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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
SOUTH TYNESIDE
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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CONTENTS	PARAGRAPHS
INTRODUCTION	1 - 3
COMMENTARY	4 - 11
SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Context	12 - 17
Performance	18
Funding	19 - 29
Council structure	30 - 32
The Education Development Plan	33 - 39
The allocation of resources to priorities	40 - 46
Recommendations	
 SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Implications of other functions	47 - 48
Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention	49 - 56
Collection and analysis of data	57 - 59
Support for literacy	60 - 64
Support for numeracy	65 - 72
Support for ICT	73 - 75
Support for schools causing concern	76 - 79
Support for governors	80 - 83
Support for school management	84 - 90
Support for early years	91 - 94
Recommendations	
 SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	
Corporate planning	95 - 102
Partnership	103
Management services	104 - 111
Recommendations	
 SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION	
Strategy	112 - 114
Statutory obligations	115 - 117
Improvement and value for money	118 - 121
Recommendations	

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places	122 - 126
Admissions	127 - 130
Provision of education otherwise than at school	131 - 133
Attendance	134 - 137
Behaviour support	138 - 140
Health, safety, welfare, child protection	141 - 143
Children in public care	144 - 146
Ethnic minority children	147 - 150
Gifted children	151 - 152
Social exclusion	153 - 154
Recommendations	

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 also took account of the Local Government Act 1999 insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.

2. The inspection was 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 members, 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 81 schools. The overall response rate was 84 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one nursery, nine primary, four secondary and two special schools. In addition, visits were also made to two pupil referral units. These visits tested the views of governors, 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 contribute to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the schools and provides value for money. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools in the LEA was also considered.

COMMENTARY

4. South Tyneside is a deprived area. Despite inward investment, the level of unemployment remains high at 10.4 per cent. Adult basic skills are low and fewer adults have higher educational qualifications than the national average. The proportion of sixteen year olds staying on in full-time education is significantly below the national average. The borough has a declining and ageing population which presents serious budgetary difficulties for a Council where community care commitments are high, the current revenue budget is six per cent above the standard spending assessment (SSA), and there is a stated commitment to restore the education budget to SSA by 2002.

5. Within this challenging context, schools are having some success in raising standards of attainment. Attainment on entry to school is below average. By the ages of seven, 11 and 14, attainment in English, mathematics and science is broadly in line with national averages. This progress, however, is not matched at GCSE where standards are below the national average. This is a pattern of attainment which matches closely the pattern of funding across the key stages, and within a formula that has not been reviewed since the early days of local management of schools.

6. At a corporate level, there are weaknesses in strategic management and planning. There is no long-term financial strategy, and the annual budget setting process is mainly on an incremental basis. The LEA has been slow to tackle special school provision and surplus places, particularly in nursery schools, despite clear advice from the district auditor. Performance management systems are under-developed and a rigorous scrutiny process has not been fully established within the modernised structure of the Council. Elected members are committed to the importance of education as a key corporate priority, but there has been only limited monitoring and evaluation of schools and the education service in terms of their effectiveness in raising standards.

7. As a result of these deficiencies, the LEA is not well placed to meet the challenges of Fair Funding, Best Value and the greater autonomy of schools. Recent service level agreements have not been sufficiently flexible. There is too much variation in the quality and performance of services across the education department which is related to inadequate service planning and performance management. The prevailing culture is one of dependency, where many schools have unrealistic expectations of the levels of support available to them; expectations which in turn have not been sufficiently challenged by officers or members.

8. The LEA's strategy for monitoring, challenge and support is weak and does not adequately reflect the Code of Practice on LEA-school relations. Monitoring activity is not fully aligned to need and the quality is too variable. The revised Education Development Plan provides a sound basis for the authority's strategy for school improvement but pays insufficient regard to the below average achievement at Key Stage 4. Overall progress on the plan has been uneven. In particular, support for school self-review has been slow to develop and is not enabling schools to manage their own improvement.

9. This is an LEA which has moved too slowly in some important areas and is unable to provide a clear strategic direction which fully responds to the new demands placed upon an education service. There are significant weaknesses in the following functions and services which seriously outweigh the strengths in other areas. They include:

- performance management;
- the allocation of resources to priorities;
- monitoring, challenge and support in schools;
- leadership and strategic management of the services to support school improvement;
- support for target-setting;
- the unsatisfactory value for money of the provision for pupils with special educational needs;
- support for school management, and in particular, support for school self review; and
- support for minority ethnic pupils.

10. In terms of day to day management, there are a number of services where the LEA is effective. In particular, the LEA is fully committed to partnership working, and services to support the most vulnerable pupils and those at risk of social exclusion are good. These include:

- support for school attendance;
- support for children in public care;
- behaviour support;
- provision for health and safety, welfare and child protection;
- support for governors;
- support for literacy;
- early years education;
- financial and personnel advice; and
- admissions to schools.

11. This is an LEA which does some things well, particularly when there are clear parameters in which to work such as improving attendance. The lack of effective strategic management and planning, however, and the inadequate response to aspects of government policy and local need mean that the LEA is failing to provide an effective service for schools. We do not believe that the leadership and the management of the authority have the capacity to address these weaknesses fully without external assistance.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. South Tyneside is a predominantly urban borough on the banks of the river Tyne. Its population is approximately 153,474 and declining slowly. The area has a history associated with heavy industries such as shipbuilding and repair, and coal mining. However, since the decline of these industries, the region has suffered high levels of unemployment. Despite inward investment in the region, male unemployment at 14.9 per cent is one of the highest in mainland Britain. The overall unemployment rate of 10.4 per cent is well above the national average.

13. The proportion of adults with higher education qualifications at eight per cent is below the national average. A Basic Skills audit in 1998 revealed that adults in the area have significantly low reading, writing and number skills. On the basis of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Deprivation (ILD), South Tyneside is ranked 38 out of 354 districts.

14. Overall, 33.2 and 25.8 per cent respectively of primary and secondary aged pupils are entitled to free school meals. This is above the national average. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need is broadly in line with the national average. Only 2.3 per cent of the school population are from minority ethnic groups, compared with 11.7 per cent nationally. The proportion of pupils staying on in full-time education post-16 has increased over recent years but, at 54.6 per cent in 1999, is still significantly below the national level.

15. South Tyneside maintains 79 schools comprising five nursery schools, 56 primary schools, 28 of which have attached nursery units, 11 secondary schools including one with a sixth form, five special schools and 2 pupil referral units (PRUs). There is extensive provision for early years education: the LEA is able to provide a place within a maintained or private/voluntary setting for all three year olds whose parents want it. All children are offered full-time infant education at the beginning of the school year in which they become five.

16. Five of the borough's schools have been awarded Beacon status. They include the 11-18 secondary school and four primary schools. An Education Action Zone (EAZ) involving 20 schools and a PRU within the borough was established in 1999 by a joint LEA and business partnership. In September 2000, an early excellence centre was opened within the premises of a primary school in the borough.

17. All secondary schools and two special schools are involved in the partnership that plans and implements Excellence in Cities (EiC). Plans include the establishment of a city learning centre at one of the LEA's secondary schools and the setting up of two mini EAZ's.

Performance

18. Key features of school and pupil performance in 1999 are:

- attainment on entry to primary school is below average;
- at the end of Key Stage 1, the percentages of pupils achieving Level 2 and above in English and mathematics tests are broadly in line with the national average and statistical neighbours; apart from reading, where attainment is above that of statistical neighbours;
- at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3, the percentages of pupils achieving the expected levels in English, mathematics and science are broadly in line with the national average and statistical neighbours;
- at GCSE, however, the percentage of pupils attaining five A* - C grades is below the national average; in 1999, this figure was six per cent below the national average but above the average for statistical neighbours. A value added analysis of the Key Stage 3 performance of the 1999 cohort of pupils indicates that pupils did not make the expected progress, and their attainment at Key Stage 4 was below average;
- the percentage attaining one A* to G grade is broadly in line with the national average. Attainment in terms of the Average Point Score (APS) is below the national figure;
- at age 18, the APS for pupils entered for two or more A-Levels is below the national average;
- attendance in primary schools is in line with the national average; in secondary schools, attendance is below the national average. Unauthorised absence is below average in both phases; and
- the LEA has been successful in reducing the rate of permanent exclusions. The proportion of pupils excluded from primary schools is close to the national average but exclusions from secondary schools, which in 1998/1999 were twice the national average, have declined dramatically in 1999/2000, thereby exceeding the LEA's target.

The recently published results for 2000 confirm previous trends in relation to national averages. When compared with its statistical neighbours, the LEA is performing well in all key stages and particularly at Key Stage 3 where the results in English are the highest.

Funding

19. The education standard spending assessment (SSA) for South Tyneside for both 1999/00 and 2000/01 was slightly above the averages of both statistical neighbours and the non-London metropolitan authorities, as the table below shows.

	1999/00		2000/01	
	SSA primary 5-10 £	per pupil	SSA secondary pupil 11-16 £	per pupil
South Tyneside	2360		3022	
Statistical Neighbours Average	2326		2991	
Metropolitan Authorities Average	2331		2997	

20. The Council has spent below the level of education SSA in recent years. It has now made a commitment to restore funding for education to SSA levels by 2002.

21. At present, the overall Council budget is set at 106 per cent of SSA with a particularly strong commitment to social services (110 per cent), highways (109 per cent) and other services (122 per cent). The Council is undertaking Best Value reviews of elderly persons homes and refuse collection services during 2000/01 and plans to use anticipated efficiency savings to restore the education budget to SSA. In view of the Council's overall budget position, this strategy is insecure and the projected outcomes are unlikely to be met. (see paragraphs 40 - 46)

22. The LEA has a longstanding commitment to both early years education and community education. It spends well above SSA in both of these areas. The early years budget of £5.28m exceeds the SSA by £0.9m (20 per cent) and the net community education budget of £2.28m exceeds SSA by £0.27m (13 per cent). The primary schools budget is set at 101 per cent of SSA, but the budget for secondary schools at £30.8m falls £2.8m (eight per cent) short of SSA. The overall education spend relative to SSA has been 98.5 per cent for the two years 1999 to 2001.

23. For the current financial year, the LEA has increased the education budget by slightly more than the increase in SSA. It has also met DfEE targets by passing these increases on to schools, and by increasing delegated budgets by 10.8 per cent. It now delegates 83.3 per cent of the local schools' budget (LSB) to schools, which is in line with government targets.

24. The Council faces a difficult financial future. The revenue budget for 2000/01 is 6 per cent above SSA and requires spending £4.3m from the available balances of £6.1m to bring it inside the capping limit. In recent years the direct labour organisation has made a net contribution of £2m to these balances, but this is unlikely to continue following a reduction in the schedule of rates from April 2000. Furthermore, as the population declines, SSA can be expected to increase more slowly than in other authorities.

25. The LEA consults schools annually over revisions to the funding formula. In recent years, these discussions have focused mainly on mechanisms for distributing funding newly delegated funding following the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act. The formula has not been reviewed since it was introduced in the early days of local management of schools. A fundamental review is now overdue. Secondary schools are critical of the way in which the LEA consults on budgetary issues and the educational rationale behind the funding formula. Primary schools are broadly satisfied.

26. The funding formula is slightly more favourable to Key Stage 1 and less favourable to Key Stage 4 and post-sixteen than those used by comparable authorities. Delegated budgets for both primary and secondary schools, following this year's increase of 10.8 per cent, are close to those of statistical neighbours but slightly below the average for metropolitan authorities. Delegated budgets as a proportion of SSA (as indicated by the table below) are well below those of metropolitan authorities. Funding for special schools falls well below that in other LEAs, however such comparisons should be treated with caution as the complexity of need met by different special schools varies considerably.

ISB: £ per Pupil 2000/01					
	Primary	ISB as % of SSA	Secondary	ISB as % of SSA	Special
South Tyneside	1,795	72.7	2,370	74.6	6,248
Metropolitan Authorities	1,961	80.6	2,634	83.8	10,315

27. Capital expenditure to improve and repair school buildings has grown rapidly during the past three years, from £1.34m in 1996/97 to a budgeted £4.39m in 2000/01. Most of this growth is a consequence of the LEA responding to central government initiatives. Successful bids under the four phases of New Deal for schools (NDS) brought in a total of just over £5m to the benefit of 64 schools and the new early excellence centre. A partnership with a private company under the capital challenge scheme has secured £1.5m to replace heating boilers in 23 schools. Improvements have also been made under the schools access initiative.

28. The LEA has a good record in attracting additional external funds, and to some extent, secondary schools have come to rely on this funding as a major resource for school improvement. The unit in the Council's planning department coordinates bids for external funding and has been successful in securing a total of £3.6m from four rounds of the single regeneration budget (SRB) for education projects in the borough, most notably the work on family learning. The LEA support for developing the capacity of schools to access other sources of funding to promote school improvement is less well developed.

29. The LEA took up its full Standards Fund allocation of £3.59m in 1999/00, of which £1.53m was devolved to schools. In 2000/01, it took up the full allocation with the exception of some of the funding for broadband information communication technology (ICT) development and two summer schools; a total of £6.31m, of which £4.4m will be devolved to schools.

Council structure

30. South Tyneside Council consists of 60 members, comprising 50 Labour, six Liberal Democrat and four progressive party members. In May 1999, the Council discontinued the former committee based system and established an 11 member cabinet as the centre of policy formulation and decision making. Each cabinet member has responsibility for one of the 11 cross-cutting issues. The political responsibility for education and schools rests with the lead member for lifelong learning. The portfolio is a wide one and the lead member is supported in her role by four link members for lifelong learning, although two of these members currently hold responsibilities as the mayor and deputy mayor. Pending new legislation the cabinet is responsible to a politically representative policy committee where executive decisions are taken. The responsibility for scrutiny procedures is vested in two politically representative select committees which review Council performance and decisions taken by the cabinet.

31. Elected members and officers are positive about the impact of these changes on the speed and effectiveness of decision making. However, it is accepted that the scrutiny process, which did not start until April 2000, has not been effective. Further training and development for members is planned.

32. In recent years, the structure of the education department has been reduced from four to two divisions, largely as a result of budget reductions. The current directorate includes the director, the head of schools and continuing education, the head of resources (each a head of division) and the chief adviser; together known as the executive management team. A wider senior management team involving other senior officers, such as the assistant directors for special educational needs (SEN) and finance, also meets on a regular basis. As these structural changes have taken place however, there has been no re-evaluation of the management structure within the department.

The Education Development Plan

33. Following the review of the Education Development Plan (EDP) at the end of its first year, the revised EDP now provides a sound basis for the authority's strategy for school improvement. The LEA acknowledged earlier weaknesses in certain programmes of activity, the need to sharpen the success criteria and to identify more clearly themes such as leadership and management across the different priorities.

34. The EDP has six priorities for school improvement, unchanged from the first version of the plan. They are:

1. to raise standards in literacy;
2. to raise standards in numeracy;
3. to provide support for self review and monitoring;
4. to raise standards for Special Educational Needs pupils;
5. to increase motivation and participation; and
6. to provide support for schools causing concern.

35. These priorities are based on a detailed audit and reflect the national agenda and, to a limited extent, the local context. For example, priority five 'to increase motivation and participation' seeks to tackle the issue of low expectations and pupil disaffection associated with the high levels of unemployment in the region. However, the EDP fails to prioritise action to improve attainment at GCSE, and the low take up of post-sixteen education receives only limited attention within the plan.

36. Revisions to the EDP have improved the quality of the activity plans. These plans, particularly for priorities five and six, 'increase motivation and participation' and 'provide support for schools causing concern', are now more focussed and success criteria, in most cases, are more specific and measurable. Links with other major LEA plans are identified but there is not enough reference to the EAZ within the plan. Satisfactory progress has been made in developing a strategy for Excellence in Cities which will complement the programmes of activity within priority five. Links between the EDP and school development plans were limited in the schools visited although there was widespread support for the priorities within the plan. In particular, schools considered that consultation on the revised EDP has been more effective than for the original plan.

37. The LEA has set challenging targets for English at Key Stage 2. Test results for summer 2000 show an increase of five per cent to 72 per cent, as compared with a four per cent national rate of improvement. Whilst good progress has been made over the last two years, there is still a shortfall on the LEA's target of 75 per cent and a further nine per cent to go in order to meet the 2002 target. In mathematics, the LEA has already exceeded its 2000 target of 71 per cent by four percentage points, leaving a three per cent increase required to achieve its 2002 target. Targets for GCSE at the higher grades are challenging and schools made good progress in 1999 towards achieving them. However, provisional results for 2000 indicate that there has been a decline and the 2002 target will present a serious challenge to the LEA and secondary schools over the next two years. The LEA has made very good progress in reducing the number of permanent exclusions in secondary schools and has exceeded the target for 2000.

38. The evaluation of the EDP has been unsatisfactory. There are adequate monitoring arrangements to check which actions have taken place but there has been no assessment of the effectiveness of what has been done. The annual progress report to members on the implementation of the plan did not provide

enough evaluation for members to carry out their task of scrutiny. The revised EDP (April 2000) has given a sharper focus to evaluation, including a commitment to an external evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the activities.

39. Progress on implementation of the plan has been variable across the six priority areas. There has been good progress made in the work on literacy and numeracy, in particular the developments at Key Stage 3, and schools are well on track to meet their targets for 2002. Work to develop school self review (priority three) has been slow and despite a history of development work in this area, practice lags behind other authorities. Progress on priority four 'to raise standards in SEN' has been satisfactory. Two inter-agency groups have been established to oversee the management of the activities in priority five 'to increase motivation and participation'. They have been instrumental in ensuring good progress in this area. Progress on priority six, to support schools causing concern, was hampered in the first year by the lack of clarity and consistency in the LEA's procedures. These weaknesses have now been addressed and should enable the LEA to achieve its target for 2001.

The allocation of resources to priorities

40. The Council's allocation of resources to priorities is unsatisfactory.

41. South Tyneside has a declining population with a growing proportion of elderly residents. In recent years, the Council has sought therefore to safeguard funds for community care and other services. As a result, the education budget has fallen below SSA for the past three years. The LEA's commitment to restore education budgets to SSA levels by 2002 is widely welcomed by schools. The directions given to officers in preparing budgets for 2000/01 were that '... with the exception of education, budgets be prepared on a standstill basis.' However, budgets subsequently agreed by the policy committee show that other departments have grown by a greater proportion than the education department, as the table below demonstrates.

Department	1999/2000 original budget £	2000/01 original budget £	1999 - 2000 % difference
culture and leisure	7,971,770	8,216,250	6.0
education	65,514,970	68,807,180	5.0
environmental health	7,167,540	7,641,860	0.7
housing	625,570	832,190	3.3
social services	34,003,150	37,076,520	9.0
town development	8,865,970	9,127,870	2.9
general services	19,586,090	20,995,520	7.2
total	143,735,060	152,931,060	6.4

42. The Council intends to use savings identified during the current round of Best Value reviews to restore the education budget to SSA. These reviews are not yet complete. This strategy means that the future of the education budget depends firstly on sufficient potential savings being identified, and secondly on the ability of

the authority to realise the savings through significant changes in provision and working practices. In the light of the 2000/01 budget changes this is very optimistic.

43. The annual budget setting process within the Council is mainly on an incremental basis. There is little attempt to review service standards, costs or systems of delivery as part of the annual budget cycle. The Council has given only outline consideration to a longer-term financial strategy and has no plan to re-direct resources to areas of highest priority.

44. Performance management systems are under-developed across the whole authority. This is acknowledged and a corporate system for performance management is being developed.

45. The Council's Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) has been judged by the district auditor to meet statutory requirements. There is a clearly staged process for the conduct of Best Value reviews. The major review in education for 2000/01 covers SEN. This review and the review of the role and function of special schools within a policy of inclusion are being done separately. This is a missed opportunity to develop a coherent overall strategy.

46. Council departments are well informed about the requirements and implications of Best Value. However, little has been done to develop schools' understanding of their responsibilities in relation to Best Value.

Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- the budget for education should reflect the priority attached to education in the Council's corporate plan;
- a three year budget and resource allocation plan should be prepared;
- as part of the annual budget making process resources should be allocated to declared priorities;
- a full review of the funding formula for schools and the relative weighting for different phases should be undertaken; and
- the management structure of the education department should be reviewed and evaluated.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

47. All divisions of the education department are involved in some way in implementing the Education Development Plan (EDP). The main contributor is the school improvement team, of which the most effective services are those which provide the support for literacy, governors and early years. Additionally, those services which support social inclusion are the ones which have an impact most directly and positively upon school improvement, as do the services which support special educational needs. Equally important, are the effective financial services which enable schools to plan ahead and function smoothly.

48. While a number of other services have important roles to play in supporting school improvement, their efforts are not always mobilised well enough or co-ordinated sufficiently to benefit schools.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

49. There are too many weaknesses in the ways in which the LEA carries out its functions in relation to monitoring, challenge and support. The LEA has failed to show how it has responded to the government's Code of Practice on LEA-school Relations.

50. The school improvement team is led by the chief adviser and consists of two senior advisers and ten general advisers. All advisers carry a subject and an aspect or phase responsibility. For monitoring purposes, each general adviser is allocated to one of the eleven pyramids of schools. The rationale underpinning the allocation of schools was revised two years ago and is now based on the equitable distribution of responsibilities. However, the workload is still uneven and resources are not always closely aligned to the LEA's identified priorities, such as providing support for management and self-review.

51. The monitoring procedures do not relate to schools' needs and lack rigour. Every school, regardless of its performance, receives three days of monitoring visits annually by its link adviser. In addition, secondary schools receive a monitoring visit from each subject adviser who meets with the head of department. Primary school subjects are monitored through the adviser convening termly meetings during which the work in that subject is discussed. Subject monitoring is poorly aligned to need.

52. The outcomes of monitoring visits are variable. Schools generally receive oral feedback which they appreciate, but they are not routinely provided with a written report. The format and content of central records of monitoring have been developing over the last few months but have not yet been finalised. Central school files are insufficient and too little use is made of the information held by the different sections within the department, on such aspects as parental complaints or feedback from the education welfare service. As a consequence, the data kept on schools are too frequently incomplete, lacking clear indicators of how schools are

progressing or of emerging concerns. Sensibly, the LEA is considering strengthening its monitoring and evaluation of schools, by establishing termly monitoring meetings involving representatives from a range of services, when individual schools will be discussed.

53. The LEA, and a number of schools, see challenge arising from target setting, but as the LEA's data have been insufficiently robust, schools have often been in a stronger position than the LEA to present challenge. However, the improved data which have just been distributed to schools have the potential to make target setting more rigorous and enable the LEA to carry out more monitoring through analysis of data.

54. Schools are loosely, but accurately, categorised into five groups: Beacon schools, schools working satisfactorily, those causing concern, schools with serious weaknesses and those in special measures. The criteria for inclusion, though vague in some respects, are adequate and result, in contrast to monitoring, in those schools most in need usually receiving the highest levels of support.

55. New advisers undergo a period of induction, and all members receive training in priority initiatives. These activities contribute effectively to staff development and consistency. All advisers undertake an annual appraisal interview, but this does not constitute a rigorous review of their performance against targets. The strategic and performance management aspects of the service are poor. The service has failed to specify clearly the levels of support to which schools are entitled under the service level agreement. The impact and performance of individual members of the school improvement division are too variable. There are instances, for example in early years and literacy, where individuals have made strong contributions to school improvement, but there are others where there is too little evidence of impact, or where the heavy workload has impeded the level of school support. While the school improvement team has a wide range of subject expertise, it does not have sufficient secondary senior management expertise and that in the primary field is limited.

56. The work of the generously-sized school improvement team is insufficiently focused and too variable. It provides unsatisfactory value for money.

Collection and analysis of data

57. Until recently, the data provided to schools have been limited and the LEA's overall support for target setting remains unsatisfactory.

58. The LEA now provides a comprehensive set for data to its primary and secondary schools. It includes details of attainment, free school meal entitlement and ethnic composition, and sets schools' data in the national and local context. The recently created education department information centre is beginning to work effectively and this year, for the first time, individual pupil data have been distributed to schools. This enables comparisons to be made of groups of pupils within and between schools. Primary schools find the data more useful than secondary schools, a number of which have developed their own comprehensive databases.

The LEA does not routinely gather, record and distribute data to schools on wider aspects of their work, such as financial information or parental complaints.

59. The LEA's approach to target-setting is grossly inefficient. Schools' attainment targets are set by the LEA and the school is told about them by the link adviser during the autumn term visit. If the school accepts these targets, the headteacher is asked to seek the approval of the governing body. If, however, the headteacher is reluctant to accept the targets the adviser expects to attend the target setting meeting of the governing body in order to put the LEA's case. The LEA's targets are based on each individual school's free school meal entitlement and past performance. Schools rightly feel that their own data on individual pupils' performance provide a more accurate basis for target setting, and a number have either challenged the LEA's targets, or accepted them reluctantly. In a number of the schools visited there is also confusion about which are the real targets. Some distinguish between targets set by the school and those which the LEA has set. The improved data which the LEA has recently shared with schools have the potential to address these weaknesses and should enable schools to set their own targets.

Support for literacy

60. Support for literacy is good. The implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) is well managed by a senior adviser with one full-time and one half-time consultant. After a period of instability, staffing is now settled and schools are benefiting from good quality provision and the expertise of the NLS staff. The team is supplemented by the termly secondment to the LEA of expert teachers from secondary schools to support developments in Key Stage 3. Five expert literacy teachers have been identified from Key Stages 1 and 2 and they are producing materials which will better engage boys in writing.

61. The training provided by the LEA has been particularly appreciated. Schools benefited from the support for developing literacy action plans, carrying out audits, and from demonstration lessons. The network support groups for coordinators are valued for the opportunities they provide for solving literacy-related problems and for the professional development which they provide for coordinators.

62. Schools value the resources which the literacy team has produced to assist their assessment of pupils' writing and to support the teaching of English as an additional language (EAL). Coordinators have analysed test results for their own schools and so have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their curriculum. The network meetings for coordinators are valued highly as a means of sharing and solving problems and disseminating information. Many schools appreciate and have learned from the demonstration lessons provided. Schools receive monitoring visits from advisers and consultants but insufficient written feedback is provided for staff.

63. The LEA identified the schools for intensive literacy support correctly and those schools have improved as a result of the help they received. All eleven secondary schools are involved in the strategy and literacy summer schools have been held over the last three years in two schools and in a third school this year. Support to improve literacy at Key Stage 3 is well underway: schools have a high

regard for the training they have received and developments across the secondary curriculum are beginning. Staff working with pupils whose first language is not English, nursery staff and those working with pupils who have special educational needs have been involved in training and are supported well. A satisfactory range of professional development opportunities is being offered to schools to enable them to develop strategies for supporting gifted and talented pupils.

64. Beneficial working links have been established with family learning schemes to engage children and parents in reading and other basic skills activities. This is a valuable extension of the literacy work taking place in schools. The education action zone (EAZ) literacy co-ordinator for Key Stage 2 works closely with the LEA, attends training sessions and has provided literacy resources for a number of schools. This results in the zone's schools benefiting from co-ordinated support. The library service has developed a wide range of resources in line with the NLS and has been used well by primary and special schools. A number of secondary schools are now also buying into it.

Support for Numeracy

65. Support for numeracy is satisfactory. Its quality is good but until recently it has been limited in quantity.

66. The Key Stage 2 results for 2000 show 74 per cent of pupils gaining level 4 or above. This is a good increase of 14 per cent over the last two years, one percentage point above the national average. The LEA is on track to reach, or even exceed its 2002 target of 77 per cent.

67. The National Numeracy Strategy is managed satisfactorily. In addition to mathematics, the strategy manager is also responsible for ICT. This heavy load and the provision of only one consultant until September 2000 have limited the support available to schools. However, the appointment of a basic skills adviser who gives almost three-quarters of her time to the strategy has improved the amount of support available.

68. As a result of priority 2 of the EDP, which is to raise standards in numeracy, the LEA has targeted its support effectively. The first numeracy action plan, although adequate, was revised, and is now a more substantial and useful document which has been shared with schools.

69. Schools have benefited from the training they have received although they report variability in its quality in the early days. Recent training and support, when schools have been able to obtain it, have reportedly been of very good quality. Network meetings are valuable and primary coordinators and secondary heads of departments find them a useful way of sharing good practice. Where demonstration lessons have taken place, they have been valued by staff who have developed lesson observation in their schools. However, a number of schools have regretted not being able to arrange such demonstrations because of the limited availability of LEA staff. The LEA accurately identified primary schools for intensive support, but did not always indicate clearly enough to them the reasons for their inclusion in the cohort. This support has been very successful in helping the schools to raise

standards. Ten intensive schools in the 1999-2000 cohort improved their results by an average of 14 per cent.

70. Ten leading mathematics teachers have been recruited to work with primary and special schools. Their work is planned well and the LEA provides the necessary administrative support to enable them to devote their time to curricular activity. The professional development programme provides opportunities for teachers to develop strategies to challenge and support gifted and talented pupils. Effective support is also provided to enable schools to identify and support lower attaining pupils, particularly girls from ethnic minority groups. The LEA is developing its learning network website in order to enable it to disseminate good practice. Schools have been well supported in analysing test results and benchmarking data to enable them to improve their provision.

71. The numeracy strategy has been very well received by secondary school staff who have particularly valued the opportunities to share training with Key Stage 2 teachers. This has enabled them to concentrate on how the strategy can be developed into Key Stage 3 and how they can best build on pupils' past experiences. Although the NNS is in its very early days of implementation in secondary schools, the prognosis for its development and contribution to the curriculum is good.

72. Links with the EAZ are sound and work is well coordinated. Effective liaison with those involved in family learning is helping children and their parents to benefit from developments in numeracy.

Support for ICT

73. The quality of support for information and communication technology (ICT) has been uneven, but it is now improving and is generally satisfactory. Visits to schools during the inspection confirmed that where support is unsatisfactory, it is because of difficulty in accessing support and guidance, a shortage of resources, and insufficient expertise to help schools when they need it. In over half of the schools support is satisfactory or good and this is because of improvements in the level, quality and promptness of advice and its relevance to school needs.

74. The LEA strategy is sound and there has been detailed guidance for schools about its development. A careful assessment of needs has been undertaken, based on an analysis of school inspection reports and Key Stage 3 assessments. Progress on implementation of the strategy and the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) is satisfactory overall; with the latter seeking to provide equitable access to all. A recent District Audit Report highlighted its strength in securing an effective ICT infrastructure within the schools, whilst observing that as targets become more challenging, the resourcing and financing of the approach require greater attention. The recommendations are being tackled by the LEA; a project manager has taken up post, the e-mail project with secondary schools is well advanced and half of all secondary school teachers and pupils now have e-mail addresses. Clear guidance has been issued to schools on policy development and provision in line with NGfL requirements, and about training through the New Opportunities Fund.

75. Although strengths now outweigh weaknesses, the latter still do exist. The schools are not fully engaged in the development and implementation of the strategy and there is no process of review and readjustment involving all schools in the LEA.

Support for schools causing concern

76. Support for schools causing concern is improving and is now satisfactory. Since 1993, two primary and three special schools have been judged to require special measures. Three of these schools were removed after a period of between seventeen and twenty six months. Of the two remaining schools, one will be re-inspected in Autumn 2000 after a period of approximately twenty one months; the other is a primary school which the LEA has been unable to prevent slipping from serious weaknesses into special measures.

77. In addition, two secondary and two primary schools have been judged as having serious weaknesses and all but one have made satisfactory progress. The LEA has also identified a further seven schools as causing concern. Approximately 16 per cent of the LEA's schools are in this category which is rightly identified as a separate priority in the EDP.

78. In the past, the LEA's support for schools causing concern has been too variable and dependent on the quality of the link adviser to the school. In some cases, the school's difficulties were well known but there was a failure to intervene early enough. In other instances, the LEA took robust action which resulted in significant improvement in the management of the schools. The LEA's recent review of its policy and procedures, as part of the review of the EDP, has recognised these inconsistencies and made the necessary revisions. The revised policy has been discussed with headteachers but there has been a reluctance on their part to accept the term 'schools causing concern' as the third category, preferring instead the term 'requiring additional support'.

79. The school improvement strategy group (SISG) of senior managers of the education department is the key decision making body for LEA intervention and support, and reviews progress of individual schools against agreed criteria on a regular basis. Multi-disciplinary school support teams coordinate the programme of LEA support and monitor its effectiveness. Meetings of these groups, however, have not been sufficiently evaluative and have not always presented the LEA's judgements on the progress the school is making. For schools identified by the LEA as causing concern, the revised policy clearly sets out the need to keep governors fully informed from the outset, the requirement of an agreed action plan and regular feedback on progress.

Support for governors

80. Overall, the support for school governors is generally good. Governor administration provides a range of services for governors which ensure that they are kept informed and up to date with local and national developments. The LEA's 'helpline' provides a prompt service for governors and headteachers on matters relating to governance and issues arising from governing body meetings. Almost all schools buy into the clerking service which is rated highly by them. Regular

monitoring of governing body minutes ensures that LEA officers are able to identify any problems at an early stage.

81. The director of education and the lead member for lifelong learning hold termly briefing sessions for chairs, vice chairs and headteachers. This meeting provides the main means of communication and consultation with governors and is valued by them for its openness. Regular link governor meetings on areas such as SEN, training, target setting and health and safety further enable governors to contribute their views on LEA policy and practice.

82. Governor training is well organised and seen to be of good quality; in particular, induction training for new governors and school based training. The LEA has been instrumental in setting up a team of governors who deliver governor training, in collaboration with LEA officers. Effective targeting has ensured that all governing bodies within the EAZ have received training on effective governance. To date, however, the links between governor training on effective governance and the school improvement team's authority-wide work on school self-review are under developed.

83. Support for governors of schools causing concern is generally effective. Liaison with the school improvement strategy group ensures that appropriate additional governors are identified when necessary. School based training on effective governance has enabled governors to fulfil their monitoring and evaluation role. Effective advice and support on staffing issues related to capability, redundancy and appointments have been widely appreciated by governors

Support for school management

84. The LEA's monitoring and OFSTED inspection reports indicate that the quality of management and efficiency in South Tyneside schools is below the national average and that of its statistical neighbours. Despite this, the LEA has not provided adequate support for its schools' senior or middle managers or those aspiring to management posts. There is insufficient expertise within the education service to support senior managers of secondary schools.

85. The headship training plan is weak. It lacks coherence and its targets are too vague and aspirational. The level of support for school managers and prospective managers has been very limited. There is no coherent support for new headteachers. A course to support new deputy headteachers began only last term. Schools report that the quality of training courses provided by the LEA is too variable. Too few senior staff from schools have attended national training courses. A steering group of headteachers has recently been set up to advise on an LEA strategy for management, and to develop a three-year programme for attendance on national and local leadership and management courses. These developments indicate a move in the right direction but they are late in the day.

86. The LEA first introduced school self-review five years ago. Since that time annual conferences have been held on the topic for a self-selected group of headteachers but self-review was not developed across the LEA. The first EDP set

out the priority to support school self-review. This programme has been revised and now includes actions which are better aligned to promoting self-evaluation procedures than appeared in the original.

87. The LEA announced these new proposals to support self-review at a headteachers' conference in the summer term 2000, and followed this up by circulating details of the minimum standards which it expects of schools in relation to self-review. From the beginning of the autumn term 2000, two headteachers have been seconded for one day a week to work with schools on self-review. Despite this high profile, progress has been too slow. Developments have lacked pace and schools have not been sufficiently supported or challenged to carry out self review and evaluation.

88. The LEA supports schools in carrying out self-review by supplying data and enabling schools to interpret and use it. The pyramid structure of schools is seen by the LEA as a central plank of support for self-review. Pyramids were formally established in the summer 2000 and are at varying stages of development. They are not regarded seriously by schools as vehicles through which self-review or management support might be brought about.

89. The LEA's training for self-review received a mixed reception by schools. That provided by external agencies was regarded more highly. Schools are at greatly differing stages of self-review and evaluation and, in the main, are unclear about the support they might receive or what the LEA expects of them. Most are aware only that the LEA will be monitoring the headteachers' reports to governing bodies, but largely unaware that part of the link advisers' visit in the autumn term will scrutinise progress on the implementation of self-review.

90. The support provided by the LEA for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) is satisfactory. Guidance is clear and those involved understand their roles. It includes varied and appropriate professional development opportunities which are appreciated by both NQTs and their tutors. Although the LEA does not observe NQTs at work, it monitors their progress through reports from schools and will carry out observations if the school needs a second opinion, or if there are doubts about the performance of individuals.

Support for early years

91. The LEA provides very good support for early years education, led by a senior member of its advisory team. The LEA has shown a longstanding commitment to early years education, evidenced in its provision of five nursery schools, 27 nursery units and the recently opened early excellence centre. The LEA's guidance and monitoring ensure compliance with the staffing ratio of one teacher and one nursery nurse to 26 pupils.

92. The early years' development and childcare plan is a satisfactory working document and its production has provided an opportunity to formalise existing working relationships. The early years' partnership has an experienced and capable multi-agency membership committed to achieving the best it can for the children and their families in South Tyneside.

93. The early excellence centre has been developed within existing school premises with the aim of providing a variety of experiences of high quality for children and their families, training opportunities for parents, carers and other practitioners, and opportunities to share and disseminate good practice. The plans for the centre are good and the partnership, with the support of the LEA, has considered carefully how the centre might contribute to developments across the range of maintained, private and voluntary sector provision. The centre is seen as the borough's focal point for development through which the LEA and the partnership will support and improve cross-sector working.

94. Early years' staff have been trained in the implementation of the NLS and NNS. The relationship with the EAZ is profitable: the EAZ funds an early years' teacher to work with the early excellence centre. The LEA encouraged and supported 18 early years staff to undertake study at the University of Northumbria. Seven of these students have progressed to pursue higher degrees. Effective relationships exist with the social services, the health authority, the private sector, the portage scheme, the University, South Tyneside College, and the Pre-School Learning Alliance. Sure Start, which operates to improve children's abilities to learn, is supported effectively by the LEA and the partnership. Children with special needs and their families are also supported well.

Recommendations

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

- the strategic and operational management of the school improvement division should be improved in order to achieve a more effective and efficient service;
- the roles and responsibilities of the division should be more closely aligned to the Code of Practice on LEA-school Relations;
- the procedures for monitoring should be refined and the results of the range of monitoring activities more accurately recorded and reported to officers and schools;
- the recently refined data should be used more effectively to monitor the performance and progress of schools;
- the schools should be made clear of their entitlement under the service level agreement and under EDP priorities, and
- schools should be encouraged to become more autonomous by encouraging less reliance on LEA support.

In order to improve support for ICT in the curriculum:

- the strategy should be reviewed in consultation with all schools in order to secure agreement on further development and implementation.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

95. Over the past two years, South Tyneside Council has been developing its approach to corporate planning. The Council issued its first corporate plan in April 1998. Raising educational standards in schools and the community is one of six corporate priorities agreed at that time. Two other corporate priorities, reducing unemployment and promoting social inclusion, also relate directly to the role of education.

96. The Council's corporate plan 2000/01 clearly identifies performance indicators across all services and provides a useful tool for monitoring performance. The aims and objectives contributed by the different services within the education department are generally sound and are based on priorities and targets within other statutory plans such as the EDP, the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan (EYDCP) and the School Organisation Plan (SOP). These contributions from the different education services however, are not securely based on effective planning at an individual service level, nor are there any links between service objectives and financial planning.

97. In May 2000, the LEA published a strategic plan for education for the period 2000/2004 as part of its corporate approach to Best Value. The plan aims to provide a coherent framework for existing statutory plans and to link them to four strategic priorities for the education service. These are: raising standards in schools; improving educational opportunities for children with special educational needs; improving opportunities for high quality, affordable and accessible childcare, early years education and play provision; and improving opportunities for lifelong learning. These strategic priorities reflect appropriately the local context and are linked to the Council's corporate priorities and core values. However, the plan has a number of significant weaknesses. It does not communicate clearly how these strategic objectives are to be met, the role that schools have to play in achieving them or how they are to be resourced. Evidence from interviews and school visits indicates that schools have only limited knowledge of these strategic priorities. Schools acknowledge the LEA's commitment to raising standards and support the priorities within the EDP. However, the strategic direction and core values for the education service have not been clearly articulated or communicated to schools.

98. The quality of statutory plans drawn up by the education department is variable. Recent revisions to the EDP have significantly improved the quality of many of the success criteria and the related activity plans. The Asset Management Plan (AMP) and School Organisation Plan (SOP) are sound planning documents. In contrast, the Behaviour Support Plan is weak and is currently being revised. The Ethnic Minority and Travellers Achievement Grant (EMTAG) action plan is poor. In both areas, however, service delivery is better than the planning suggests.

99. There is no consistently applied performance management strategy across the education service, nor does the Council operate an appraisal system. To date, there has been limited monitoring of the performance of individuals or of the

effectiveness of the different services within the department. Service planning is not consistently implemented across the department. There is little use of evaluative feedback from service users. As a result, the authority has limited information about the effect of the various strategies and actions which have been implemented. There has been an over-reliance on evaluation from external agencies such as OFSTED and the reports of the district auditor. The department, however, has recently established an annual performance monitoring schedule which identifies, on a monthly basis, progress reports on key LEA and partnership plans to be considered by the senior management team.

100. Day to day operation of the education department is generally effective. Staff are hardworking and conscientious, and many services provide appropriate support for schools, despite the absence of effective management in some areas. Relationships between officers and schools and other key partners are open and accessible. However, there is too wide a variation in the performance of different services within the department. Senior management has not been sufficiently proactive in dealing with these deficiencies. As a result, the LEA does not have the capacity to improve the way it delivers services in order to meet the demands of the Best Value regime or to support schools towards greater autonomy. The prevailing culture within the authority is still one in which the majority of schools are dependent on the LEA to meet their needs, rather than taking greater responsibility for their own improvement. The political and professional leadership of the LEA has been slow to challenge these assumptions, and has failed to embrace fully the implications of the Code of Practice on LEA-school relations.

101. Officers' advice to elected members is generally sound and committee reports are succinct and well written. However, senior officers and elected members have been far less effective in developing strategic policies and in making effective decisions: most notably in relation to the education budget and in the slow response to the district auditor's report of July 1998 on SEN provision and in the removal of surplus places in nursery schools and classes. Elected members are not sufficiently briefed on standards and school improvement apart from the OFSTED summary reports on schools which are presented to the performance and quality select committee on a six monthly basis. Reporting of progress on the EDP is not sufficiently evaluative and does not enable elected members to judge the effectiveness of the strategy and the related resource allocations. In this respect, they are not able to carry out effectively their scrutiny role.

102. The procedures for consultation are generally effective, although as yet consultation involves schools mainly in responding to draft documents rather than in influencing the development of policy and planning. In particular, secondary schools in the school survey rated as poor the extent to which they are able to influence LEA policy. The recent introduction of Excellence in Cities (EiC) got off to a bad start because the LEA took an insufficiently robust stance in bringing schools together. These earlier problems have been addressed and the partnership working is now running smoothly.

Partnership

103. The LEA is committed to partnership working and effective links are well established at a strategic level with a wide range of local authority departments, voluntary and public sector agencies. Representatives of the LEA's partners spoke highly of the accessibility of senior officers and of their commitment to collaborative working to the benefit of children and young people in the borough. Links with South Tyneside College are strong and result in a wide range of initiatives designed to improve the staying on rate at post-16 and to enhance the employability of young people. The LEA and South Tyneside College are working jointly on the piloting of the Education Maintenance Allowance which was introduced in September 2000. The director of the education business partnership is a member of the LEA's school improvement team and the director of the EAZ regularly attends team meetings. Their respective programmes of work are making a significant contribution to the drive to raise standards. There are productive relationships with the Diocesan authorities.

Management services

104. South Tyneside LEA offers a full range of support services to its schools. The funding for finance and personnel services was delegated to schools for the first time in April 2000. The LEA provides a single level of service for the same cost as each school receives in delegated funding. All the services are provided through clearly written service level agreements, which run for three years up to 31 March 2003. Schools were consulted extensively in the run-up to budget delegation. However, once final budgets were allocated, there was not sufficient time for schools to fully consider alternative provision before they had to commit themselves to the LEA. In these circumstances, three-year binding contracts, with no choice about service level, constrain schools' freedom of choice. The LEA conducts regular surveys to determine schools' satisfaction with traded services.

105. Responsibility for providing advice and support on personnel matters is shared between the education personnel team and the corporate personnel department. The response to schools is prompt; the advice is generally good and sometimes excellent. On a few occasions schools would have welcomed more forthright support in dealing with issues of capability and under-performance. Written guidance on policy and procedures is clear and timely. However, it has not been assembled as a personnel manual so that headteachers have no readily available reference source.

106. South Tyneside provides good financial support to schools. This covers budget setting and monitoring; budget officers are responsive and well regarded by schools. No schools have built up significant budget deficits. Those that end the year with balances of more than five per cent are asked to explain expenditure plans. At the end of March 1999, only ten schools held balances of more than five per cent and only three more than ten per cent. The LEA facilitates an inter-school loan scheme using budget surpluses, borrowing schools pay only moderate rates of interest but lending schools receive no interest whatever. This disadvantages schools with retained balances.

107. Payroll services are efficient and accurate. The internal audit service works to a clear schedule and produces thorough reports with clear recommendations.

108. All of these financial services are highly regarded by schools. However, the finance team does not produce comparative financial information for schools to use in budget planning and analysis of performance.

109. The LEA provides good ICT support for management and financial administration in schools. It has written its own software package, supported by good quality training and a comprehensive, easily understood manual. There are occasions when schools have difficulty in getting access to telephone support, but once contact is made, support is good. The LEA is a pilot authority for the introduction of the electronic form seven and unique pupil numbers. It ran a successful trial in January 2000. In the survey, schools rated this service as good.

110. South Tyneside has one of the highest take up rates in the country for paid school meals. Catering services provided by the Council are good. Grounds maintenance services are inconsistent; schools frequently have to complain to the contractor in order to receive a better service.

111. Building services, provided by the public works department, respond promptly to emergency calls, but until recently was slow to respond, expensive and bureaucratic.

Recommendations:

In order to improve strategic management:

- in collaboration with key partners, a clear, strategic direction for the education service should be formulated in order to provide a coherent framework for existing plans;
- the recently published education strategic plan should be used as a basis for service planning, review and evaluation;
- performance management procedures should be devised and implemented across the department; and
- the three yearly SLAs with schools should be reviewed so that renewal can be undertaken on an annual basis, and that a choice of service levels is offered.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

112. The LEA policy for special educational needs (SEN) is comprehensive and is clearly related to the SEN Code of Practice and to the national agenda. The LEA also recognises the need for an additional inclusion policy to meet the wider requirements of schools in developing a more inclusive response to individual pupil need, as a key part of the SEN inclusion strategy. This need is also being addressed within priority five of the EDP.

113. The LEA's approach to SEN has been a measured one. This, in turn, has slowed down the pace of development, although actions taken are sound and reflect the views of the LEA's partners. In addition, there is insufficient clarity about the intended outcomes of the medium and long term targets, with corporate SEN targets not fully aligned to SEN targets in the EDP.

114. In July 1998, a district auditor's report recommended that the LEA undertake a comprehensive review of SEN provision. The LEA's response has been slow. It is only recently that an extensive consultation and review of special schools has taken place. Further recent developments to provide outreach support from special schools have been well received, but have not been communicated effectively as part of the LEA's strategic response to inclusion. The ongoing development of resourced bases attached to mainstream schools is sound and has decreased the number of pupils in out of borough provision. Visits to schools indicate that this provision has led to effective integration in most cases.

Statutory obligations

115. The LEA currently takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory responsibilities. In 1999/2000, 65 per cent of statements were drawn up within the recommended 18 weeks, and with exceptions, 92 per cent. Schools reported a variable response to the meeting of statutory deadlines, expressing concern regarding delays in the psychological service's assessment of pupils. These delays, which were due to staff shortages in the service, have now been rectified and the statutory time limits are improving significantly.

116. Administration systems to support the statutory process are improved through the vigilance and urgency of the administrative staff with the other agencies involved in meeting required deadlines, and through the attention paid to the corporate targets for SEN. The updating of the information systems will further enhance this process and support the effective work of the administration team.

117. The quality of statements examined is rarely less than satisfactory, and in most cases good, especially those produced more recently. A satisfactory proportion of annual reviews, both in and out of borough, are attended, with a range of officers prioritising transitional reviews and contentious cases. The review of statements and the de-statementing of pupils are satisfactory. The moderating panel for assessment currently only meets to resolve difficult and contentious cases. This panel should now become a regular means of placement as current practice does not always ensure an equitable response to need.

Improvement and value for money

118. Leadership and support for SEN has been strengthened by the appointment of an SEN adviser and an advisory teacher. Both play significant roles in raising the status of SEN in mainstream schools. Effective work has been done to support the priority for SEN in the EDP and has ensured the development of model SEN school policies, the development of appropriate reporting of SEN in governors annual reports, target setting and the provision of professional development for teachers, SEN coordinators and learning support assistants. The expertise of teachers in special schools is beginning to be shared in mainstream schools and complements the effective regional liaison work, with the LEA leading on conferences on inclusion, autism and dyslexia.

119. Support services are well received by schools with a willingness to work together to meet individual need. The learning and behaviour support service has recently been restructured effectively and now reports directly to two senior psychologists who manage individual pupil need on a referral basis. Early intervention strategies are being developed to meet schools' needs as they become more inclusive. Early years, portage and sensory services have established effective links with social services and health. These services stimulate initiatives, monitor and review pupil progress, and train mainstream teachers to meet needs in the classroom. However, the overall monitoring and evaluation of the support services is under developed.

120. In almost half the schools visited during the inspection, financial arrangements were unsatisfactory. The lack of clarity in relation to the principles and criteria on which funding for SEN provision is allocated is a weakness. Schools are uncertain about the entitlement of pupils without statements and the absence of systematic monitoring of expenditure on SEN prevents the LEA and schools being able to demonstrate that resources fully follow need. The situation is further complicated by a flexible response to funding bands for statutory assessment and by special schools' concerns about their comparative low levels of funding. The cost of out of borough provision remains significantly high and requires further liaison with social services to address the funding issues that arise from the shared funding of children in public care. The LEA currently provides unsatisfactory value for money in meeting SEN.

121. The omission of special schools from the current Best Value review of SEN is of serious concern, given the large part they currently play in SEN provision in South Tyneside.

Recommendations

In order to improve the arrangements for meeting pupils' SEN:

- the development of SEN provision should be continued ensuring that all schools are fully aware of the principles underpinning the inclusion strategy;

- the arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of schools and support services in meeting individual pupil need should be improved;
- clear and transparent funding mechanisms should be published with associated criteria for the assessment of and provision for pupils with SEN; and
- the outreach provision should be extended and the outcomes of the special schools' review and the Best Value review of SEN should inform future strategic planning for SEN.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

122. The population of South Tyneside is falling. The projected primary school roll is anticipated to fall by 1,174 between January 2000 and January 2004, and in the secondary sector from 10,444 to 10,148 over the same period. Since the inception of the LEA in 1974, it has worked steadily to reduce the number of schools and surplus places; there were 20 secondary and 90 primary in 1974, and 11 and 56 respectively today. In January 2000, the borough had 1647 surplus places in primary schools, 11.2 per cent of the total and 1183 (10.4 per cent) surplus places in secondary schools. 616 children were enrolled in schools beyond capacity. These figures are close to the average for similar authorities. The LEA has firm plans in place to remove 195 places by September 2002. The School Organisation Plan (SOP) estimates that 1400 primary and 500 secondary places will have to be removed by 2004 if the Best Value target of six per cent surplus is to be achieved. Initial considerations have focused on the five primary schools and the one secondary school with more than 25 per cent surpluses. Rapid action is now required if the LEA is to achieve its target for 2004.

123. The SOP anticipates that some of the surplus places may be used to accommodate units for children with SEN. However, the 2000/2001 revised SOP makes no mention of the review of special schools that the LEA has initiated. This review is not integrated within overall school place planning.

124. The LEA has a policy of seeking to merge infant and junior schools into all through primary schools when opportunities arise. It has recently completed one such merger successfully and building work is underway on another.

125. In addition to the surplus places in primary schools, there is also a significant surplus of places in nursery schools and classes. This matter was raised in the district audit report following a review in 1996. The LEA was slow to tackle the issues raised but is now considering the options available to it to remove surplus places and to make more economic use of its resources.

126. The LEA has prepared a plan to reduce infant class size and reached the target of no class above 30 from September 2000. Given the situation with surplus places it was only necessary to build one classroom.

Admissions

127. Admissions to schools in South Tyneside run smoothly. There are relatively few appeals and they are managed effectively. Admissions criteria are mainly based on school catchment areas. Admissions administration for primary schools is now co-ordinated centrally and this prevents parents holding more than one vacancy and making planning difficult for individual schools. Admissions to nursery schools and classes are administered locally and this leads to problems when parents hold a place on more than one waiting list. Admissions information to parents does not indicate the extent to which schools are oversubscribed.

128. The LEA has prepared a detailed Asset Management Plan (AMP) which lists the condition of all school buildings. The estimated cost of the backlog of repair work is £24m. The LEA has asked schools to undertake their own suitability audits and will complete the sufficiency audit on the basis of centrally held building plans. There is no system to moderate suitability audits.

129. The management of major building projects is generally effective. The LEA has made effective use of New Deal for Schools (NDS) funding and capital challenge funds to carry out repair and refurbishment of school premises. Occasionally, work has been subject to delay. Work is also under way to construct two new schools using funds derived from private sector developments.

130. Most schools have agreed to pool delegated funds for structural repairs and maintenance; this programme is managed by the LEA. At present, no report is circulated to schools on how this fund is spent. Satisfactory arrangements are in place to support schools in making effective use of delegated capital funds.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

131. Provision for education otherwise than at school has improved significantly over the last year and a half and is now good. The arrangements for educating pregnant schoolgirls and teenage mothers are effective in providing programmes which are focused to individual need, and are improved by links to the early excellence centre. There are well-established arrangements for the oversight of children educated at home (14 last year) by their parents. Hospital and home tuition for children out of school owing to illness (47 and six respectively last year) are also well managed by the learning support team.

132. Provision for permanently excluded pupils has also improved significantly over the last year. From the start of this term, through arrangements managed by the alternative education service, no permanently excluded pupil is offered less than 18 and a half hours education, with the majority being offered over 21 hours.

133. The arrangements for all pupils without a school place are characterised by effective documentation, close cooperation between the alternative education service and the learning support service, and between them and other agencies. Overall, the referral systems are effective and generally well understood by schools. The procedures for providing individual education plans for permanently excluded pupils, setting targets and monitoring them are appropriately detailed and focused upon individual need. Expenditure on education out of school is very slightly above that of statistical neighbours on average, at the same level as metropolitan authorities generally and slightly under the national average. The service is good and provides good value for money.

Attendance

134. Arrangements for supporting improvements in pupil attendance at school are well established and effective. The education welfare service (EWS) is very well managed with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. The strategy for

improving attendance has been carefully worked out through divisional and departmental discussions, careful consultation with schools and staged discussions with other agencies and departments. The strategy is clearly delineated and is based not only upon an effective statistical system but also direct knowledge of schools through regular visiting, which together have provided a full audit of need and a secure basis for the strategy.

135. Assignment of support to schools is based on an assessment of need and its effectiveness is systematically monitored by senior management, with consequential adjustments to support related to need and negotiated with schools. This process supports a highly effective approach to direct resources to support and challenge schools. An example of the former is the way the service and an individual high school concentrated for 18 months on a particular year group with sporadic attenders, with the effect of raising the percentage attendance from low to upper 80s and beyond. An example of the latter is the EWS use of pastoral support programmes to focus on attendance as well as behaviour, and to involve school staff in developing solutions to attendance difficulties.

136. The EWS also works well with other partners such as the police, in truancy sweeps, joint work in and around schools, and in developing with the youth offending team the use of parenting orders. There is a carefully graded and robust approach to the use of legal powers; last year there were 29 prosecutions of parents. The service fully meets all its statutory and legal responsibilities. Strategies and actions for improving attendance are coherently developed in the EDP and other plans, and are based upon effective working with all partners.

137. Attendance of pupils is consistently above that of pupils in similar LEAs. At the primary stage, attendance is in line with the national average for 1999. At the secondary phase (at 90 per cent) it is below the national level, but levels of unauthorised absence are significantly below both similar LEAs and the national level in both phases. The LEA has exceeded its EDP target for unauthorised absence in both phases and is now directing its attention to improving overall attendance further, by reducing authorised absence. Expenditure (£17 a pupil) is higher than both the metropolitan average (£13) and the national average (£14). However, the quality of support for improving attendance is very good and this activity provides very good value for money.

Behaviour support

138. Support for improving pupils' behaviour at school has been improving rapidly and is now good. The rate of permanent exclusions in particular has decreased dramatically, especially in the secondary sector where there was furthest to go. Last year, it stood at 0.3 per cent in comparison to 0.89 per cent three years earlier. At the primary phase, exclusions remain below the figures for statistical neighbours and nationally. Last year there were no permanent exclusions from special schools, and no child in public care was permanently excluded. The targets set two years ago were challenging but have now been passed and are being reformulated. Figures for fixed term exclusions last year were static compared with the previous year.

139. The LEA has been robust in its approach to reductions in exclusions and has used the opportunity presented by bidding successfully for external funds to develop effective arrangements for pastoral support plans. Two social inclusion teams in secondary schools provide in-school support and the capacity to avoid exclusions where appropriate. Similarly, SRB funding has been allocated to the alternative education service (AES) to assist groups of schools in tracking pupils at risk from Key Stage 2 through to the end of Key Stage 3. These approaches are entirely consistent with other Standards Fund initiatives for developing in-school systems designed to obviate the need for exclusions. LEA work with parents of at risk pupils is also designed to reinforce the importance of inclusion. These important examples of joint working and co-operation have provided a useful platform for further development as part of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme.

140. In the school survey, schools rated advice on exclusion procedures by the LEA as good, but alternative provision for excluded pupils worse than satisfactory. Evidence from school visits during the inspection indicates that provision is improving. Behaviour support at the primary phase is provided by the learning support team, and behaviour support and alternative educational provision are provided at the secondary stage by the AES. Although there is close personal collaboration between the two services, consistent approaches and joint working are not sufficiently developed.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

141. The LEA takes all appropriate steps to discharge its statutory duties in relation to health and safety at work. It has provided risk assessment training for headteachers and undertaken asbestos surveys of school buildings. Steps are taken to ensure that cleaning, catering and building contractors working on school premises comply with necessary legislation.

142. Relationships between education, social services and health agencies are very effective at all levels from the strategic to the operational. In the case of routine health issues, every school nurse has a number of link schools which broadly follow the primary/secondary clusters. Health agencies work with the LEA to advise schools, parents and children on vaccinations, dental health, personal hygiene and healthy living issues generally, including a protocol on headlice. In more specialist areas, all three partners are closely involved in the children and adolescent mental health service and, overall, joint working is effective, despite some shortage of psychiatric support.

143. Child protection is a major priority for all three partners, and social services consider that the educational input to joint training and to the work of the area child protection committee is a real strength of the arrangements in South Tyneside to protect vulnerable children. All schools have a named contact person and visits to schools during the inspection indicate rigorous systems and commendable attention to detail. Support for child protection was rated satisfactory in two schools and good in the rest. The LEA is taking all appropriate steps to meet its statutory duties. Activity is effective and provides good value for money.

Children in public care

144. Support for children in public care is good and continuing to improve. The links between education, social services and the health service are very effective at both informal and formal levels, the latter including an inter-agency monitoring/implementation group chaired by the social services department. The group comprises a paediatrician, foster carers, education and social services representatives. The children's services and the Quality Protects management action plans define a clear and coherent strategy for these children and there are effective links between those plans and the EDP. These are much more than lines drawn on paper and reflect a clear commitment from officers in all three services. For example, alternative education for excluded pupils starts after 15 days; for excluded children in public care it starts after five days. Educational targets for children in public care have been set and are monitored. Provision of longitudinal data for these pupils has improved rapidly and is starting to help schools focus more effectively on their needs, although at present the level of pupil performance remains well below current levels for the school population as a whole.

145. Training programmes for teachers, social workers and foster carers are established with effective contributions from all three agencies. Particularly important is the developing training for foster carers leading to NVQ Level 3 with input from the education service. South Tyneside has a high proportion of children of statutory school age in public care (216). The position is complicated by the fact that upwards of 70 per cent of these children are fostered as there is no large children's home within the borough and none have had education on the premises.

146. The work supporting children in public care is well organised and managed and in key areas such as data provision and use, identification of named teachers, documentation to promote partnership, effective multi-agency direction, and in joint training development, the service is good and improving. The school survey indicates that all phases rated provision for children in public care as at least satisfactory and in some cases good. Overall the service is good and provides good value for money.

Support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage, including Travellers

147. The support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage is unsatisfactory, although improving. A senior adviser has recently taken over the management of these support services and there have been marked improvements. The LEA has recently begun to provide each school with individualised pupil data and is monitoring more closely the attainment and progress of minority ethnic pupils.

148. The Ethnic Minority and Travellers Achievement Grant (EMTAG) action plan is poor. It provides too little analysis and insufficient data. Although the strategy for support is clearly defined and the priorities are appropriate, its attainment targets for pupils are too low. However, the LEA now has useful information which shows the performance of different groups and is giving increasing attention to monitoring the attainment of groups of different origin.

149. The EMTAG has been distributed appropriately to the four schools with significant proportions of minority ethnic pupils, mainly of Bangladeshi and Arab

origin. The funding has been devolved according to the number of pupils, standards of fluency and levels of attainment. It is used by the three primary schools to provide targeted support, mainly EAL teaching. This support is provided by the EAL service which is effective in raising standards in literacy and increasing motivation and participation. While the support for EAL is sound, there is insufficient support for dual language teaching or interpretation. The secondary school makes its own, more diverse, satisfactory provision. The LEA now monitors pupils' progress and attainment, and the EAL support which they receive closely, but it does not review whether, and how, pupils' wider needs are met, or the extent of progress on schools' action plans.

150. There are reported to be no Traveller pupils in the LEA.

Gifted and talented children

151. LEA provision for gifted and talented children is satisfactory. Support is currently overseen by an adviser with a small allocation of five days per year. This time is used mainly to support a group of primary schools that have developed their own programmes of enrichment activities and to disseminate and share their good practice within the authority.

152. To date, there has been limited involvement by secondary schools apart from one school whose well developed policy and practice are being used as a platform for developments by all schools within the EiC programme. Two secondary schools ran summer schools this year for gifted and talented pupils and further developments are planned as part of the EiC programme, including one school running an accelerated programme for mathematics. It is planned that EiC developments in this area will build on and extend current activity to support the more able which is underway within the EDP priority to increase motivation and participation. In particular, the EiC partnership recognises the importance of the learning mentor strand in supporting the achievements of gifted and talented pupils who underachieve, as well as supporting young people who have become, or are in danger of becoming, disaffected or disengaged from learning.

Social exclusion

153. Support for this area of activity is good. Tackling social exclusion is a key corporate priority. This is in turn reflected in the EDP. As formulated, priority five not only reflects national initiatives and policies but also provides a local approach. The supporting activities have now been focused into four main areas; tackling barriers to learning, exploring ways of re-engaging disaffected learners, enhancing the range of opportunities for developing employment skills and focusing support on identified groups at risk of under achieving. All secondary schools are represented on its strategy and working groups. The programme not only engages the schools but pre-school provision (maintained, voluntary and private), further and higher education, local business and industry, and not least, the LEA's own alternative education and learning services as well as family learning services and community education. As a result, the approach to inclusion underlies the LEA's strategy for developing special education as well as its policies and practices for improving access to education and training opportunities for excluded pupils and those at risk

of exclusion. Its importance is illustrated in the increasingly effective systems for supporting children in public care, the development of local community responsibility for community buildings and developments, and the use of SRB funding to ensure that children and young people do not fall out of the system. The links with social services, police and health agencies as well as the youth offending team are very effective in supporting these approaches. There are regular meetings and a common agenda.

154. The LEA's arrangements to combat racism are sound. The Stephen Lawrence inquiry was the subject of a multi-disciplinary conference in the autumn of 1999. This conference was planned and hosted by the LEA which worked closely with schools, other council departments and local race equality forums. The LEA's initiatives were applauded by many group members. Since the conference, there has been a rise in the number of schools reporting minor racial incidents, not because of increased racial disharmony, but because key members of staff are now aware of the procedures which they are required to follow. According to the Tyne and Wear racial equality council, there are relatively few racial incidents in South Tyneside compared with those in other LEAs in the region.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for access:

- a clear plan to remove surplus school (including nursery) places should be prepared to enable the LEA to reach the 6 per cent target by 2004 and secure the agreement of schools and the SOC;
- the review of special schools should be integrated within the SOP and overall place planning;
- a system to moderate schools' suitability assessments for the AMP should be established;
- an annual report to schools should be provided showing how delegated repair and maintenance funds managed by the LEA have been spent;
- information about the over-subscription of schools should be included in future editions of the admissions booklet;
- schools should receive advice and support to enable them to meet the wider needs of ethnic minority pupils, for example in dual language teaching and in the provision of translation services;
- the levels and quality of support which ethnic minority pupils receive should be monitored and evaluated; and
- progress on schools' EMTAG action plans should be monitored and evaluated.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- the budget for education should reflect the priority attached to education in the Council's corporate plan;
- a three year budget and resource allocation plan should be prepared;
- as part of the annual budget making process resources should be allocated to declared priorities;
- a full review of the funding formula for schools and the relative weighting for different phases should be undertaken; and
- the management structure of the education department should be reviewed and evaluated.

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

- the strategic and operational management of the school improvement division should be improved in order to achieve a more effective and efficient service;
- the roles and responsibilities of the division should be more closely aligned to the Code of Practice on LEA-school Relations;
- the procedures for monitoring should be refined and the results of the range of monitoring activities more accurately recorded and reported to officers and schools;
- the recently refined data should be used more effectively to monitor the performance and progress of schools;
- the schools should be made clear of their entitlement under the service level agreement and under EDP priorities, and
- schools should be encouraged to become more autonomous by encouraging less reliance on LEA support.

In order to improve support for ICT in the curriculum:

- the strategy should be reviewed in consultation with all schools in order to secure agreement on further development and implementation.

In order to improve strategic management:

- in collaboration with key partners, a clear, strategic direction for the education service should be formulated in order to provide a coherent framework for existing plans;

- the recently published education strategic plan should be used as a basis for service planning, review and evaluation;
- performance management procedures should be devised and implemented across the department; and
- the three yearly SLAs with schools should be reviewed so that renewal can be undertaken on an annual basis, and that a choice of service levels is offered.

In order to improve the arrangements for meeting pupils' SEN:

- the development of SEN provision should be continued ensuring that all schools are fully aware of the principles underpinning the inclusion strategy;
- the arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of schools and support services in meeting individual pupil need should be improved;
- clear and transparent funding mechanisms should be published with associated criteria for the assessment of and provision for pupils with SEN; and
- the outreach provision should be extended and the outcomes of the special schools' review and the Best Value review of SEN should inform future strategic planning for SEN.

In order to improve support for access:

- a clear plan to remove surplus school (including nursery) places should be prepared to enable the LEA to reach the 6 per cent target by 2004 and secure the agreement of schools and the SOC;
- the review of special schools should be integrated within the SOP and overall place planning;
- a system to moderate schools' suitability assessments for the AMP should be established;
- an annual report to schools should be provided showing how delegated repair and maintenance funds managed by the LEA have been spent;
- information about the over-subscription of schools should be included in future editions of the admissions booklet;
- schools should receive advice and support to enable them to meet the wider needs of ethnic minority pupils, for example in dual language teaching and in the provision of translation services;
- the levels and quality of support which ethnic minority pupils receive should be monitored and evaluated; and

- progress on schools' EMTAG action plans should be monitored and evaluated.

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**Office for Standards in Education
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE**

Tel: 020 7421 6800

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