statements, there has been a steady increase in the number of statements for older pupils. Furthermore, in 2000, the LEA ceased to maintain only 18 statements.

### **Statutory obligations**

119. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligation, in relation to SEN. 59 per cent of statements of SEN are issued within 18 weeks. This is in line with the national mean, but it is still too small a proportion. However, virtually all assessments are completed by the LEA within 18 weeks, exceptions being due to a delay in advice being received from other agencies. The quality of statements is satisfactory and procedures for the annual review of statements are appropriate.

120. A review of a sample of case files showed that assessments are handled effectively and efficiently and there were examples of good quality, sensitive casework in potentially difficult cases. Only one appeal was made to the SEN tribunal in 1999 and this was unsuccessful.

121. Parents are well supported. Good use is made of a parent/partnership officer who maintains a register of independent parent supporters – volunteers who are available to support parents during the statutory assessment of their children's educational needs.

### **School improvement and value for money**

122. Support for school improvement is good. Special schools receive good support from the SEN adviser and from literacy and numeracy consultants. One special school received good support from the LEA in its successful joint bid for technology college status with a similar school in a neighbouring LEA. The special school in special measures is receiving sound support for improvement from both the specialist SEN adviser and the attached adviser.

123. There is good support to mainstream schools to secure improvement in relation to pupils with SEN. Schools make effective use of the good quality data provided by the LEA to monitor and evaluate the progress made by pupils with SEN at both individual and whole-school level. The special educational needs support service is generally well regarded by schools, who particularly value the provision of a central team of trained classroom assistants. A growth in the educational psychology service, together with the gradual reduction in the number of statements, has allowed educational psychologists to develop an increasingly wide role offering effective support and training to staff and greater support to parents. Support to pupils with hearing and visual impairment is effective and is provided through a joint arrangement with other authorities in the Tees Valley.

124. The LEA has issued useful criteria for schools to assist them in identifying pupils at Stages 2 and 3 of the SEN register. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) are represented on the moderating group which considers requests from schools for additional support or for pupils to be put forward for statutory assessment. This has increased schools' confidence in the operation of the group and the peer evaluation of cases has been valuable. The panel provides helpful feedback to schools when submissions have been unsuccessful. The systems are clear and transparent and are generally recognised as such by the schools.

125. There is good support and training for SENCOs who feel valued by the LEA. SENCOs are encouraged and supported to access two post graduate courses on specific learning difficulties and on the role of the co-ordinator, in line with Teacher Training Agency standards. There are regular support group meetings for secondary SENCOs and firm plans to improve support for primary SENCOs.

126. Taking into account the good quality of support for school improvement, the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides satisfactory value for money, but there are weaknesses. Control of the SEN budget is satisfactory.

However, the LEA does not monitor effectively the use of SEN funding delegated to schools. Procedures to evaluate how well this money is spent in order to advise schools on the effectiveness of the impact of different forms of support are inadequate. Expenditure on SEN is in line with that of unitary authorities and all other LEAs, but above the average for similar authorities. SEN services account for just over one-third of the funding retained centrally by the LEA. Of this total expenditure, 65 per cent is committed to provide support for statemented pupils. Schools are uncertain about the costs of different types of SEN provision and the funding arrangements for different levels of support.<sup>5</sup>

### **Best Value review of special educational needs support service**

127. The findings of a pilot Best Value review of three elements of the SEN support service, the educational psychology and educational social work services and the raising achievement and performance team, were published in June 2000. The review produced a set of relevant, though unprioritised recommendations together with seven specific performance indicators to improve what were already perceived by schools as at least satisfactory services. Appropriate action has ensured that satisfactory progress has been made against the targets and that improvements have taken place.

128. The review was a pilot, but nevertheless did not test in a rigorous way the extent to which the services provide Best Value. The review group was drawn too narrowly from the education service and elected members were not sufficiently involved in the process. The report acknowledges that consultation was inadequate, in particular because parents were not included and the input of schools was limited. Comparative data from other services proved difficult to collect and, given the nature of the services provided, at present there are few alternative providers.

129. In spite of its limitations, the review was useful in progressing discussion on possible delegation of services, developing a more rigorous approach to benchmarking and improving performance management procedures. Additional emphasis has been given to setting and meeting performance indicators.

### **Recommendations**

#### **In order to improve the effectiveness of special educational provision:**

- work with other agencies to improve the completion rate of statements of special educational need within 18 weeks;
- introduce a system for monitoring and evaluating the use and impact of all SEN expenditure delegated to schools; and
- clarify the cost of different levels of support for special educational needs.

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<sup>5</sup> The levels of support known as 'school action plus' and 'school action plus star'.

## **SECTION 5: ACCESS**

### **The Supply of school places**

130. Overall the LEA's management of the supply of school places is satisfactory. It has had to tackle a number of difficult situations in both the special and primary sectors. It is taking appropriate steps to make clear plans, although public consultation documents sometimes lack the necessary financial information.

131. Much local attention has been focused on proposals to reduce residential special school provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties from three schools to two, with one school having pupils from Key Stages 1 to 3 and the other having Key Stage 4 pupils. It would be surprising if the closure of a special school had not led to controversy. The issues faced by the LEA have been complex and in many respects, it has tackled these effectively. However, the LEA was slow to bring the process to a conclusion and the timetable slipped significantly with a consequent effect on pupils' education. Further delay has occurred because the schools organisation committee rejected the plan as a result of concerns about the planned separation of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3. At the time of the inspection, the LEA was waiting for the decision of an external arbitrator.

132. The school planning process is underpinned by reliable pupil forecasting and accurate measurement of school places, updated annually. The school organisation committee has fulfilled its statutory duties and the school organisation plan sets out adequately the future intentions of the LEA. The LEA works in close partnership with the diocesan authorities.

133. There are nine per cent surplus places in the primary sector, and five per cent in secondary. Three primary schools have in excess of 25 per cent surplus places. One of the primary schools is newly established and proper action is being taken to reduce spare places in the other two. However, within the next five years, most areas of the LEA will see a steep decline in school population, particularly in primary schools. The LEA has grasped the nettle and published timely and innovative proposals to begin the process of consultation on the reduction of primary places. These correctly take account of the quality of accommodation and the promotion of school improvement. The LEA is aware that it will need to address the less steep decline in the secondary school population.

134. The implementation of proposals to meet an expanding population in the south of the authority has been carried out with effective co-operation with diocesan authorities for the joint provision of new places, in part, through a private finance initiative. Planning documentation setting out the options for development has been thorough throughout. Equally good has been the annual review of LEA nursery provision, leading to appropriate action. The infant class size plan was introduced fully by September 2000.



## **Recommendation**

### **In order to improve the provision of school places:**

- ensure that public documents proposing school reorganisation contain all information relevant to the proposals, including financial implications.

## **Asset management planning**

135. The LEA has a good record in making capital investment and historically maintained its schools in reasonable condition. Its management of the asset management process has been satisfactory.

136. Total education capital expenditure in Stockton has increased annually since 1996, from a starting point of £600 thousand to over £7 million in 2000/01. This is to be enhanced by Private Finance Initiative funding for a new community primary school and aided secondary school. Total maintenance expenditure has increased less steeply, from about £1.5 million in 1996/7 to £2 million in 2000/01. It is planned that by 2003, 95 per cent of teaching accommodation will be permanent. High priority maintenance work, identified by condition surveys, is reasonable. Appropriate technical support is available to schools.

137. All DfEE deadlines for the transmission of data necessary for the asset management process have been met. The DfEE followed up on a few issues and condition data are now deemed satisfactory. The asset management plan policy statement lacks precision. It does not demonstrate clearly to schools how the various sources of LEA and school funding can link together to improve school premises. Suitability data produced by schools on school premises is too inconsistent.

138. The asset management plan steering group, which provides a forum for school representatives, was established too late. Nevertheless, it now intends to tackle the issues raised here concerning the use of funding and consistency of suitability data.

## **Admissions**

139. The LEA manages the admissions process and appeals system efficiently and effectively. There is minimal pupil movement in and out of Stockton at the time of admission, and admissions zones for community schools are well established. The average successful first preference rate for both primary and secondary schools usually exceeds 98 per cent, and the number of appeals relating to admission at the beginning of the academic year is consequently low. The LEA is correctly liaising with schools affected by population growth to ensure effective admissions planning.

140. Admission booklets produced for parents are sound. Documentation to assist parents in the process of appeal is good. A useful protocol for the transfer of pupils within the academic year is being developed.

141. There is good co-operation between Stockton, neighbouring LEAs and diocesan authorities in securing as far as possible common dates in the admissions process. Procedures for admissions and appeals operate smoothly. Limited use is made of information technology in the admissions process, though there are plans to increase this in future.

### **Provision of education otherwise than at School**

142. The LEA has been successful in providing alternative full-time provision for all pupils permanently excluded from school, well in advance of the government target date. This is an important aspect of the council's policy and strategy to combat social exclusion. However, aspects of the LEA's support for this have significant weaknesses which undermines the overall provision, making it less than satisfactory.

143. A primary PRU provides full-time education for pupils permanently excluded from primary schools, although there have been none this year. The same centre also provides flexible programmes for the very small numbers of pregnant schoolgirls who do not attend school (a total of seven over the year) and 12 pupils from across the key stages who have school phobia. Provision for these pupils, a maximum of two days per week, is insufficient.

144. On another site, an individual learning centre houses the secondary PRU and secondary pupils with statements for emotional and behavioural difficulties who are awaiting admission to a local special school; all receive full-time provision. The centre also manages two alternative education programmes. All year 11 pupils attending the centre this year have achieved external qualifications, although none equivalent to GCSE. Nevertheless, good technology resources, recently improved ICT provision and access to an alternative education programme which includes training, ensures pupils receive a broad curriculum.

145. Although there is a good range of provision, there are a number of weaknesses in the organisation and support which the LEA provides. The LEA was criticised for a 'hands-off' approach and lack of measures to hold the centre to account in a Section 10 inspection report two years ago. It has been slow to respond to these criticisms. The location of support for young women of school age who are pregnant and for anxious pupils is separate from the centre and yet is the responsibility of the centre head. This makes the monitoring of provision difficult. The centre does not routinely receive all relevant information such as that relating to the monitoring of racial incidents. Moreover, it is not routinely included in EiC and EAZ initiatives. Provision for a computer-based administrative system is late - being operational from September 2001. Education welfare support was halved, with the centre having to buy additional hours. This does not reflect the needs of the centre when unauthorised absence is currently unacceptably high at 21 per cent.

146. Referral arrangements are clear to schools, but there are some serious concerns about the lack of robust admission arrangements to the centre. Some statemented pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are being placed temporarily at the centre until places become available at one of the special schools. This is unsatisfactory. Pupils who are excluded for more than 15 days are also placed at the centre. This presents difficulties for the centre in managing, in an

effective way, unpredictable pupil admissions. Whilst secondary headteachers maintain that it is only the most challenging of pupils who attend the centre, the very low rate of re-integration of pupils back into mainstream schools is also a cause for concern.

147. Very good links exist with social services, the Police, the health authority and the drug action team who have provided effective and useful training.

148. Pupils who receive hospital or home tuition receive five hours per week tuition, as was agreed by elected members on the establishment of Stockton as a unitary authority. This provision is inadequate for those well enough to receive more. There are very clear procedures which are followed for the education of children at home. Monitoring arrangements are robust.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the provision of alternative education:**

- introduce arrangements for rigorously monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the current provision for alternative education, particularly that made for statemented pupils and those excluded on a fixed term basis;
- devise in partnership with the pupil referral unit an appropriate strategy to significantly reduce the high percentage of unauthorised absences and provide sufficient support from the education welfare service to implement this effectively;
- review communications with the individual learning centre to ensure all relevant information is received and that the centre is included in relevant initiatives;
- review the curriculum provided for pupils who require education otherwise than at school to ensure all pupils receive an appropriately challenging programme of study that is matched to their abilities and promotes the highest of expectations; and
- in partnership with schools, draft, agree and implement appropriate arrangements for admission to the individual learning centre and suitable procedures to reintegrate pupils into mainstream schools, particularly taking into consideration the initiatives which are promoted under EiC.

## **Attendance**

149. The overall level of attendance at all the LEA's schools is good. It is above the national average in primary schools and in line with the national average in secondary schools. Unauthorised absence in primary schools is very low at 0.1 per cent. Secondary schools have been set a challenging, but attainable, unauthorised absence target of 0.5 per cent for 2001/02 as a result of the EiC initiative. Attendance also features as a priority area within the work of the three EAZs. Despite some effective work being undertaken by EWOs, there are a number of areas in which the service has not provided sufficient support to schools. Nevertheless, support for school attendance is satisfactory.

150. Although some schools have set themselves attendance targets, this practice is not widespread and schools do not have ownership of the LEA's unauthorised absence targets. The LEA has not produced any guidance materials to assist schools in developing strategies to improve attendance or developed formal arrangements for disseminating good practice. No guidance has been produced for parents to discourage extended holidays abroad in term time, or for approaches that schools could adopt to minimise impact. No action has been taken to follow up the concerns expressed in a recent district audit report that a number of schools did not have attendance policies. Currently, the service only has access to an elementary database, although a new computer system was to be installed imminently. However, appropriate use has been made of LEA funding for the employment of a first day response worker in four schools. This has been effective and has encouraged schools to fund such a strategy themselves.

151. Despite tight deadlines, the LEA volunteered to take part in the national secondary devolution pilot project from September 2000. The agreed formula for devolving education social worker support has resulted in 63 primary schools, three special schools and two PRUs having to share less-than-half of the total hours of support available. Of the three secondary schools visited where attendance issues were discussed, two were enthusiastic about the impact of the devolution project. Improvements included a clear remit for the education social workers to concentrate on attendance matters rather than social work issues and much improved communication with school staff.

152. Primary schools rated support for improving attendance as at least satisfactory in the school survey, but the overall level was below the mean for the 96 LEAs surveyed to date. The LEA rightly targets support at those primary schools with less than 95 per cent attendance; other schools receive a prompt response to telephone concerns. However, in two of the schools visited, inadequate support had been provided when staff were on long-term absence. The reduced allocation of hours to the secondary PRU has resulted in the centre having to purchase additional hours. This is unsatisfactory.

153. The overall management of the service is satisfactory, but lacks vision and the determination to concentrate fully on attendance issues rather than the social work dimension. In the light of the LEA's involvement in the devolution pilot, a suggestion to return to the previous service delivery model from September, rather than refining the arrangements, would be a retrograde step.

**Recommendations:**

**In order to improve levels of attendance in schools:**

- through consultation with schools, assist schools in setting individual school targets for attendance and for unauthorised absence which contribute to the LEA's overall targets;
- ensure all schools have effective attendance policies;

- provide guidance to schools on strategies to improve attendance, including action to discourage families with children of school age taking extended holidays abroad during school time;
- review the allocation of educational social worker time allocated to the PRU to ensure that it is sufficient; and
- improve contingency arrangements to ensure schools are supported when education social workers are on prolonged sick leave, regardless of whether or not the service is devolved.

## **Behaviour support**

154. The LEA has been very effective in reducing the number of permanent exclusions from its schools. These are well below the national average. The LEA just missed its challenging EDP target of 23 permanent exclusions. Worryingly, in secondary schools, there has been an increase in the number of fixed-term exclusions from 197 in 1998/9 to 265 in 1999/00.<sup>6</sup>

155. The LEA's lengthy behaviour support plan has recently been updated and consultation on the new draft plan is underway. The plan provides a helpful résumé of progress on the previous plan and reiterates its philosophy and the functions of various services. There is insufficient analysis of the useful statistical data to ensure that the wide and appropriate variety of support is closely targeted to those most in need. The action plan for 2001/04 rightly outlines objectives for the service, but is too sketchy in identifying the strategies to be employed.

156. Support for improving behaviour is provided by the raising achievement and performance team and is generally well regarded by schools. Support is allocated to schools through an agreed and appropriate formula and in the majority of schools this works well. The work is negotiated with headteachers and includes a comprehensive range, including both support for pupils and staff training. Clear, effective procedures for referring pupils for support are flexible enough to provide a swift response when necessary. Primary school pupils who find themselves close to exclusion can be referred to the primary PRU for up to three days per week. This programme is monitored effectively and pupils receive appropriate support

157. Pupils at risk of exclusion in Years 8-9 are referred to the new *directions* scheme which is funded, with the agreement of headteachers, by the pupil retention grant. An evaluation of the scheme published, in June 2000, found attendance on the scheme to be very good with no unauthorised absence. Of the 42 pupils who attended the course in the last five terms, only five pupils have subsequently been permanently excluded.

158. The LEA has established support for pupils who are excluded from school for a fixed period of more than 15 days. In these instances, the pupil's case is referred to the highly regarded social inclusion officer. Usually, fixed-term excluded pupils attend one of the two PRUs. However, there are concerns that occasions could

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<sup>6</sup> Data from Behaviour Support Plan: 2001-4

occur when there are insufficient resources to accommodate the numbers at the secondary PRU. Significant efforts are made by the social inclusion officer to find alternative solutions to the permanent exclusion of pupils, such as work placements, the New Start scheme and Prince's Trust work.

**Recommendations:**

**In order to maximise the effectiveness of behaviour support:**

- ensure that the behaviour support plan includes clear strategies, based on the analysis of the good statistical data available, to target resources closely to those in need; and
- review the placement of pupils who are excluded for more than 15 days at the pupil referral unit and ensure that resources are adequate to meet their needs effectively.

**Health, safety, welfare, child protection**

159. There are clear, satisfactory policies and procedures for health and safety and appropriate established practices for dealing with areas of significant risk. The LEA fulfils its statutory obligations with regard to these matters.

160. The LEA provides very effective active support on child protection matters. It has produced useful guidance for schools which is complemented by a comprehensive and well-supported rolling programme of training which benefits from a multi-agency approach. However, the attendance rate of school representatives at child protection conferences is disappointing, although the appropriate LEA officer always attends. This has been identified in the behaviour support plan as an area requiring improvement. Schools report some difficulties when officers from the social services department do not meet commitments they have given to pupils.

## **Children in public care**

161. Support for the 216 children in public care is satisfactory and improving. There is a clear and coherent strategy for promoting the educational achievement of these children, although the activity in the EDP 'to ensure the provision of effective education' is insufficiently detailed and lacks focus. A multi-agency working group drew up the education targets for children in public care. A comprehensive and extensive database has now been established and progress of individual children is being effectively tracked. In 2000, the LEA's 2002 target for the proportion of children in public care achieving 1+ A\*-G grades (60 per cent) was exceeded with 67 per cent of pupils reaching the minimum qualification. On the basis of assessments carried out on children's levels of attainment, around 90 children who have been in public care for over one year are appropriately targeted for additional educational support. This provision is good.

162. All schools have a designated teacher with responsibility for monitoring the attendance of these children and acting as a point of contact for other agencies. A rolling programme of training for designated teachers commenced in the autumn term, with an appropriate input by social services, to which foster carers and representatives from children's homes were also invited. Although the training was not well attended, every effort is being made to ensure teachers are aware of the issues and of the expectations of the council and the government. Plans exist to provide accredited training for foster carers.

163. The council has placed an appropriate emphasis on its role as corporate parent through its decision to review schools' admissions policies to give children in public care first priority. Elected members discuss reports on the attainment of children in public care. In addition, the council has committed £50,000 to support a range of extra curricular activities for these pupils.

164. There are close-working relationships with social services and health. Schools face periodic difficulties caused by poor communication with the social services department. This is not helped by the lack of a shared database. The work of two educational facilitators in children's homes was identified as having a positive impact on pupils' attendance at school. A multi-agency working party has the responsibility of determining the format of the authority's personal education plans and one is being piloted.

## **Minority ethnic children including Travellers**

165. The LEA has been slow to promote support for minority ethnic pupils and has not done enough to persuade schools that this is of relevance to all schools. Although the EDP rightly recognises the need to meet the education and cultural needs of ethnic minority pupils, support for ethnic minority pupils is too narrowly focused on language acquisition. The well-run and efficient language support service is effective. It is quick to respond to requests from schools or from other agencies such as those supporting asylum seekers.

166. This year, four of the seven schools, which have more than 30 pupils eligible for Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Grant (EMTAG), have chosen to have

funding devolved. Arrangements for monitoring schools' use of funds have not yet been finalised although link advisers are being asked to check how schools are spending the money. Schools have no ownership of the aspirational attainment targets set within the EMTAG action plan for subsequent years and do not themselves analyse performance by ethnicity.

167. A small number of information booklets to support curriculum planning and promote awareness of multicultural issues are distributed to schools. However, there is no programme of training for mainstream teachers on the needs of ethnic minority pupils, although the new course for governors on the findings of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence includes the celebration of cultural diversity.

168. The council has been proactive and effective in developing and providing support for both refugees and asylum seekers. The schools that these pupils attend are receiving appropriate support. The authority has a significant Traveller population. The small traveller education service covers an appropriately wide range of work and provides satisfactory support. In primary schools the service works with the pupil's class teacher to produce appropriate distance learning packs. In secondary schools, Travellers receive pastoral support through a regular visit from a representative of the service, although an increase in the target for the proportion of Travellers continuing into secondary education does not set a high enough expectation. The LEA's statementing arrangements show good practice in effectively fast-tracking itinerant pupils so that they are able to receive the required support.

### **Recommendations**

**In order to improve the provision for ethnic minority pupils and raise the awareness of all schools to their responsibility to promote cultural diversity:**

- agree arrangements for monitoring and evaluating schools' use of devolved Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Grant Funds;
- as a matter of urgency, provide training for mainstream teachers on the needs of ethnic minority pupils and on the development of resources to promote cultural diversity.

### **The effectiveness of measures taken to combat racism**

169. The LEA has made a comprehensive, but late response to the recommendations of the report of the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. In part, this was due to the decision to have a consistent response across all areas of the council determined by a multi-agency forum. Recently developments have begun to take shape. However, the LEA has a significant challenge in persuading schools to be proactive in tackling racial issues. A number of schools visited during the inspection did not consider recording of racist incidents relevant to them. This coupled with poor attendance by schools at a recent conference leaves much to be done.

170. The local authority has a new diversity framework and policy and is running seminars for chief officers, elected members and senior staff on its implementation.



The 'promotion of anti-racist policies and practices' rightly features as an activity with the EDP. However, the target group is identified as ethnic minority communities, headteachers and governors; there is insufficient focus on classroom activities or strategies that can be adopted by teachers to tackle racist attitudes. The LEA recently launched a sensible and thorough action plan to address the recommendations of the report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

171. Draft guidelines have also been produced for schools on how to deal with racist incidents. Governors have received training on their responsibility to report racist incidents to the LEA and relevant forms for recording incidents have been distributed to schools, via governing bodies. Racist incidents are to be recorded from September and the school's link adviser will check that this is being done. This is much later than in some authorities. There is no training programme for teachers on ways of challenging and tackling racist incidents, although training has been provided for lunchtime supervisors. It was reported that teaching materials to promote anti-racism would be developed but there is a lack of clarity in secondary schools as to who is responsible for this.

### **Recommendations**

#### **In order to improve the effectiveness of measures to combat racism:**

- develop teaching materials to be used with pupils to promote anti-racism; and run a programme for all teachers and support staff on:
  - the use of these materials in the classroom; and
  - ways in which to challenge and tackle racist incidents.

### **Support for gifted and talented pupils**

172. Support for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory. The LEA has provided or supported a number of initiatives which are intended to meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils. Master classes and summer schools, run in partnership with the university, have been well received by pupils, and a series of training events have raised teachers' knowledge and awareness. A working group with representatives from all phases of education has been established to develop a consistent approach across the LEA. This is co-ordinated by a seconded primary headteacher. The LEA and its secondary schools have established common criteria for the identification of gifted and talented pupils and there is a recognised need for further work in primary schools to ensure earlier identification. The LEA's work complements the work of other initiatives such as EiC and the EAZ, although to date there has not been a co-ordinated strategy for supporting gifted and talented pupils across the LEA.

### **Social inclusion**

173. Overall, support for this area of activity is satisfactory. Promoting inclusion is a key priority within the council's community plan and the EDP. The LEA works

effectively with its partners to use a range of regeneration funding for the benefit of educational and social inclusion. Partnerships with statutory and voluntary groups are strong.

174. Support for behaviour in schools has been very effective in reducing the level of permanent exclusions to below the national average. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs is beginning to support inclusion by redistributing SEN resources to schools. The LEA provides a well-received family learning programme to encourage support for children's learning at home. There is an effective working relationship with the EAZ and the early years and childcare development partnership. Two small EAZs are being established in areas of social and economic disadvantage as part of the EiC initiative. The national healthy schools initiative is being implemented in over a third of schools, offering accreditation for aspects of pupil welfare and development.

175. However there are some significant weaknesses in the LEA's strategy. The LEA is not giving sufficient priority to improving the attainment of minority ethnic pupils. It has been slow to respond to the recommendations of the report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence and it has only just begun to challenge schools to tackle racial issues.

## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

This report makes a number of recommendations. However, the following are fundamental in that they affect the LEA's overall capacity for improvement:

- Align education service planning more closely to financial planning.
- Bring forward the Best Value review of school improvement.
- Produce a strategy for the future development of school improvement which reflects the code of practice on LEA-school relationships, spells out what is intended and how it is to be achieved, covers how staff are deployed, distinguishes between those activities which are funded centrally and those which schools are able to purchase, and enables schools to have greater choice.
- Extend the provision of challenge to the leadership and management of schools.
- Collate data on the attainment and progress of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and pupils in public care and share them with schools so that they can monitor the performance of their own pupils.
- Ensure that schools' difficulties are identified at an early stage and that monitoring arrangements are sufficiently robust to identify concerns about leadership and management in schools.
- As a matter of urgency, training should be provided for mainstream teachers on the needs of ethnic minority pupils and on the development of resources to promote cultural diversity.
- Develop teaching materials to be used with pupils to promote anti-racism; and run a programme for all teachers and support staff on:
  - the use of these materials in the classroom
  - ways in which to challenge and tackle racist incidents.

We also make the following recommendations:

- Review corporate charges made to the education service in time for 2002/03.
- Review the allocation of any growth funding between the primary and secondary sectors, taking account of all aspects of delegated school budgets.
- Monitor school balances more closely and take further action to reduce primary schools' year end balances.
- Improve schools' understanding of their Best Value responsibilities.

- Ensure that written records of visits to schools identify clearly strengths, weaknesses and points for action and that they are routinely sent to headteachers and chairs of governing bodies.
- Establish, in consultation with secondary schools, a plan of support to:-
  - develop an appropriate training programme in the use of ICT within the secondary curriculum to complement NOF provision;
  - support schools in developing arrangements for 'levelling' and moderating pupils' work at Key Stage 3;
  - provide intensive support to those secondary schools most in need, determined after a review of schools' ICT departments and in consultation with headteachers;
  - ensure that schools meet their statutory requirements at Key Stage 4.
- Strengthen the leadership and management element of the school self-evaluation programme.
- Provide or broker more opportunities for middle managers to develop leadership and management expertise.
- Offer schools greater choice and differentiation by packaging service level agreements at a more detailed level and by providing a menu driven approach for individual services.
- Streamline the procedure in place for schools to sign up for LEA services by combining the service proposal stage and the service level agreement documentation.
- Ensure greater transparency between budgets delegated to schools and the cost of services offered by the LEA.
- Set a target for, and work towards a reduction in, teacher absence.
- Consult with schools on the method of delegation to be used for ICT administration and ensure relevant budgets are delegated as soon as possible.
- Work with other agencies to improve the completion rate of statements of special educational need within 18 weeks.
- Introduce a system for monitoring and evaluating the use and impact of all SEN expenditure delegated to school.
- Clarify the cost of different levels of support for special educational needs.

- Ensure that public documents proposing school reorganisation contain all information relevant to the proposals, including financial implications.
- Introduce arrangements for rigorously monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the current provision for alternative education, particularly that made for statemented pupils and those excluded on a fixed term basis.
- Devise, in partnership with the pupil referral unit, an appropriate strategy to significantly reduce the high percentage of unauthorised absences and provide sufficient support from the education welfare service to implement this effectively.
- Review communications with the individual learning centre (ILC) to ensure all relevant information is received and that the centre is included in relevant initiatives.
- Review the curriculum provided for pupils who require education otherwise than at school to ensure all pupils receive an appropriately challenging programme of study that is matched to their abilities and promotes the highest of expectations.
- In partnership with schools, draft, agree and implement appropriate arrangements for admission to the ILC and suitable procedures to reintegrate pupils into mainstream schools, particularly taking into consideration the initiatives which are promoted under Excellence in Cities.
- Through consultation with schools, assist schools in setting individual school attendance targets for attendance and for unauthorised absence which contribute to the LEA's overall targets and ensure all schools have effective attendance policies.
- Provide guidance to schools on strategies to improve attendance including action to discourage families with children of school age taking extended holidays abroad during school time.
- Review the allocation of educational social worker time allocated to the pupil referral unit to ensure that it receives sufficient.
- Improve contingency arrangements to ensure schools are supported when education social workers are on prolonged sick leave, regardless of whether or not the service is devolved.
- Ensure that the behaviour support plan includes clear strategies, based on the analysis of the good statistical data available, to target resources closely to those in need.
- Review the placement of pupils who are excluded for more than 15 days at the pupil referral unit and ensure that resources are adequate to meet their needs effectively.

- Agree arrangements for monitoring and evaluating schools' use of devolved Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Grant funds.

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