

**South Gloucestershire
Local Education Authority
Inspection Report**

Date of Inspection: October 2004

Reporting Inspector:

Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI

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Basic information

Name of LEA:	South Gloucestershire Local Education Authority
LEA number:	803
Address of LEA:	Municipal Offices Bowling Hill Chipping Sodbury South Gloucestershire
Reporting Inspector:	Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI
Date of Inspection:	October 2004

Summary

Introduction

South Gloucestershire is a relatively advantaged unitary authority. Although predominantly rural, and with unemployment lower than the national average, 60% of the population live in a significant urban fringe to the north and east of Bristol where there are areas of deprivation. The total population is growing and this rise is projected to continue. Since the previous inspection, the school-aged population has decreased slightly in primary schools and risen in secondary schools.

Standards of attainment are generally above the national averages and in line with those in similar authorities¹. There has been improvement over the last four years in all key stages, particularly at Key Stage 3. Standards at GCSE have also improved although there is significant variation between individual schools and overall results dipped in 2004. The LEA fell short of its targets for 2004 and will require a greater rate of improvement to meet the 2005 targets. Post-16 attainment is too low, particularly in schools with small sixth forms.

Since the previous inspection there have been major changes within the council and the education services directorate. An executive councillor now has responsibility for children and young people covering most education functions. The select committee for children and young people has oversight of education and monitors the work of the education department. The education department was restructured in 2002 to improve service delivery, including coordinating services to raise pupils' achievement, to provide support, challenge and intervention in schools and to promote inclusion. At the time of this inspection the department was engaged in further structural changes.

¹ South Gloucestershire LEA's statistical neighbours are: West Sussex, North Somerset, Bedfordshire, Worcestershire, Warrington, Dorset, Poole, Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire and East Sussex.

Main findings

Summary: The performance of South Gloucestershire local education authority (LEA) is highly satisfactory. It has made highly satisfactory progress since the previous inspection, with the most notable improvements in the implementation of its strategy for school improvement and in services to support schools. All functions are at least satisfactory and over a quarter are performed to a good standard. Council members and officers provide strong leadership. Schools have confidence in the LEA and work effectively with officers and partners. The implementation of national strategies and support for school leadership and management are good. The commitment to raising standards is high, with particular focus on the more challenging areas of the authority. More remains to be done to reduce the variation in standards between individual schools at GCSE and post-16. The strategy for pupils with special educational needs is good and work to promote social inclusion is highly satisfactory. The LEA is well placed for further development of its services for children and young people and its capacity for further improvement is good.

Areas of strength	Areas of weakness/for development
Corporate leadership of education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision and strategic planning for children’s services • Clarity and coherence of plans • Leadership of senior officers and elected members and effectiveness of their decision-making • Support from schools • Partnerships and collaborative work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigour in measuring the returns of investment in education and value for money • Range of opportunities in the 14-19 curriculum and guidance at age 16
Strategy for education and its implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision for school improvement • Identification of and support for underperforming schools • Challenge to schools • Use of successful schools to support those that are underperforming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant variation in performance across schools, particularly secondary schools and underachievement post-16. • Lack of precision in evaluation and reporting the impact of school improvement work
Support to improve education in schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for leadership and management, including the sharing of good practice • Support for national strategies at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 • Support for school governors • Planning and provision of financial and human resources services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency of provision to support gifted and talented pupils • Variation in quality among services to schools • Support for procurement and best value • Lack of specific measurable targets in some individuals’ performance reviews
Support for special educational needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectiveness of the strategy • Support for parents and carers of pupils with SEN • Value for money in provision for SEN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent detail about provision in the statements of special educational needs
Support for social inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to promote social inclusion • Links between attendance, behaviour and achievement • Multi-agency work in schools • Commitment to promoting racial equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic monitoring of racial incidents and child protection requirements • Support for the educational progress of looked after children and young people living outside South Gloucestershire • Tardiness in securing suitable full-time education for permanently excluded pupils

Recommendations

Key recommendations

There are no key recommendations.

Other recommendations

Corporate leadership of education

Corporate planning: Evaluate more rigorously the value for money of the council's investment in education.

Support for 14-19 education

- Improve the range of provision for vocational study at age 14 and the guidance to students on alternative courses post-16.
- Increase support and challenge to schools to raise achievement in GCE/VCE AS/A level programmes.

Strategy for education and its implementation

Strategy for school improvement: Ensure evaluation and reporting is precisely focused on the impact of the LEA's actions on the quality of teaching and learning, pupils' progress and achievements.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

- Revise the amount of time allocated to successful schools for supported self-evaluation visits to reflect their improving practice.
- Ensure notes of visits to headteachers and chairs of governors provide specific judgements to inform them about achievements and actions needed to secure further improvement.

Support to improve education in schools

Support for gifted and talented pupils: Support and challenge all schools in developing provision for gifted and talented pupils and in tracking their progress to raise standards further.

Services to support school management: Improve support for procurement in schools so that they become more effective purchasers of services.

Services to support school improvement

- Help schools to secure best value in their purchasing decisions and share with schools the results of the LEA's own quality assurance of school improvement services.
- Ensure that individuals' performance reviews consistently include specific measurable targets to monitor performance robustly in all parts of the service.

Support for special educational needs

Statutory obligations: Consistently provide sufficient detail in statements in order that parents, carers, schools and other agencies know what must be provided to meet the specific needs of the child.

Support for social inclusion

Support for child protection: Challenge schools to ensure that relevant staff keep up to date with child protection training.

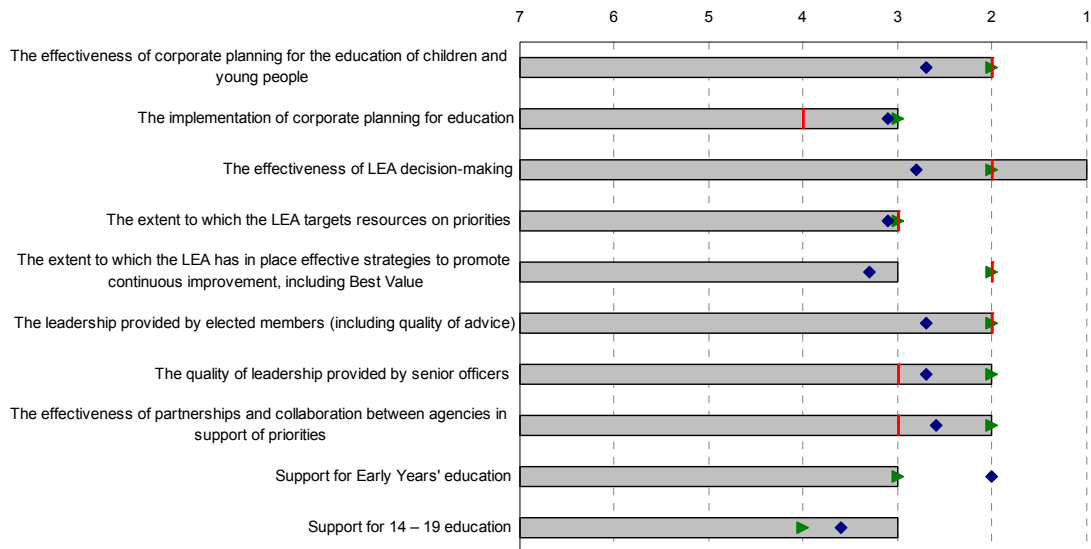
Provision for looked after children: Strengthen support for the educational progress of all looked after children and young people placed outside South Gloucestershire.

Promoting race equality

- Ensure that all schools complete regular returns on racial incidents, including nil returns.
- Ensure that staff and governors undergo training on the promotion of racial equality and the handling of racist incidents.

Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

Summary table of judgements



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

Corporate planning for education and its implementation

1. Since the previous inspection, the council has maintained its good corporate planning for education and has improved the implementation of plans which is now highly satisfactory. Changes to the political administration, the new structure of the education service and preparation for the fundamental service review of children's services have not deflected the work of the education services directorate and elected members away from the key principles of the community strategy and the corporate service plan. The council's vision and priorities for education have remained clear and consistent. The LEA's relationship with its schools is productive in bringing about improvement. The strong support of schools underpins and informs the officers' work. For example, schools have contributed to, and therefore support, the development of strategies such as the strategy for special educational needs and initiatives to promote inclusion. Consequently, the positive context needed to raise standards further and manage change effectively, is well established. Schools recognise the strong leadership of senior officers and the determination of elected members to improve provision further.

2. Education has a high priority within corporate plans, with good partnership work and strong collaboration between agencies. Education is a major theme of the community strategy "Our area - Our Future". There is secure cross-party commitment to developing a holistic and community-based approach to meet the needs of children and their families. Support for early years is highly satisfactory

and plans are suitably focused on raising standards and improving the overall quality of provision in maintained and non-maintained settings. Parents and families have access to comprehensive information, advice and support. The training programme provides good support for early years' practitioners. The planning framework for the review of services is coherent. The corporate service plan sets out clearly the agenda for the education directorate. It places strong emphasis on the continual improvement of educational outcomes, the inclusion of all pupils in relevant learning activities, and securing young people's welfare and safety.

3. Arrangements for checking whether the LEA is achieving its goals are well established. Progress is monitored rigorously by senior officers and reported regularly to elected members. The council's chief officer management team, the cabinet, and the children and young people select committee have explicit roles in holding heads of services to account and in monitoring performance, including the budget. Unforeseen difficulties are rare and effective action is taken when problems arise, as in the case of capital expenditure and a predicted overspend of the SEN budget.

4. The scrutiny function focuses on topics of high importance for South Gloucestershire such as admissions, the school improvement programme, schools' performance and the progress of schools causing concern. However, there is scope for further improvement in the robustness of elected members' challenge to investigate the value for money of the council's investment in education with a particular focus on the unevenness of the progress of 14-19 year old students and the outcomes for all vulnerable pupils.

Recommendation

- Evaluate more rigorously the value for money of the council's investment in education.

5. Overall, the LEA knows its strengths and weaknesses well because the monitoring of progress is rigorous, although evaluation does not always focus sufficiently on measurable outcomes to inform future strategies for improvement. Nonetheless, there is a close match between the LEA's self-evaluation, the findings of this inspection and the outcomes of the most recent corporate assessment which judged the council to be good overall for its performance and capacity to sustain improvement. The quality of educational leadership, the good support from schools and the commitment to continuous improvement mean that there is good capacity to improve further. The education department is well placed to meet the challenges of its broader remit in the new directorate for children and young people.

Decision-making

6. The effectiveness of decision-making is very good. The council's capacity to take difficult decisions is demonstrated in the determined way in which it has tackled school reorganisation, revised funding arrangements and planned the review of

children's services. Decisions are taken in a timely way, with thorough consultation and communication with schools. Major proposals in education are communicated well to schools and other stakeholders. Their views are considered and influence decisions to improve service quality and efficiency, for example through the Schools Forum. Effective delegation to officers creates a climate of confidence and trust. Officers provide very good advice to elected members, allowing for options and implications to be considered in detail.

7. Decision-making is strengthened by effective cross-party agreement and a determination to ensure that priorities are delivered in line with the corporate service plan. There is strong agreement between elected members about the part education plays in improving community cohesion and in supporting the objectives of the council's community strategy. This is strengthened further by the budget-setting process which subjects proposals to rigorous and open scrutiny before final decisions are made. The quality of the open debate and the wide consultation about provision of a new secondary school in Bradley Stoke exemplify the strength of the process.

Targeting of resources

8. The LEA's targeting of resources to priorities is highly satisfactory. The money in the schools' budget is less than that of statistical neighbours and the national average. However, the council continues to spend more than the funding it is allocated by central government and delegation levels are higher than statistical neighbours and the national average. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has increased spending on a range of areas including information and communication technology (ICT) to keep pace with national developments and special educational needs (SEN) to meet the costs of support for pupils with a statement of SEN in mainstream schools.

9. The LEA's access to government grants is limited. However, it deploys those it receives to relevant priorities, for example to support activities in the Education Development Plan (EDP) and to realign provision of school buildings to match community and demographic need. The support to schools for bidding for grants is at an early stage of development. The LEA is clear about its priorities and is flexible about redirecting funding as needs and opportunity arise. Schools are extensively consulted on funding matters. The understanding and review of the funding formulae are monitored well by the Schools Forum and particular attention is given to the specific needs of small schools. Over half of all schools have budget surpluses of more than 5% and secondary school balances increased substantially last year. The LEA challenges each school to explain the reasons and schools are responding suitably with specific plans to address their own circumstances.

10. Central recharges were an issue at the time of the previous inspection because costs and service levels lacked clarity. There is now greater understanding over the costs and level charged for the services provided but the LEA has not assessed how far these services provide value for money.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

11. The LEA's strategies to promote continuous improvement remain highly satisfactory. Members and officers are strongly committed to improvement. Following the previous inspection, the LEA undertook to review the advisory service, property services and ICT. It decided to retain and improve these services. Service reviews have resulted in a step change in the delivery of services such as capital investment and asset management and greater consistency in the working practices of school improvement advisers. Developments to improve consistently the quality of traded services have been slow to establish, but the progress made since April 2004 is well received by schools.

12. Individual officers, senior managers and elected members are clear about the strategic outcomes towards which the council is working, although some individual services are more able than others to reflect these in clear objectives and targets. Performance indicators are securely in place in many areas and most are improving. The indicators to identify quality performance in buildings and facilities management and some traded services are at an early stage of development.

13. Systems for reporting on performance management are well established. However, information and data from across the organisation are not sufficiently brought together and interpreted to track progress and to benchmark against internal and external provision. This improvement is required to strengthen performance management systems for individual officers and to ensure greater rigour of continuous improvement.

Leadership by elected members and advice given to them

14. Elected members continue to provide good leadership. This inspection considered in detail the leadership and management of the service review of children's services. Members have detailed knowledge of the issues precipitating the change; they have clear plans to align services and are well briefed by officers about the implications of proposals. Members add to this knowledge through scheduled visits to schools which headteachers value. Many elected members improve their understanding further through their work as school governors. Members have a realistic approach to managing change in the culture and structure of existing services. In moving towards their vision, plans for the development of children's services are managed well with a good balance between sensitivity and determination.

15. Relationships between senior officers, the leader of the council and the executive councillor for children and young people are strong. Senior officers provide good leadership. Regular briefings keep members well informed and a quarterly review enables progress against targets to be monitored effectively. Advice to members is timely and indicates clearly how to bring about improvement, for example in raising attendance in some South Gloucestershire schools and tackling the difference in performance between boys and girls. Elected members have maintained their commitment to partnership work and performance in this

aspect of their role is good. The early years development and childcare plan is an example of effective partnership arrangement at strategic and operational level.

Support for 14-19 education²

16. Support for 14-19 education is highly satisfactory. The well-designed policy and strategy encourage schools to act as a local focus of lifelong learning, in collaboration with other providers, and to improve levels of participation and completion of learning programmes. The strategy is understood by schools and they have all committed themselves to its implementation. Good leadership and expertise within the authority support effective collaboration with the West of England Learning and Skills Council and other partners. Partnerships provide access to additional funds and enable the authority to make best use of limited resources, but the strategy is largely reliant on short-term project funding. It does not make clear how new developments will be supported once existing funding ceases.

17. The implementation of the strategy is based on five local collaborative clusters of schools, colleges and other providers. Two of these are already well established, but the others are at relatively early stages of development. Increased collaboration between providers is improving access to a wider curriculum and increasing numbers of young people are engaged in vocational studies, including over 200 14-16 year old pupils involved through the Increased Flexibility Project. However, there are insufficient level 2 courses for 16-year-olds or vocational options at Key Stage 4. The Kingswood Partnership includes a 14-19 Pathfinder project which has developed common procedures for monitoring students' progress across the six schools in the partnership. Despite the recommendation in the previous inspection, there has been little effective sharing of this good practice with the other four consortia.

18. The standards achieved by learners at age 16 are broadly in line with the average for similar authorities but progress has been slow in improving post-16 achievement, particularly in schools with small sixth forms. In 2003 performance at GCE/VCE/AS/A level was below the national average. The 2004 provisional results show improvement but with marked variation between schools. The continuation rate into education or work-based training is good and participation by vulnerable young people aged 16 is high. The information available to young people on choices at 16 has improved through the LEA's partnership with the Connexions service. However, advice and guidance by school staff on the full range of post-16 opportunities are not sufficiently independent and reliable. Consequently too many young people progress at 16 to unsuitable courses in the sixth form. The effective leadership and good structures for the implementation of the strategy suggest that the capacity for improvement is highly satisfactory.

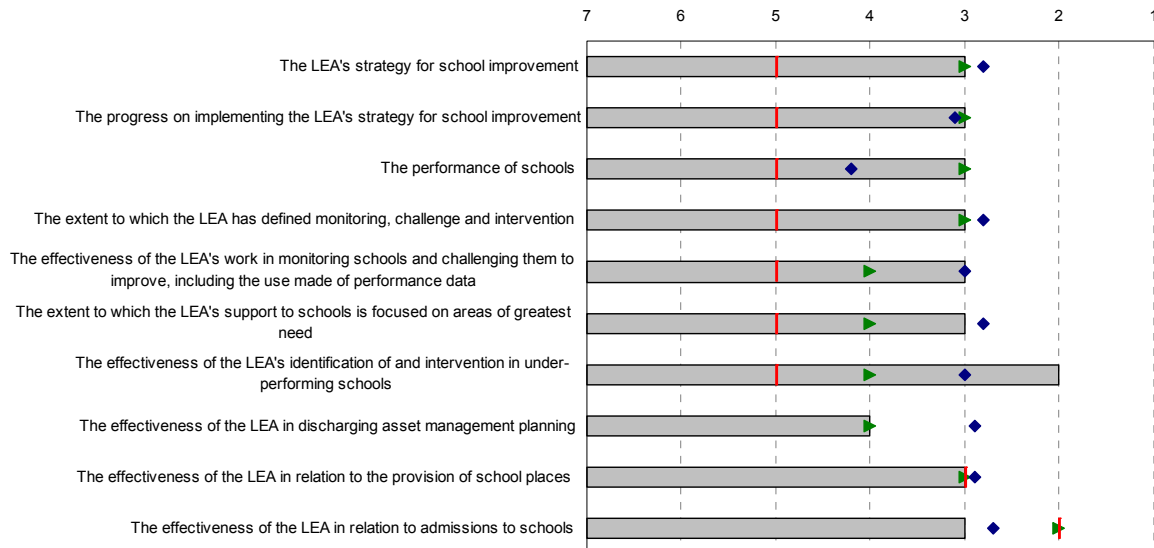
² See Ofsted 14-19 Area Wide inspection of South Gloucestershire - Autumn 2004

Recommendations

- Improve provision for vocational study at age 14 and the range of alternative courses post-16.
- Increase support and challenge to schools to raise achievement in GCE/VCE AS/A level programmes.

Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

Summary table of judgements



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

The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

19. The strategy for school improvement and its implementation are highly satisfactory. The vision and the challenge to raise standards are clearly stated within the EDP and the school improvement strategy. This is endorsed in corporate plans and policies for SEN and social inclusion. Since the previous inspection, the content and structure of the EDP have been simplified. Priorities are soundly based on audit, reflect national and local needs and are firmly endorsed by schools. The strategy for school improvement has also been revised. Systems and processes have been clarified and the use of data strengthened to bring greater consistency to the work of the school improvement team. Capacity for further improvement is good.

20. The LEA's challenge to raise performance and turn satisfactory performance into excellent is increasingly shared by schools. Significant variation in performance between schools, a concern in the previous inspection, continues to challenge and hamper that ambition and has driven the LEA's strategy to champion continuous improvement through investment in a leadership academy. At an operational level the challenge guides decisions about the targeting of curriculum support to early years and through the national primary and Key Stage 3 strategies but this has not yet carried through to GCSE and post-16. There is a strong focus on achieving targets and schools contribute to, and benefit from, a well co-ordinated range of LEA

support supplemented by advanced skills teachers (ASTs), leading teachers and guidance from beacon, leading edge and specialist schools.

21. The LEA has had notable success in implementing the EDP. LEA advisers are more rigorous and challenging to schools as a result of improved performance data. Better analysis has enabled schools and advisers to identify barriers to improvement. This has resulted in a closer match between LEA and school targets. There is clear evidence that aspirational targets and focused support have had a positive influence in raising expectations of higher attaining pupils, particularly in primary schools where almost half of schools exceeded their 2003 targets. However progress in achieving the challenging LEA targets is uneven, with results in Key Stage 2 at Level 4 and GCSE significantly adrift from the 2005 targets. Given current rates of progress, these targets are unlikely to be achieved within the timescale.

22. Systems and processes for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting progress to elected members and annually to the EDP monitoring group are well established. However, some reporting lacks precision and is overly focused on procedural outcomes and the completion of tasks rather than on the quality and impact of support. This limits the LEA's understanding of the value for money of services and its approach to determining best value. Where minor slippage occurs in the EDP, the reasons are known; for example non appointment of staff, high turnover of science and mathematics teachers, or unsuccessful bids for funding. In these circumstances alternative approaches are put in place to achieve outcomes.

Recommendation

- Ensure evaluation and reporting are precisely focused on the impact of the LEA's actions on the quality of teaching and learning, pupils' progress and achievements.

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

23. Monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and targeting of support are highly satisfactory. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection when these functions were unsatisfactory. Link advisers are well regarded by schools and the challenge they offer is rigorous and systematically applied.

24. Significant improvements have been made to the quality and range of performance data and management information, particularly since 2002, and this aspect is now in line with national developments. Over the last year, additional analysis of pupils' progress and data on the achievement of pupils who are vulnerable or have special educational needs, provides a secure baseline from which to identify further progress. Improvements to data are supported and welcomed by schools.

25. Performance data are used effectively in LEA desk-top reviews to identify schools where robust challenge is required, to target underperformance, and define the level of consultant support provided to the school through the national strategies. A comprehensive range of criteria draws effectively on information from across the service and is used well to inform decisions about the support category into which the school is placed.

26. Headteachers and governors have a good understanding of the categorisation process and the distinction between their entitlement to support and the further support which they must pay for. All schools receive three days of advisers' time. This is too large an entitlement for successful schools. However, in practice, the amount of time given to such visits is significantly differentiated because it takes into account the quality of the school's self-evaluation and, consequently, the agenda reflects the increased capacity of these schools to identify their own needs accurately.

Recommendation

- Revise the amount of time allocated to successful schools for supported self-evaluation visits to reflect their improving practice.

27. Headteachers and chairs of governing bodies receive detailed and timely notes following visits by LEA advisers, curriculum and support staff. They usefully detail the completion of actions and some give sharp clear judgements about the quality of what has been achieved and specific actions to secure further improvement. Most, however, are overly descriptive with insufficient judgement and clarification of remaining weaknesses.

Recommendation

- Ensure notes of visits to headteachers and chairs of governors provide specific judgements to inform them about achievements and actions needed to secure further improvement.

Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools

28. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved and is now good. The LEA has one school identified by Ofsted as in need of special measures and one judged to be underachieving. Significant progress has been made during the last six months; two schools have been removed from special measures, one with serious weakness has been closed and one school is no longer judged to be underachieving. Support to these schools is effective. The quality is never less than satisfactory and mostly good. Senior officers monitor schools' progress rigorously and elected members are kept well informed.

29. Improvements in the use of data, coupled with sharper criteria for identifying underperformance, have resulted in a slight increase in the numbers of

schools designated by the LEA as causing concern. The concerns are made clear to governing bodies and they understand what must be achieved in order to exit the category.

30. Arrangements are well co-ordinated to make effective use of the expertise in successful schools. Additional headteachers, governors and ASTs form a key part of planned support programmes. All primary schools receiving intensive literacy and numeracy support made substantial gains in Key Stage 2 results in 2004. Headteachers and governors report increasing confidence in their own self-evaluation as a result of the scrutiny of LEA monitoring. Most schools move out of the category within agreed timescales and continue to maintain improvement.

Asset management planning

31. Asset management of building stock was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. There has been good progress from a low base and this is now satisfactory. Consultation on the asset management plan was comprehensive and the plan is judged by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to be satisfactory. Schools are better informed about the capital programme and the criteria for prioritising need through the Schools Forum.

32. Previous recommendations to tackle the poor quality of some school buildings are being addressed systematically. The backlog of repairs has been significantly reduced. Some £18million has been spent on improving secondary school buildings and the council is now spending significantly more per pupil on capital projects than its statistical neighbours and the England average. Despite these developments, the magnitude of the problem means that only highest priority needs will be met by the end of the next financial year and the LEA estimates that, in reality, it will take 5 to 6 years before all current schools' needs are met.

33. The council has maximised the use of earmarked funding and attracted other external grants. It is successfully working in partnership with private developers to build new primary schools and is awaiting the outcomes of the DfES priority rating for the replacement and refurbishment of secondary schools buildings as part of the Building Schools for the Future initiative. Even though there will still be an estimated £25million shortfall to meet known needs, there is no guarantee of the required resource. A range of options have been considered but there are no specific contingency plans in place.

Providing school places

34. Provision of school places continues to be highly satisfactory. The LEA is managing well a complex set of changes in school places across South Gloucestershire. School place planning, asset management, transport and admissions teams work constructively together.

35. Forecasting changes in pupil numbers has been problematic due to fluctuations in the South Gloucestershire population. However, the use and range of

data have improved and, over the last two years, estimates have been accurate. A 5% fall in primary pupil numbers is now forecast and the percentage of surplus places is in line with similar authorities and the national average. In secondary schools, the anticipated increase of 19% has reduced to 5% but the percentage of surplus places in the secondary phase remains high compared with statistical neighbours. In one secondary school, over a quarter of places are surplus to need but this is being addressed effectively by the LEA. Despite this surplus, the new secondary school due to open in September 2005 in Bradley Stoke is required to meet the needs of new residential developments and to increase the number of parents who receive a school of their preference.

36. The provision of school places is being actively tackled through a comprehensive and coherent school organisation plan. Members of the school organisation committee (SOC) have a clear understanding of the issues and consultation on proposed closure and amalgamation of four schools has been effectively undertaken. Changes have been made to admission numbers and secondary school admission areas to align school places better to the emerging needs of the population. The school organisation plan rightly makes reference to school improvement, social inclusion and community cohesion plans.

Admissions to schools

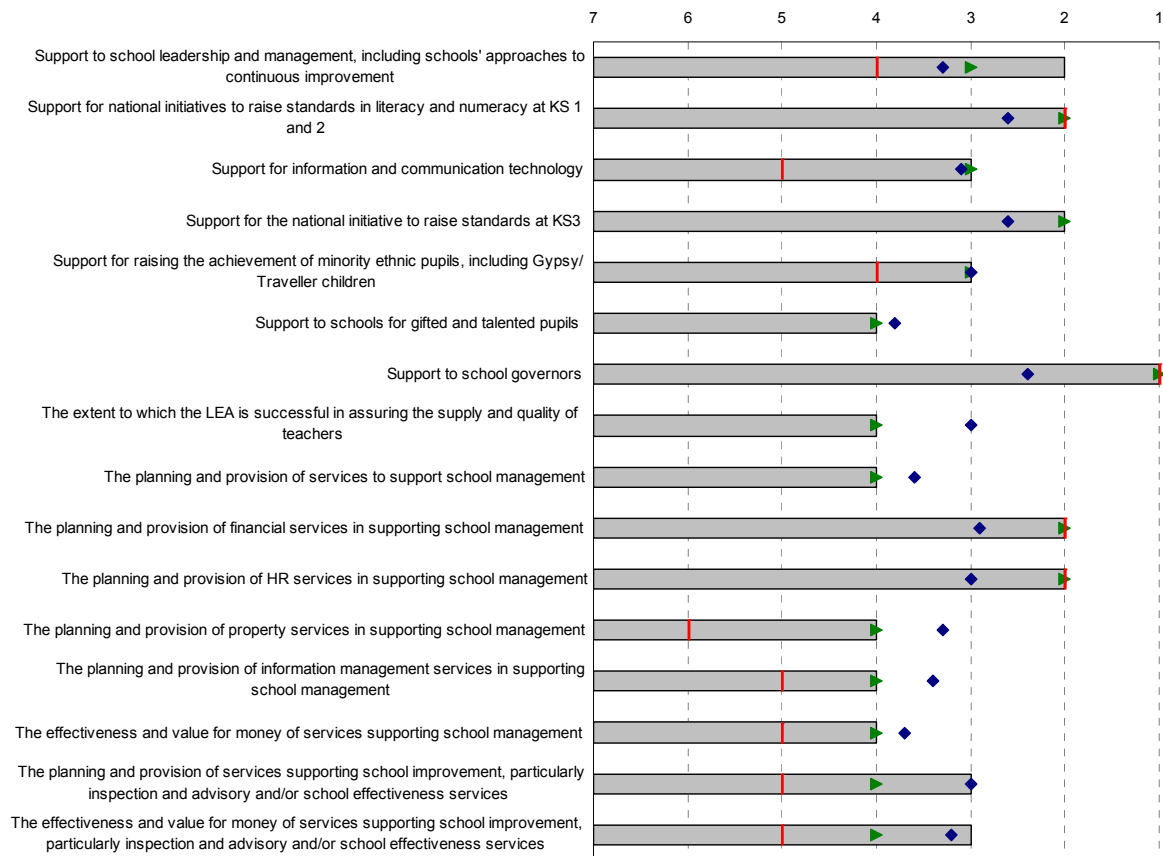
37. The LEA's admission arrangements are highly satisfactory. The organisation and process for appeals and arrangements for the admission of vulnerable pupils into schools are strong. The LEA is on course to meet the deadline for the implementation of co-ordinated admission arrangements for September 2005. The Admission Forum is fully active in considering and promoting improvements in admission arrangements. Effective co-ordination arrangements have been put in place for the re-integration of excluded secondary age pupils which all schools understand and support.

38. The number of parents being offered their first preference school has increased by 6% over the last five years. Significantly more parents are successful in having their children accepted in South Gloucestershire schools following appeal than is the case nationally or in similar authorities. This has resulted in discrepancies between the LEA's planning for admission numbers and the numbers actually admitted to specific schools and this continues to be an issue for the LEA. Revised admission arrangements for September 2004 helped successfully to address the issue of high levels of appeals in one area. Similarly, increasing the admission number of an over-subscribed school from 2005 will also have a positive impact.

39. The Admission Forum has worked effectively with officers. The school admission booklets and oversubscription criteria for the large majority of schools are comprehensive and unambiguous, with priority being given to looked after children as required. Despite active work by the forum and by the LEA, the admission arrangements of three Roman Catholic schools are less clear concerning the status of looked after children. Plans are in place to continue the dialogue with admission authorities for next year and to clarify arrangements still further.

Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

Summary table of judgements



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

Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

40. Support for school leadership and management has improved and is now good. The development of school self-evaluation and the provision of an extensive range of leadership training for headteachers, governors and teachers are given high priority. The quality of school leadership and management is improving but this has yet to impact in all schools. Support for the national initiatives to raise standards at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 is good. The dissemination of best practice through well-established learning networks and projects continues to flourish. The capacity for further improvement is good.

41. The process of school self-evaluation is well supported by school improvement advisers through annual review visits. Useful criteria, developed by the LEA, help schools compare strengths and weaknesses against a baseline of satisfactory performance. This provides a productive starting point for challenging

professional discussions between the LEA and schools about expectations of performance. Training in self-evaluation, combined with an improved range of valuable local data, has increased schools' confidence in the process. School inspection data confirm that the quality of monitoring and evaluation of performance is improving.

42. Schools needing support or intervention to improve the quality of leadership and management are identified carefully using a broad range of performance data and information drawn from all parts of the education service. Support for these schools is good. Tailored plans address specific issues and make relevant use of additional governors, attached headteachers and mentoring. Governing bodies are well briefed on strategic leadership issues through the work of the governor development team. Support for school governors is very good.

43. Continuous improvement is firmly encouraged. An annual audit of schools' continuing professional development needs is linked to the self-evaluation process. The excellent support programme for leadership and management provides access to an extensive range of international, national and local professional development opportunities. All schools are involved in relevant aspects of the programme. Emphasis on continuing professional development is a key feature in the authority's successful teacher recruitment and retention package. Take-up of the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) is close to 100% and over 60% of headteachers are trained as mentors, coaches and consultant leaders. Half of South Gloucestershire schools are involved in 'leaders in learning' training. This wealth of activity is contributing to general capacity building. However, the LEA has yet to analyse improvements in leadership and management across all schools.

44. Collaboration between schools and the sharing of best practice are well co-ordinated through LEA networks, a leading edge collaborative group, learning partnerships and clusters of schools. Together they help to reinforce the emphasis on teaching and learning promoted by the LEA in its work to support the national strategies. A wide range of projects and initiatives, developed in association with higher education, help to disseminate ideas and facilitate changes to practice. This work is highly valued by schools. A strong focus on teaching and learning in the three schools involved in the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) partnership has led to improved GCSE results and value added scores, and higher attainment for boys.

45. All services to support school management and school improvement are at least satisfactory and have improved since the previous inspection. Headteachers and governors are provided with basic advice about alternative sources of support, procurement of services and procedures for best value. In practice, a high percentage of schools receive centrally provided school improvement services from the authority. Traded school improvement services are at an early stage of development. Satisfactory use is made of brokerage to help schools secure external providers for in-service training.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

46. Support provided to schools for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory. There is strong leadership, vision and expertise in the LEA but the strategy is not yet having an impact in all schools. The strategy includes clear advice on how to identify gifted and talented pupils and provides guidance on their social and welfare needs. Its implementation is led by an adviser, supported by an advisory teacher since September 2004. Headteachers value the dialogue which they are able to have with LEA staff, whose support they regard as practical and helpful.

47. Progress has been made in clarifying the current level of activity and raising schools' awareness of the initiative. Most schools have audited their provision and many have developed policies. Attendance at good practice fora has trebled over the last two years. A range of activity and projects is underway; the LEA has supported a variety of summer schools and a small number of schools are engaged in a project to develop learning through innovation in the use of ICT resources and techniques. Some schools are finding ways to involve pupils in the assessment of their own and others' learning. These projects are still in progress and, therefore, it is too soon to evaluate the impact fully.

48. Take-up of the initiative has been greater in primary than in secondary schools. Clusters of schools are set to encourage the development of this work, but not all are fully operational. Most schools have provided details of gifted pupils but less than a third have provided details of talented pupils. Advisory staff are working effectively to support schools in identifying these pupils. Individual schools are at different stages in setting achievement targets for gifted and talented pupils and the LEA is not yet in a position to track their progress across phases. Financial support is limited, however individual students receive support in music and drama. National funds available for ICT and sport are used well.

Recommendation

- Support and challenge all schools in developing provision for gifted and talented pupils and in tracking their progress to raise standards further.

The planning and provision of services to support school management

49. The LEA has satisfactory arrangements in place to provide services to schools. The quality of services is at least satisfactory; finance, payroll and personnel services remain good while property services and information management have improved and are now satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, the LEA have been slow to tackle the variable quality of services because other issues, such as school improvement, were rightly considered to be more urgent. In January 2004, a senior officer was appointed to improve service quality. In April 2004, a trading panel comprising headteachers, governors and heads of service was established. The work is at an early stage and is intended to bring accountability to customers and consistency to service operation. Schools welcome this development.

50. A review of planning and provision of property services brought about improvements in systems and management. Costs of building work are clearly defined. Project management has developed slowly since 2001. A help desk, post-project appraisals and a programme of joint visits to schools have been introduced. Despite only 20% of projects being completed on time in 2003-04, no school failed to open on time after holiday periods. The LEA has clear plans in place to improve the success rate for this type of work, including better project management and tighter monitoring of progress.

51. ICT for management and administration is satisfactory. A major review has led to step changes in the way the service is being delivered. There is still some way to go before ambitious, yet realistic, plans are completely realised. An energetic and committed team has focused developments on providing coherence in hardware and software, and linkage between the curriculum and administrative systems. Broadband was introduced to all schools two years ahead of schedule. Rapid progress has been made in electronic data transfer and many requests for information, for example on school attendance, can be met centrally.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management

52. Overall the effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management are satisfactory. Most provision is at least satisfactory and some key services are good; many services are improving and the buy-back by schools is high. The variation in the quality among services to schools is being actively addressed through comprehensive service plans and the work of the trading panel. Services clearly report on service levels and set relevant targets for the coming year. In individual cases, the LEA assists schools with purchasing from external contractors, for example the purchase of cleaning services, but school purchasing decisions are hindered by the LEA's slow pace in developing comprehensive benchmark comparisons. However, the LEA recognises that support for procurement has been weak and has taken early steps to improve support through the traded and support services webpage. The LEA has detailed knowledge of the individual reasons for service underspends and overspends in 2003-2004 and is costing services more accurately for 2004-2005.

Recommendation

- Improve support for procurement in schools so that they become more effective purchasers of services.

Planning and provision of services supporting school improvement

53. This function was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection but is now highly satisfactory. Leadership of school improvement is effective. Service plans are rightly based on the priorities for improvement, activities and success criteria in the EDP. Termly reviews and detailed progress reports, such as those for the national strategies, are combined with well-established systems to share

information. They provide senior managers with a broad overview of the strengths and areas for development in most aspects of the school improvement service.

54. Performance management follows an annual cycle and is based on an authority-wide process. The quality of performance reviews varies and in some services they lack specific measurable targets to identify and monitor individuals' contributions to educational objectives.

Recommendation

- Ensure performance reviews consistently include specific measurable targets to monitor individuals' performance robustly in all parts of the service.

55. Changes to the education service have given a stronger focus to management responsibilities, phase and advisers' expertise. Recent changes to the deployment of staff are also broadly welcomed by schools, although it is too early to identify their impact. In addition, local secondments, expert headteachers, specialist and leading teachers are used flexibly and effectively to supplement resources and meet schools' emerging needs.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement

56. The effectiveness and value for money of school improvement services are highly satisfactory. These aspects were unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and improvement has been secured through better service monitoring and the introduction of quality assurance procedures.

57. Regular formal and informal monitoring by line managers, heads of service and senior officers ensures that procedures are systematically in place across the service. Informal feedback on service quality is obtained through the director and deputy director's programme of visits to schools, individual teachers' views on the quality of professional development events, and heads' and governors' views on the quality of the work of the school performance and effectiveness team. Schools' confidence in school improvement services is high.

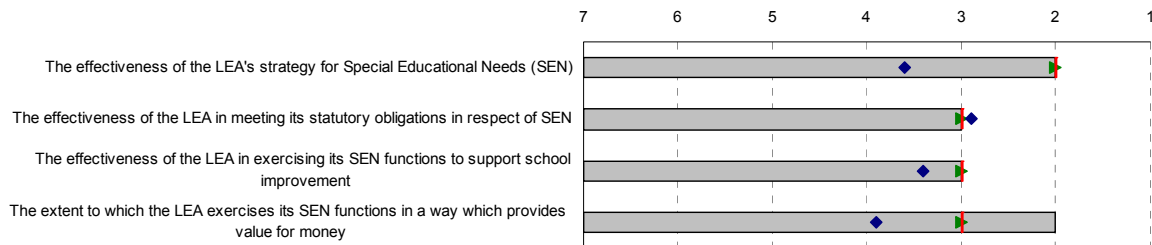
58. Open and regular feedback from and to service users is encouraged formally through the work of the EDP monitoring group and the Schools Forum. Despite this, the authority does not report specifically on standards of school improvement services to all purchasers and users. The costs of the service are in line with statistical neighbours and national averages and pricing is broadly related to costs of provision.

Recommendation

- Help schools to secure best value in their purchasing decisions and share with schools the results of the LEA's own quality assurance of school improvement services.

Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

Summary table of judgements



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

The strategy for SEN

59. The LEA's strategy for SEN is good, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. The recommendations in the 2000 report have been addressed and the LEA has largely implemented its initial strategy for SEN. The LEA is managing complex strategic and operational changes to services, which are becoming increasingly effective. Partnerships are adequately linking the development of policy with higher level strategic planning. All services for children, including those with SEN, are being brought into a single department. Consequently, activities are prioritised more effectively, using information from social services, the census and public health practitioners. For example, work in the early years supports pupils' transition to school as well as identifying and meeting early the needs of those with autistic spectrum disorders.

60. Support for school improvement and inclusion is now part of an integrated division in the local education authority. Bringing inclusion support services together has provided a clearer focus from which to develop practice in schools, particularly in the secondary phase. Overall, budgets are controlled effectively in a low-spending authority and the LEA is increasing the delegation of funding for SEN to mainstream schools. This strategic change, which schools support, has been made to promote earlier interventions, improve flexibility and, in time, reduce the numbers of statements of special educational needs that are required. The LEA has recognised the need to review its SEN provision further, including the identification of local alternatives to costly placements in residential special schools for pupils with complex needs, such as challenging behaviours and needs associated with autism.

61. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations, although the specification of provision in some statements lacks sufficient detail. Parents and carers receive comprehensive information on SEN policy and services. Value for money is good, as current outcomes for pupils with SEN are at least in line with, and often better, than those in similar authorities and national averages. The LEA's

success in promoting inclusion is demonstrated by the low numbers of pupils with a statement of SEN who are placed in special schools, especially at primary level. The LEA has made strong commitments, which reflect national strategies, on developing inclusion and integrating childrens' services. Schools support the changes and value the high levels of consultation and the clarity of policies, as well as the leadership and responsiveness of the LEA and its officers. Although it is too early to show that new monitoring and funding arrangements have led to more rapid gains in pupils' progress and achievement, the LEA is well placed to make further progress in its work on SEN.

Statutory obligations

62. The LEA's overall effectiveness in this function is highly satisfactory, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. Fieldwork focused on the process for statutory assessment, the quality of the information on the website for SEN and links with the health authority.

63. The council's website and documents give relevant and comprehensive information about policies, processes and sources of support. The independent parent partnership is effective, offering casework as well as information and providing training and support in a variety of settings. Processes to carry out statutory assessments of SEN are now more efficient as a result of improved work with other agencies, especially health services, and an enhancement of the LEA's own team. The LEA's performance in the preparation of statements within the expected 18 weeks is now in line with similar authorities and national averages. Annual reviews of statements and amendments are carried out efficiently and follow-up action is taken.

64. The descriptions of need and intended outcomes in statements of SEN drawn up by the LEA are generally clear. However, there is inconsistency in the quality of statements of SEN because the LEA decides on a case by case basis how far it will specify and quantify the necessary associated provision. Parents and carers must be clear about what will be provided through the statement and not have to rely on discussion with the LEA or the school.

Recommendation

- Consistently provide sufficient detail in statements in order that parents, carers, schools and other agencies know what must be provided to meet the specific needs of the child.

SEN functions to support school improvement

65. The LEA's work remains highly satisfactory, as it was in the previous inspection. Fieldwork focused on the LEA's effectiveness in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement. Activity has been effectively targeted on developing inclusive practice, such as work with the National Autistic Society in the

early years, multi-agency casework meetings and a senior managers' inclusion forum at secondary level.

66. Reports on annual reviews of statements of SEN are scrutinised to target activity on schools with the greatest needs. The wider monitoring, through the schools' annual review process, has a number of elements related to SEN. Tracking the progress of individual pupils is now underpinned by a database that identifies clearly pupils' specific needs and includes effective use of "P scales" for lower-attaining pupils. The LEA has, over the last year, introduced annual school audits of SEN. The framework, agreed with schools, enables improvement advisers and inclusion support service staff to review, analyse and challenge schools to maximise achievement.

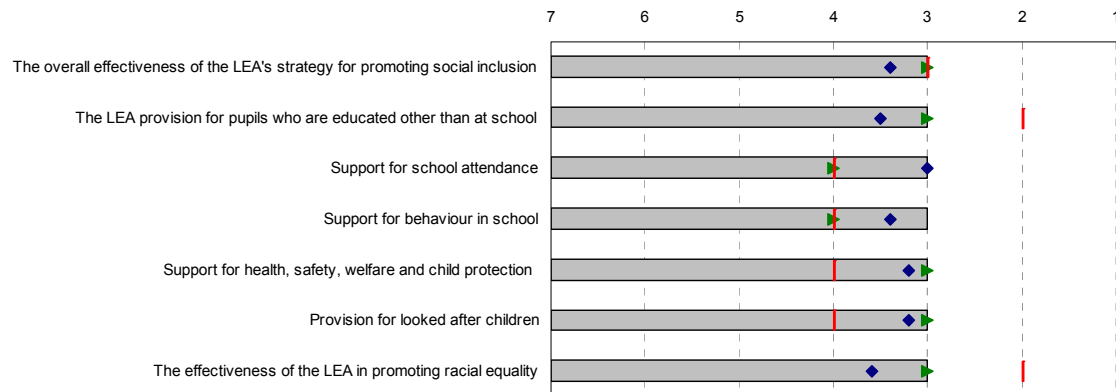
67. Inspections of schools have found that generally the teaching and learning of pupils with SEN are good, confirming that children with SEN in South Gloucestershire are well served by the LEA's support.

Value for money

68. The LEA's work in this area is now good, having been highly satisfactory when previously inspected. Fieldwork focused on the monitoring of delegated funding to provide value for money. The outcomes achieved by pupils with SEN are at least in line with, and often better than, those of pupils in similar authorities and nationally. This is secured with relatively low levels of spending on SEN, although the LEA has identified additional funding to SEN when required. Expenditure is controlled efficiently and current levels of statementing in South Gloucestershire are low. The funding formula is well understood by schools and is allocated fairly. In line with the national expectation, the LEA has revised its SEN funding scheme for mainstream schools. Delegation of funding for pupils with low level needs in mainstream schools has improved because the LEA now rightly includes measures of pupils' prior attainment to decide the funding allocation. The LEA revised its initial funding proposals to address schools' concerns and, as a result, there has been strong school support. The respective responsibilities of schools and the LEA are now clearly set out. It is too early to judge the impact of these changes that are suitably planned to improve inclusive practice and to support schools' freedom of action, as well as securing better use of funding for SEN.

Section 5: Support for social inclusion

Summary table of judgements



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

The strategy for social inclusion

69. The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion is highly satisfactory, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. The recommendations from that inspection have been met, although permanently excluded pupils have only been receiving full-time education since September 2004. Strategic planning reflects national developments, has identified relevant issues such as provision for children and adolescent mental health, and is proceeding at an effective pace. The council has established a single department for children's services, with a further expectation that a children's trust will include children's health services. Data are used well to identify target groups and geographical areas and to inform preventive approaches, such as the establishment of neighbourhood family centres in three areas. New collaborative ways of working are ensuring that better links are made between improving pupils' progress, their good attendance and behaviour and the reduction of health, social and educational inequalities.

70. The LEA's work on improving access to education and promoting social inclusion has improved. It uses school inspection findings to focus activities. For example, in order to improve further the climate in secondary schools, the LEA has introduced effective multi-agency casework meetings, a senior managers' inclusion forum to promote behaviour and reduce exclusions, and an advisory panel that considers pupils who are experiencing significant difficulties. Focused support has led to an improvement in pupils' attendance in 2003-04. The LEA is also taking reasonable steps to reduce permanent exclusions and improve rates at which pupils excluded from school are found a school place.

71. The council demonstrates a commitment to safeguard children through its responses to national reports and guidance and its training and support for schools. The website for SEN is accessible and gives comprehensive information about procedures and sources of support. New referral arrangements, information-sharing and assessment are developing on a sound basis. The local authority provides strong support for looked after children within South Gloucestershire, but this is less satisfactory for placements outside the area because of limited support to raise educational achievement. The authority's work with schools and other agencies reflects its strong commitment to promoting racial equality.

72. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet statutory obligations. It logs which schools have complied with national requirements as well as the LEA's expectation on child protection and combating racism. However, the analysis of the data provided to senior managers is insufficiently timely and robust for the LEA to be confident that all its schools are aware of current requirements and are fully meeting their responsibilities on social inclusion.

73. The local authority is aware of its strengths and is addressing difficulties, for example in relation to child and adolescent mental health services, arrangements for children's health services and alternatives to costly residential placements. Education has a clear place within corporate strategies for social inclusion. The authority is accordingly well placed to have a further positive impact on the lives of children and young people.

Provision for pupils educated other than at school

74. The LEA's exercise of this function is highly satisfactory, having been good when previously inspected. Fieldwork focused on provision in the pupil referral units (PRUs), on re-integration of pupils, and on the quality of the home and hospital teaching service. The quality and range of the provision in the primary and secondary PRUs are good. However, the LEA has only since September 2004 met the obligation to provide all permanently excluded pupils with suitable full-time education within 15 days. The PRUs have a clear focus on reintegrating most pupils into a school or college setting, generally after a six-week programme, longer for a few. Secondary schools are being supported and challenged to reduce the levels of permanent exclusion. Parents and carers are fully involved, both when the placement in the PRU begins and through regular feedback. Exit from the PRU is accompanied by a comprehensive reintegration package. Secondary headteachers are co-operating in the implementation of new protocols to secure reintegration placements for permanently excluded pupils as they move on from the PRU.

75. Pupils educated at home through parental choice are monitored effectively and action is taken if they are not receiving suitable education. Where pupils are unable to attend school for medical reasons the LEA makes provision that reflects their needs and capacity to cope with education.

Support for attendance

76. The LEA's work in this area is now highly satisfactory, having been satisfactory when previously inspected. Fieldwork focused on the LEA's support for secondary schools with low school attendance and on the quality of the education welfare service (EWS). The importance of good attendance on pupils' attainment has been strongly emphasised and attendance is now better than in similar authorities and the national average at primary level. It has also shown recent improvement at secondary level, where it is better than the national average, although still lower than in similar authorities. Electronic registration in all schools has improved the range of centrally held data, the analysis of which has led to a robust stance on prioritising the work of the EWS. An annually negotiated service level agreement identifies commitments and responsibilities on both the service and schools. The EWS rightly visits less frequently if attendance and welfare issues are not significant. Schools have all received comprehensive guidance on promoting good attendance, which has led to lower rates of referral to the EWS, as schools have become more proactive. For example, first day calls are now expected when a pupil is absent. The LEA uses the full range of its legal powers and has successfully piloted new approaches, for example attendance improved in a school where fast track prosecutions for non-attendance were introduced.

Support for behaviour

77. The LEA's support for behaviour in schools is now highly satisfactory, having been satisfactory at the previous inspection. The behaviour support plan provides relevant contextual information, objectives and plans for action. Schools are encouraged to take greater responsibility for improving behaviour and reducing exclusion rates. Services are working collaboratively with schools and the work of the social inclusion team is integrated effectively with the specific support provided by the Key Stage 3 attendance and behaviour consultant.

78. Although four schools have learning support units, the LEA is now giving greater emphasis to developing links across schools. These links are evident in a senior managers' inclusion forum to promote good behaviour and reduce exclusions, which also includes representation from the LEA and the PRU. School improvement advisers routinely receive records of visits from behaviour support services.

79. Ofsted inspections have found behaviour, including the incidence of exclusions, in schools in South Gloucestershire to be broadly in line with similar authorities and national averages. There is a weakness in that the LEA has no specialist provision for long-term placements for pupils with acute behavioural difficulties. It closed its special school for emotional and behavioural difficulties as it was not serving local needs and is now rightly considering more flexible alternatives to costly residential provision.

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

80. The LEA's work on these functions is now highly satisfactory, having been satisfactory at the previous inspection. Strong procedures to ensure the health and safety of pupils are well-regarded by schools. Guidance is available through a manual, model documents, bulletins and advice through personal contact.

81. The LEA takes reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory responsibilities. It has taken effective action following recent national reports on safeguarding children. The local authority is preparing to establish a local safeguarding board, in line with the expectations of the Children Bill. All schools have a designated teacher for child protection. There is a wide range of multi-agency training in respect of child protection at different levels, to match the experience and needs of designated teachers and other professionals. However, arrangements to identify schools where training is not up to date have been insufficiently robust.

Recommendation

- Challenge schools further to ensure that relevant staff keep up to date with child protection training.

Provision for looked after children

82. The LEA's provision is now highly satisfactory, having been satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. Good information is maintained on children and young people looked after by the local authority. Improved work with social services has meant that all those looked after have a personal education plan that is regularly reviewed and updated. A multi-agency panel meets each month to consider serious cases regarding looked after children and those at risk of being placed in public care. All schools have a designated teacher for looked after children, but not all took up the offer of training in the initial round arranged by the local authority. The LEA now targets schools with a looked after child and provides an urgent visit to any school admitting a looked after child for the first time.

83. Good support is provided within South Gloucestershire by a designated teacher from the LEA who visits every school in the authority with a looked after child at least once a year. Support is personalised and targeted on raising educational achievement. However, over half the children and young people looked after by South Gloucestershire are placed outside the area and they achieve less well than looked after children placed locally. In part, this reflects the greater needs of those placed in specialist placements externally. Although regular statutory reviews are properly carried out for those out of area, a significantly higher level of personal support for educational progress and achievement is available for those who are placed locally. This inequality is a weakness in an otherwise effective service.

Recommendation

- Strengthen support for the educational progress of all looked after children and young people placed outside South Gloucestershire.

Promoting racial equality

84. The promotion of racial equality is highly satisfactory. It was judged to be good in the previous inspection, but insufficient monitoring of race-related incidents resulted in a lower grade in this inspection. The authority demonstrates a strong commitment to race equality; its strategy is integrated into corporate and operational plans on inclusion and is subject to regular review. Work with other agencies and within local partnerships is improving methods for understanding and tackling race-related issues in schools and the wider community.

85. There is good support and guidance for schools in understanding their responsibilities in relation to the promotion of racial equality, and developing their policies and practice. Schools have access to a useful website and other resources. Effective support is provided to schools to improve the achievement of Black and minority ethnic pupils through a contract with Bristol Ethnic Minority Achievement Service. The training programme for headteachers, governors and school staff is well designed and provided in conjunction with a voluntary organisation, Support Against Racist Incidents. The focus of support includes Traveller pupils, refugees and asylum seekers. However, there has been insufficient challenge to schools to ensure good participation and take-up of training was low in 2003.

86. The monitoring of racial incidents is not fully systematic. Schools are required to monitor incidents of racism and report them to the authority, but they are not required to make nil returns. Advisers follow up an absence of returns, but officers and elected members cannot be certain that they have a fully accurate view of race-related issues in schools. The aggregated data on racial and other incidents are analysed to identify any trends and reports are made regularly to elected members. The reports contribute to two-monthly reviews by a local partnership against racial and hate crimes, thus improving the effectiveness of action within the community to address racism.

Recommendations

- Ensure that all schools complete regular returns on racial incidents, including nil returns.
- Ensure that key staff and governors undergo training on the promotion of racial equality and the handling of racist incidents.

Appendix A

Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA :	South Gloucestershire Local Education Authority
LEA number:	803
Reporting Inspector:	Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI
Date of Inspection:	October 2004

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

1.8	The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities	2	NF
1.9	Support for Early Years education	3	NF
1.10	Support for 14 – 19 education	3	
Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation			
2.1	The LEA's strategy for school improvement	3	
2.2	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement	3	
2.3	The performance of schools	3	
2.4	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention	3	NF
2.5	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	3	
2.6	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	3	
2.7	The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools	2	
2.8	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	4	
2.9	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	3	
2.10	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	
Section 3: Support to school leadership and management, including schools' efforts to support continuous improvement			
3.1	Support to school leadership and management, including support for schools' approaches to continuous improvement	2	
3.2	Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2	2	NF
3.3	Support for information and communication technology	3	NF
3.4	Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3	2	NF

3.5	Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children	3	NF
3.6	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	4	
3.7	Support for school governors	1	NF
3.8	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	4	NF
3.9	The planning and provision of services to support school management	4	
3.9a	The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management	2	NF
3.9b	The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management	2	NF
3.9c	The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management	4	
3.9d	The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management	4	
3.10	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management	4	
3.11	The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	3	
3.12	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	3	
Section 4: Support for special educational needs			
4.1	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs	2	
4.2	The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	3	
4.3	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	3	
4.4	The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money	2	

Section 5: Support for social inclusion			
5.1	The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion	3	
5.2	The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place	3	
5.3	Support for school attendance	3	
5.4	Support for behaviour in schools	3	
5.5	Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	3	
5.6	Provision for looked after children	3	
5.7	The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality	3	

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

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 7-point scale:

Grade 1: Very good; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Highly satisfactory; Grade 4: Satisfactory; Grade 5: Unsatisfactory; Grade 6: Poor; Grade 7: Very poor

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

- Grades 1-2: Well above
- Grade 3: Above
- Grade 4: In line
- Grade 5: Below
- Grades 6-7: Well below.

Appendix B

Context of the inspection

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

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

- the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in 2000;
- the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;
- the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;
- recommendations on areas for improvement.

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

All functions of the LEA have been inspected and judgements reached on how effectively they are performed. Not all functions were subject to detailed fieldwork, but in all cases inspectors reached their judgements through an evaluation of a range of material. This included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, data (some of which were provided by the LEA), school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports, and audit reports. In addition, the inspection team considered the previous Ofsted and Audit Commission reports on this LEA and two questionnaires from 2003 and 2004 seeking the views of all schools on aspects of the work of the LEA. In those areas subject to fieldwork, discussions were held with LEA officers and members, headteachers and governors, staff in other departments of the local authority and other agencies and LEA partners.

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

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the quality of leadership provided by senior officers;• the effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities;• support for early years education;• the extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring challenges and intervention;• support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at Key Stages 1 and 2; |
|--|

- support for information and communication technology;
- support for the national initiative to raise standards at Key Stage 3;
- support for raising achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers children;
- support for school governors;
- the extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers;
- the planning and provision of financial services to support school management;
- the planning and provision of human resources to support school management.

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

Context of the LEA

South Gloucestershire is a relatively advantaged unitary authority. Long established towns and villages contrast with new residential and commercial developments. Although predominantly rural and with unemployment below average, 60% of the population live in a significant urban fringe to the north and east of Bristol with pockets of comparative disadvantage, particularly in Filton, Kingswood, Patchway and Yate.

The adult population of the authority is increasing and is forecasted to rise by 2% per year until 2011. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) ranks the growth of South Gloucestershire as 34th out of 376 for rate of population change (ONS 2001 census). Since the previous inspection the school-aged population has decreased slightly in the primary phase and risen in the secondary phase. Consequently, a new 11-16 secondary school is scheduled to open in September 2005. Since the previous inspection fewer pupils have transferred into South Gloucestershire from neighbouring authorities. However the proportion of pupils admitted to or leaving their secondary school, other than at the usual time of admission, is above the national median.

The proportion of white British pupils is significantly above the national average. The number of pupils for whom English is an additional language is low but increasing with a greater range of ethnic groups represented. In 2003-04, some 200 Gypsy and Traveller children were educated in the LEA. The percentage of pupils in

maintained primary and secondary schools eligible for free school meals is well below national averages. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average and most pupils with special needs are included in mainstream schools, with less than 1% educated in special schools.

Currently there are 22,579 pupils in 96 primary schools and 16,950 pupils attending 14 secondary schools, all of which are mixed 11-18 comprehensive schools. A further 55 pupils are placed in one pupil referral unit and 290 are in three special schools.

Educational provision is available for all three-year-olds pupils whose parents seek it. Approximately 91% of three- and four-year-olds benefit from early years education and care. The majority attend classes in the private and voluntary sectors. The LEA maintains eight nursery units attached to mainstream schools. Twelve secondary schools have specialist status, two primary schools have Beacon status and three secondaries are leading edge schools.

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

The performance of schools

The performance of schools in South Gloucestershire has improved. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection.

Pupils' performance at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 is above the national average and in line with statistical neighbours. Improvement rates for the period 1999-2003 are in line with the statistical neighbours' trend for Key Stages 1 and 2 and better than similar authorities at Key Stage 3. The provisional 2004 data show that standards have been maintained at all key stages and the gap between boys' and girls' results has narrowed.

Performance at GCSE is in line with national and statistical neighbours, with results at 5+A*-G above the national average. Improvement rates for the period 1999-2003 are above the national and statistical neighbours' trend for pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades. Despite continuing improvements in standards, the difference in achievement between boys and girls at GCSE has grown and, by 2003, the gap was greater than that found nationally. The 2004 provisional GCSE results show a decrease in overall results with wide variation between individual schools and insufficient value added between Key Stages 3 and 4 in a significant minority of schools.

Attainment post-16 is too low, particularly in schools with small sixth forms. In 2003, the average GCE/VCE point score was below the national average in eleven of the fourteen secondary schools. The provisional 2004 GCE/VCE results indicate a rise overall, but still too many schools underperform post-16. The proportion of 16-year-olds staying on in full-time education or training (84%) is above national rates and those of similar authorities.

The number of pupils leaving public care is very low and in 2004 only eight pupils took their GCSE examinations. Data indicate a significant improvement in those gaining one or more A*-G and five or more A*- C grades in 2004.

The number of schools achieving the Key Stage 2 floor targets is much improved. In 2004 only 6% of schools achieved less than 65% level 4 and above in English compared with 21% at the time of the previous inspection. All schools meet the floor target in science. In mathematics, the figures have fluctuated over the last three years but significant improvement was made in 2004 with only 10% of schools not achieving the target. Over recent years, all secondary schools met the minimum target of 25% of pupils achieving grades A*-C at GCSE, but in 2004 one school failed to do so.

The 2003 performance indicated that the LEA was making good strides towards achieving its aspirational targets, particularly at Key Stage 3 and GCSE. The dip in the provisional 2004 results now puts this into question and the LEA is not on track to meet its 2005 targets. However, Key Stage 3 remains strong and there is less of a gap in English at Key Stage 2. The LEA has two additional targets under LPSA for 2007. The main shortfall to achieve these is in science at Key Stage 3 and GCSE at five or more A*-C grades. At present the LPSA targets appear to be beyond reach.

Data from school inspections show that the proportion of good and very good schools is below that in similar authorities.

Attendance has improved. The LEA achieved its 2004 primary attendance targets and fell short of its secondary target by only 0.5%. In primary schools, attendance is now above the national average and statistical neighbours. Unauthorised absence rates are in line with similar authorities. At secondary level, attendance is above the national average but below that of similar authorities. Unauthorised absence is in line with the national average but below similar authorities. Exclusions are below those nationally.

Funding data for the LEA

SCHOOLS BUDGET	South Gloucestershire	Statistical neighbours average	Unitary Average	ENGLAND AVERAGE
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Individual schools budget	2,584	2,676	2,795	2,900
Standards fund delegated	52	54	56	63
Excellence in Cities	0	5	28	35
Schools in financial difficulty	3	7	4	4
Education for under fives (non- ISB)	94	98	87	85
Strategic management	29	25	31	30
Special educational needs	80	113	116	126
Grants	21	17	26	26
Access	84	43	63	60
Capital expenditure from revenue	0	30	19	24
TOTAL SCHOOLS BUDGET	2,949	3,066	3,224	3,354
Schools formula spending share	2,791	2,898	3,057	3,197

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05

LEA BUDGET	South Gloucestershire	Statistical neighbours average	Unitary Average	ENGLAND AVERAGE
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Strategic management	103	81	89	99
Specific Grants	9	13	18	14
Special educational needs	23	29	36	36
School improvement	36	33	35	38
Access	125	157	137	142
Capital expenditure from revenue	0	1	2	2
Youth and Community	48	52	70	75
TOTAL LEA BUDGET	344	366	387	406

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05

Notes:

All figures are net.

Funding for schools in financial difficulties excludes transitional funding.

Averages quoted are mean averages; the original DfES Comparative Tables quote median average figures, not the mean average.

Notes