



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
SOUTHWARK
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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

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APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection of Southwark local education authority (LEA) was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (December 2001)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA and the contractor's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA and the contractor, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA and the contractor. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports and audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, officers and members; governors and headteachers; staff in other local authority departments; diocesan representatives; parents and trade union representatives. Visits were made to four schools and telephone interviews were held with two headteachers. Discussions or telephone interviews were held with representatives from the local community, other agencies and partners. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier OFSTED/Audit Commission reports on this LEA published in 1998 and 1999. Sixty-three per cent of schools responded to a questionnaire sent to all schools, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA and the contractor. The inspection also took account of letters and written evidence submitted by headteachers, governors and other agencies.

3. The inspection involved studies of particular aspects of the LEA and contractor's work through visits to three primary schools and one secondary school. Those visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA and contractor's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support that is provided by the LEA and the contractor contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, and is effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Southwark remains one of the most socially deprived authorities in England, although there are pockets of affluence and the borough has benefited in recent years from major urban regeneration programmes. Pupil performance remains well below the national average at all key stages. The gap in performance between the LEA and national figures has narrowed at Key Stages 2 and 4 but widened at Key Stages 1 and 3 since 1999.

5. Southwark LEA was previously inspected in November 1998 and December 1999. The inspection in 1999 found that the performance of the LEA had regressed since 1998 and that it was not adequately fulfilling its functions with regard to raising standards in schools. The report concluded that the LEA lacked the necessary capacity to make the improvements required. Following a direction from the Secretary of State, the council made the decision to provide all education functions, except early years and adult education, through a contract with Atkins Education, a private sector organisation, for a period of five years, starting in April 2001.

6. The findings of this inspection show that the LEA and the contractor have made substantial progress in implementing the recommendations of the previous inspection and that the overall performance of the functions of the LEA is now satisfactory, with strengths outweighing weaknesses.

7. The previous inspection identified a breakdown of trust and a lack of confidence by schools in the LEA's ability to support school improvement. Much has been done to remedy this and the inspection found a widespread belief amongst headteachers, governors and others in the contractor's capacity to bring about improvement. Vital to achieving this has been the appointment of expert and highly regarded senior officers, improved consultation, a change in organisational culture and a willingness to take action where there is justified criticism. Elected members, particularly the lead member for education, played a key role in supporting this process. There was generally a smooth transfer of responsibilities from the LEA to the contractor. Although this consumed much of the time of members and senior officers, it did not prevent important steps being taken to improve the capacity of the authority to support its schools before the contract was in place.

8. The relationship between the council and the contractor is regarded by both sides as a partnership. It is a relationship that generally works well, but the outsourcing arrangements are not without their difficulties. Some aspects of industrial relations remain problematic. The financial reporting arrangements specified in the contract are not being fully implemented, making it difficult to judge whether it is providing overall value for money. The precise division of responsibilities between the chief education officer (CEO) and the contractor's director of education services for strategic management is unclear. The LEA lacks effective mechanisms for verifying the financial and other data provided by the contractor.

9. Priority in the first year of the contract has rightly been given to identifying and supporting schools causing concern and supporting national initiatives. It is generally in these areas that progress has been most rapid. Progress has been less satisfactory in

improving services supporting school management and in aspects of support for social inclusion. In many cases basic systems and processes have needed to be put in place before real progress can be made. A particular problem is the lack of standardised computer systems for administration in schools which hinders support for school administration, including the effective collection and use of management data.

10. Members provide sound leadership for education, which is seen to be at the heart of the council's vision of social and economic regeneration for the borough. Education continues to be well funded and there is cross-party support for the main priorities. Members are well informed and make decisions on the basis of good advice provided by LEA officers and the contractor. They effectively monitor and challenge the performance of the education service. Senior officers in the LEA and in Atkins Education also provide effective leadership and raising educational standards permeates thinking across all services.

11. Considerable progress has been made in co-operative working with other council services and agencies, although there continues to be some failings at the operational level, particularly with social services. There is effective work with the police in tackling juvenile crime and the concerns arising from the murder inquiry following the death of Damilola Taylor.

12. The great majority of functions are now performed at least satisfactorily and there are examples of good practice within most areas of work. Functions which are performed particularly well include:

- support for literacy;
- support for raising standards at Key Stage 3;
- support for Traveller education;
- support for attendance; and
- advice to elected members.

13. Some weaknesses remain, most of which were recognised in the self-evaluation carried out by the LEA and the contractor for this inspection. They include:

- support for information and communications technology in the curriculum (ICT);
- support to management provided by human resources, property services and ICT;
- aspects of strategic planning for special educational needs;
- support for improving behaviour; and
- procedures for reporting racist incidents in schools.

14. The contractor has yet to achieve the necessary breakthrough required to raise attainment to levels which match those found nationally, but it is still early days. The findings of this inspection indicate that the LEA and the contractor have the capacity to make further improvements and implement the recommendations made in this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

15. The socio-economic context of the borough has not changed significantly since the last inspection. Although there are small areas of considerable affluence, the borough remains one of the most socially deprived local authorities in England. Thirty-nine per cent of primary pupils and 53 per cent of secondary pupils are eligible for free school meals, compared with 18 per cent and 17 per cent nationally.

16. Ethnic minority pupils make up sixty per cent of the pupil population, an increase of approximately three per cent since 1999. The proportion of pupils speaking English as an additional language has increased by eight per cent, to 43 per cent, since 1999 and the proportion of pupils not fluent in English has increased by seven per cent to 27 per cent. One hundred and five different languages are spoken by Southwark pupils, compared to 90 in 1999. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) has fallen since 1998 and is marginally above national figures for primary and secondary sectors. Almost four per cent of pupils in 2001 were children of asylum seekers or refugees. Pupil mobility remains very high, with one in three pupils changing schools at least once during both primary and secondary education.

17. There are 35,318 pupils educated in schools in the borough, an increase of just over 1,000 since 1999. The LEA maintains five nursery schools, 72 primary schools, 13 secondary schools, seven special schools, two hospital schools and three pupil referral units. A new community secondary school was opened in September 2000. There are considerably more boys than girls in the mixed secondary schools.

Performance

18. Performance in key stage tests and in GCSE remains well below national averages. However, the proportion of pupils attaining one or more GCSE passes at grades A-G is close to the national figure.

19. Between 1999-2001, the gap in performance between the LEA and national figures has narrowed at Key Stages 2 and 4 and widened at Key Stages 1 and 3. The gap is greatest in English at Key Stage 3, where 40 per cent of pupils achieved Level 5 or above in 2001, compared with 64 per cent nationally.

20. The gap in performance between girls and boys has widened since 1999 in English at Key Stage 2. There is little difference between the performance of girls and boys in mathematics and science at Key Stage 2. This is consistent with the position in 1999. Girls continue to outperform boys in achieving five or more GCSE passes at grade A*-C, but the gap has narrowed marginally since 1999. English, Scottish and Welsh pupils and Black Caribbean pupils perform significantly below the average for the borough in terms of higher grade passes at GCSE and the difference has increased since 1999. In 2001, the proportion of Black Caribbean pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C was half the borough average and under a third of the national average for all pupils.

21. OFSTED inspection data show just over half of all primary and secondary schools in the borough requiring some or much improvement in the quality of education provided in their last inspection, compared with a third of schools nationally. The quality of teaching in lessons inspected has improved since 1999, but remains marginally below national figures in both primary and secondary sectors. Four schools are currently in special measures, compared to 10 at the time of the last inspection. Seven schools have been awarded Beacon status.

22. Attendance in primary and secondary schools has improved since 1999 and is now marginally below the national average and above that of statistical neighbours. Attendance in primary schools is the highest in inner London and the third highest in secondary schools. Permanent exclusions from primary schools are broadly in line with national figures and have declined over the past five years. Permanent exclusions from secondary schools have declined by 46 per cent since 1997 but still remain well above national figures.

Council structure

23. The council adopted a cabinet structure in April 2001. Labour became a minority administration in 2001, having 32 seats, the same number as the combined total of the other parties. Decision-making powers rest with the ratification committee which has been controlled by Labour. The local elections of May 2002 resulted in the Liberal Democrats becoming the largest party, but with no overall majority.

24. A new director of education and lifelong learning was appointed in April 2000. Following a direction from the Secretary of State, all education services previously carried out by the LEA, except early years and adult education, were outsourced to Atkins Education, a private sector company, from April 2001 for a period of five years. This includes support for finance, property and ICT for administration. The director of education and lifelong learning is one of five strategic directors. He manages a small team comprising an executive and business manager, a head of policy and performance and a head of operations. The contractor has a director of education services, a commercial director and eight heads of service.

Funding

25. The 2001/02 education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for Southwark, at £3,688 for primary schools and £4,776 for secondary schools, is broadly in line with inner London authorities but higher than the England averages of £2,653 (primary) and £3,413 (secondary). Southwark's education budget for 2001/02 was one per cent above SSA. It is to be set at SSA for 2002/03.

26. The council has taken up its full standards fund allocation for 2001/02 and has been successful in attracting external funding through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and neighbourhood renewal funding. Satisfactory progress on its asset management plan has secured capital allocations from the DfES and alternative sources of investment have been obtained through the funding for two city academies and private finance initiative credits. The council has agreed a £20m capital programme for education in addition to allocations received for asset management.

27. Centrally retained funding, at £578 per pupil, is higher than the inner London average (£558) and much higher than the England average (£436). Strategic management costs, at £214 per pupil, are very high in comparison with inner London (£118) and England (£101). Within this category, the retained funding for premature retirement costs, at £115 per pupil, is very high compared with inner London (£25) and England (£24). This is due to approved pension funding which cannot be delegated. Retained funding of £46 per pupil for school Improvement and £182 for SEN are both lower than the inner London averages of £59 and £232 respectively, but higher than the England averages of £29 and £158.

28. Budgets delegated to primary and secondary schools in 2001/02 were in line with similar authorities for secondary and above for primary.

2001/02	Southwark	Statistical Neighbours	Inner London
Primary ISB/pupil*	£2,716	£2,582	£2,688
Secondary ISB/pupil	£3,393	£3,392	£3,408

* Individual school's budget per pupil

The strategy for school improvement

29. The strategy for school improvement, which includes the education development plan (EDP), is satisfactory. The last inspection judged the EDP to be unsatisfactory and recommended that it should be completely revised. This recommendation has been successfully implemented through the LEA's revised EDP for 2000-2002 and through the post inspection action plan.

30. Progress in implementing the revised EDP has been satisfactory. Statutory targets for 2001 were missed by four per cent for English and mathematics at Key Stage 2, but achieved for five or more GCSEs grades A*-C, for one or more grades A*-G and for the average GCSE points score. The number of permanent exclusions was seven fewer than the target set for 2001. The target for unauthorised absences was missed by 0.4 per cent in primary schools but exceeded by 0.4 per cent in secondary schools. Progress in implementing the action plans supporting literacy and numeracy and for schools causing concern has been good, but progress elsewhere, for example in ICT and developing self-evaluating schools, has been more patchy.

31. The EDP for 2002-2007 has been given full statutory approval. The priorities identified in the EDP are:

- raising attainment in early years and primary education;
- raising attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4;
- support for schools causing concern;
- social and educational inclusion;
- the development of effective self-managing schools; and
- recruitment and retention of teachers.

32. The EDP has more strengths than weaknesses. The audit draws on an appropriate range of data. There is a thorough analysis of performance by ethnicity, gender, fluency in English, free school meals and mobility. There is insufficient analysis of the performance of pupils with SEN and children in public care. There is insufficient evaluation of the cost effectiveness of the strategies underpinning each of the priorities in the EDP for 1999-2002, but the key issues for further attention in the new EDP are identified. The overall audit is sound and the outcomes are used to inform each of the national priorities and justify the inclusion of the local priorities.

33. The 2004 targets are very challenging, particularly for Key Stages 3 and 4: for example, the gap between current performance and the 2004 targets for Key Stage 3 is 19 per cent in mathematics and 24 per cent in English.

34. The school improvement strategy has significant strengths. There is generally a clear link between priorities, actions, activities and success criteria. Action plans are detailed and address the weaknesses identified in the audit. The plans appropriately target support on weaker schools and under-performing groups of pupils. Arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the plans identify responsibilities and appropriate timescales.

35. The strategy also has some weaknesses. There are a very large number of success criteria and targets, some of which are imprecise and not easily measurable. The baseline against which improvement is being measured is not always specified. The EDP is clearly linked to the corporate plan. Links with other plans, such as those for the Education Action Zone (EAZ) and Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiatives, are stated for each set of activities but it is not always made clear how these are meant to form a coherent overall strategy for school improvement. Support for pupils with SEN is included within a separate priority for social and education inclusion but the links with other priorities, such as raising attainment in secondary schools, are not made sufficiently explicit.

Recommendation

In order to improve the effectiveness of the EDP:

- reduce the number of success criteria and targets and ensure they are quantifiable;
- strengthen links with plans for the EAZs and EiC to form a coherent strategy; and
- ensure the links between the support for pupils with SEN and other priorities are made explicit.

36. Secondary schools have been involved in the EiC initiative since 1998 and this was extended to 13 pilot primary schools in 2000. The North Southwark EAZ was established in 1997 and two further small EAZs were established as part of the EiC initiative in 2000 and 2001. The EiC initiative was originally seen by secondary headteachers as almost solely their responsibility and there was little LEA involvement. It has recently developed into an effective partnership between the schools and the borough and is now fully integrated with the work of school improvement division. There is still some way to go in

terms of links with other aspects of support, particularly access and social inclusion, but plans are in place to strengthen these. There is evidence in section two of this report that the work of the EiC initiative is having a positive impact on support for gifted and talented pupils and on support for raising standards at Key Stage 3. The city learning centre places an appropriate emphasis on raising the quality of teaching and learning through ICT.

37. A recent OFSTED report on the North Southwark EAZ judged it to be making good progress and commented favourably on the coherence of its priorities with those of the LEA.

The allocation of resources to priorities

38. The allocation of resources to priorities is satisfactory. Funding for education in recent years has been funded at slightly above SSA. A recent decision has been taken to move to funding all services at SSA in 2002/03. In reducing its education budget to match its SSA, the council has not passed on increases in education SSA fully to schools in 2002/03 but it has programmed significant capital investment in schools.

39. A new corporate planning framework, together with the three year financial review and the updated medium term financial strategy, ensure that resources are allocated effectively to priorities. The contractor is subject to financial penalties if certain performance targets are not achieved and greater weight is now attached to those indicators that most directly relate to the LEA's strategic priorities. The contractor has effective financial monitoring procedures in place for the budgets it manages on behalf of the LEA, including the standards fund.

40. The financial reporting arrangements specified in the contract are not being fully implemented, making it difficult to judge whether it is providing overall value for money. The contractor received a sum of £15m in 2001/02 to deliver LEA services. The allocation of this sum to individual services is seen as the contractor's responsibility and the contractor does not report over or under spends on individual services, provided these are managed within the overall sum. There are substantial difficulties in apportioning costs between the LEA and the contractor on the Section 52 statement. In particular, the high strategic management costs include allocations to both the LEA, for its residual and corporate responsibilities, and to the contractor for delivering the LEA's outsourced statutory functions. These difficulties are being addressed through ongoing discussions with District Audit involving the council and the contractor.

Recommendation

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- ensure that the financial reporting arrangements specified in the contract are fully implemented.

41. Delegation has increased to 87 per cent, which meets the government target but is three per cent below the target set in the contract. Schools and the LEA agreed with the contractor that the educational psychology service and education welfare services were

not at the time secure enough to be delegated. Improvements have now been made to both these services and delegation will be considered for 2003/04.

42. The contractor is responsible for consulting on the school funding formula. This year's consultation was thorough and well managed. Additional funding for the ISB has been targeted on areas which the schools see as priorities, including increased funding for reception classes and Key Stage 4. The funding formula, although well understood and agreed with schools, is unduly complex, particularly in relation to funding special educational needs. It remains historically based, despite the targeting of new funding at priorities. Schools are rightly pressing for the school funding formula to be based on the costs of activities that they are undertaking.

Recommendation

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- simplify the school funding formula, particularly in relation to additional educational needs, and relate it more closely to the activities being undertaken.

Strategies to ensure continuous improvement, including Best Value

43. The council's arrangements for promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value, are satisfactory with strengths outweighing weaknesses.

44. Southwark's performance management plan for 2001/02 is sound and closely linked to its Best Value Performance Plan. The strategic targets are derived from the community plan's priorities and responsibilities for achieving these are clearly identified. The contractor is required to support the council in its duty to secure Best Value but the contract does not specify clearly enough how this support will be provided to schools.

Recommendation

In order to ensure schools are fulfilling their responsibilities with regard to Best Value:

- the LEA and contractor should agree clear processes for supporting this function.

45. There are satisfactory procedures in place to ensure that individual, team and department plans integrate with the corporate framework. The corporate planning manager requires monthly monitoring reports and challenges heads of service on any areas of concern. Members receive timely and accurate information on priority areas, emerging issues and deteriorating performance.

46. The contractor has efficiently implemented the business excellence performance management system, which is compatible with the council's own system of performance management. Effective mechanisms are in place to ensure the accuracy, reliability, consistency and timeliness of performance data. The contractor reports on performance

to the LEA and the LEA reports to the corporate centre on both outsourced and retained services.

47. The Best Value Performance Plan has been approved by the external auditor with no qualifications. The Best Value review process is well managed and there is an effective system of checks and balances to ensure implementation. Best Value reviews are well-targeted on services, which directly impact on the public. Although pilot reviews focused on individual services, the council has rightly decided to undertake cross-cutting reviews, including two related to vulnerable children, in order to ensure better co-ordination of services to the public. A Best Value scrutiny panel provides effective and robust external challenge.

48. The Secretary of State's direction requiring the outsourcing of LEA functions overrides the requirement to secure Best Value. However, the LEA is clear that it has a duty to secure Best Value for these services and a review of education is to be completed before the end of the current contract. As this will evaluate the effectiveness of the outsourcing arrangements, it is crucial it takes place early enough to inform decisions about how education services are provided when the contract expires.

SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Summary

49. There has been significant progress in implementing the recommendations made in the last inspection relating to school improvement and nearly all these functions are now carried out effectively. The work of link advisers and consultants is well regarded by schools and there is strong evidence that it is having a positive impact on school management, planning and the quality of teaching. Improved links with the EiC initiative and the EAZs ensures a more coherent approach to the support for school improvement, although this is not fully reflected in the EDP. In general, the contractor has ensured that relevant expertise to support schools is either available within the service, or can be brokered. However, specialist advisory support for special schools is currently inadequate.

50. Co-operation between the school effectiveness division and other parts of the education service is developing well. Support for governors is now fully integrated within the school improvement division, although links with support for behaviour and SEN are under-developed. The lack of effective administrative systems in schools undermines their ability to use performance data effectively. Shortcomings in management data also inhibit the work of the human resources service in supporting schools. Although there have been improvements in the support provided by financial services, delays in paying invoices have led to considerable difficulties for several schools and the school improvement division.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

51. Despite a recent change to the leadership of the school improvement division, it continues to be effectively managed by two ex-headteachers, one primary, the other, secondary. The organisational structure and management responsibilities are clear and strategic planning is satisfactory. There is a coherent service improvement plan which reflects EDP priorities and clearly identifies timescales and responsibilities for implementation. However, too much time is being devoted to producing guidance policies to support school self-evaluation and there is insufficient focus on the identification and dissemination of good practice.

52. The last inspection identified a lack of sufficient staff with appropriate experience to intervene effectively in schools. This has very largely been resolved: nearly all advisers and consultants have senior management experience, in either primary or secondary schools, and five have headship experience. They make effective use of their expertise to support schools, the only significant shortfall being in support for special schools and special educational needs in mainstream schools. Good use is made of consultants bought in to provide leadership and management training, and to some extent, of existing expertise in schools. Little information is currently provided to schools about brokering support in areas where advisers lack subject expertise, such as modern foreign languages. The support provided by the contractor for the early years in primary schools is well regarded. However, the headteachers of nursery schools, which are not currently supported through the contract, are critical of the lack of specialist support available to them from the LEA.

53. School improvement staff are generally deployed effectively. Schools are categorised according to need and the number of days of support they can expect to receive is clearly identified. Although this is adhered to in general, some schools request, and receive, additional support free of charge. This practice is not in keeping with Fair Funding principles and results in extra pressure being exerted on already fully stretched advisers and consultants. In particular, the ICT adviser has insufficient time to fulfil the role effectively. The allocation of consultants' time to schools requiring intensive support is appropriately based on an audit of schools' needs and is reviewed regularly.

54. The performance management arrangements for the school improvement division are in line with those deployed throughout the education service and are effective. The aims, targets and responsibilities of staff are clear and reviewed regularly. Staff have a clear sense of direction and know their responsibilities. Individual support and training needs are identified through the appraisal system. The services supporting school improvement provide very sound value for money.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

55. The previous inspection identified a lack of precision in the triggers for intervention. Significant progress has been made since then and the criteria for intervention are now clear and fully understood by schools. Effective arrangements for monitoring, challenging and intervening in under-performing schools are now in place.

56. There have been significant improvements in arrangements for monitoring and challenging the performance of schools since the last inspection. Prior to the annual review meeting, the link adviser and headteacher each prepare an evaluation of performance and progress against agreed criteria. These evaluations are then used as the basis for agreeing a summary statement of the school's position and this determines its category of support. This is a rigorous process which headteachers find both useful and challenging. The progress of schools is reviewed each term by the contractor and LEA officers.

57. The contractor has developed a good basis for promoting school self-evaluation, but this has yet to be fully embedded in the everyday working practices of all schools. Although there are some effective arrangements in place for the dissemination of good practice, for example, in relation to work with gifted and talented pupils, they are not yet effective in all areas. The LEA has seven Beacon schools and three specialist schools, but does not have a co-ordinated approach to maximising the use of the expertise available in these schools. Nevertheless, there are individual examples of good practice.

Recommendation

In order to improve the quality of schools' work:

- develop a strategy for the dissemination of good practice which co-ordinates the use of available expertise in the borough, including specialist and beacon schools.

58. The quality of data on pupil performance made available to schools has improved since the last inspection and is now good. The data are analysed by ethnicity, language proficiency and social factors. Predictive performance data for individual pupils, provided for the first time this year through an external agency, has been very well received by schools. It has enabled link advisers to discuss individual pupil performance targets and has improved the process of agreeing school targets. Guidance for schools on the use of performance data is generally good. However, difficulties in accessing pupil performance data in some schools have meant it is not always used effectively by subject co-ordinators and other staff.

59. The transfer of pupil data between primary and secondary schools is unsatisfactory. In part, this is because schools do not have compatible management information systems and several have developed their own strategies for recording and tracking pupil performance. Last year, secondary schools received pupil performance data at the end of the first week of the autumn term. This is an improvement on previous practice but is still too late for the data to be used effectively to group pupils at the start of Year 7.

Recommendation

In order to assist secondary schools with the organisation of Year 7 pupils:

- work with schools to overcome the problems of transferring pupil performance data and other information to secondary schools before the end of the summer term.

60. Strategies are now in place to ensure schools with problems are quickly identified and intervention targeted effectively. About one third of schools are in the 'light touch' category and receive three link adviser visits each year. This level of visiting is appropriate, given the lack of contact there has been with schools in the past and the need to identify good practice. Schools in other categories are allocated appropriate levels of support, which varies according to their needs. Headteachers and governors were consulted on the system of categorising schools and are supportive of it.

The effectiveness of work with under-performing schools

61. At the time of the previous inspection, there were seven primary schools and three secondary schools requiring special measures and six primary schools and one secondary school identified as having serious weaknesses. In addition, the LEA identified a further 25 schools causing concern. The inspection judged that the LEA lacked the capacity to intervene and support these schools adequately.

62. Good progress has been made and there is now effective support to schools causing concern. Although the proportion of schools causing concern is slightly above the national average, the numbers have been reduced to four primary schools in special measures and four schools identified as having serious weaknesses. Two of these schools have gone into special measures since the contractor took over. In the case of one school this happened very early in the contract and there was little that could be done in the time available. The other school came as a surprise to both the LEA and the contractor. As a result of this, the contractor has improved its procedures for identifying schools which appear to be performing satisfactorily but may be experiencing difficulties.

63. There are effective strategies in place to intervene in and support under-performing schools. Action is co-ordinated across the education services and the contractor has been prepared to take robust action where necessary, including withdrawing delegated budgets, issuing formal warnings, strengthening governing bodies and replacing headteachers and other staff. As schools improve, there is an appropriately staged reduction in support to enable schools to take increasing responsibility for their own improvement.

Support for literacy and numeracy

64. Support for literacy and numeracy was judged as satisfactory in the last inspection. This has now improved; support for literacy is good and support for numeracy is highly satisfactory.

65. The rate of improvement between 1999-2001 in the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 at Key Stage 2 was above the national average in both English and mathematics. However, improvement at Key Stage 1 has been below the national rate.

66. Schools rated the support for both literacy and numeracy as good in the school survey. The literacy and numeracy strategies are well understood and fully supported by schools. The literacy strategy provides a coherent approach to supporting pupils with English as an additional language and pupils with SEN. Training for the national strategies is well structured, takes full account of national and local priorities, and is effectively delivered. Schools particularly value the use of demonstration lessons as part of the training programme. The literacy and numeracy teams are well managed and their work is appropriately targeted on schools with the greatest needs. There are good networks of support for schools not receiving additional support. Performance in schools receiving intensive support has generally improved at a rate above the LEA average.

67. Particularly good support has been provided to develop literacy in the early years and to help foreign teachers unfamiliar with the national strategy. There was evidence of the effectiveness of this support in the schools visited.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

68. The last inspection found weaknesses in the strategic planning for ICT and insufficient emphasis on monitoring the progress and raising the achievement of pupils. These weaknesses have not been resolved and support for ICT remains unsatisfactory.

69. Support for the use of ICT in the curriculum was rated as unsatisfactory by a third of primary schools and a quarter of secondary schools in the school survey, although over 70 per cent of secondary schools also considered support to be good. The draft ICT strategy brings together developments funded through National Grid for Learning (NGfL), the EDP and the EiC initiative. However, it is still insufficiently focused on raising the achievement of pupils in and through ICT. The strategy is not costed and some of the activities in the EDP overlap, for example those relating to raising attainment by using the new technologies. The guidance for schools on the format and content of their ICT development plans does not include setting targets for raising attainment. However, a useful spreadsheet has been produced to help schools plan the replacement of ICT resources.

70. Consultation arrangements on the allocation of NGfL funding are appropriate. Targets for computer to pupil ratios have been met well ahead of the government guidelines. Useful links are being established with the city learning centre, which is a key element in developing the effective use of ICT across the curriculum. However, there is no co-ordinated technical support for computer networks used for curriculum purposes. Advisory support for ICT is currently inadequate. This is reflected, for example, in the slowness in establishing effective monitoring arrangements for ICT in schools. The contractor is aware of this and is taking steps to increase both the quantity and quality of support.

71. Support for raising standards and improving the quality of teaching in ICT in primary schools is unsatisfactory, but with some signs that this position is improving. Meetings for ICT co-ordinators have only recently been established. There has been no general training on assigning national curriculum levels to pupils' work, although support has been given on an individual basis when ICT staff have visited schools. Advice on the purchase and location of computer suites has been generally well received, as has the support provided by an advisory teacher to 12 primary schools to maximise the benefits offered for staff development through the New Opportunities Fund. A six-day course for new ICT co-ordinators and training for early years staff in the use of ICT in the curriculum have also been well received.

72. Support in secondary schools is better but still has some significant shortcomings. There are termly meetings for co-ordinators and some support has been given on levelling pupils' work, but this still remains under-developed. Strategies for meeting Key Stage 3 ICT targets for 2004 are unclear. It is not known how many secondary schools are meeting national curriculum requirements at Key Stage 4 or the proportion of 16 year olds gaining some form of external accreditation in ICT.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support to schools in raising the attainment of pupils in and through ICT:

- carry out an audit of schools' needs for support to improve the quality of teaching and learning in ICT, including its use across the curriculum; and
- in consultation with schools, draw up and implement a plan to support ICT, giving priority to those schools with greatest needs.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

73. A good start has been made to implementing the Key Stage 3 strategy, which has many strengths and few weaknesses. The strategy is well led by a strong team of advisers and consultants; support for literacy is particularly good. Although it is too early to measure the impact of the strategy on attainment, many examples were given of improvements in teaching and learning resulting from training provided by the consultants. The initial audit carried out by schools and pupil performance data have been used effectively to identify schools requiring intensive support and negotiate an appropriate programme of intervention.

74. The consultants for English and mathematics have carried out rigorous evaluations of the implementation of the strategy. Impediments to progress have been identified and strategies have been put in place to overcome them. There are examples of effective liaison and joint working. For example, two of the English and mathematics consultants are part-funded through the ethnic minority achievement grant and are being trained to work with ethnic minority pupils across Key Stages 2 and 3, and to develop resources for dissemination to all schools. However, cross-curricular work is less well developed, although there are individual examples of departments working effectively together.

Support for ethnic minority and Traveller children

75. The last inspection judged the support for ethnic minority pupils as unsatisfactory. This has improved and is now satisfactory. This finding is reflected by the school survey.

76. A good start has been made in the first year of the contract. Strategic planning for raising the attainment of ethnic minority pupils is thorough and has been informed by a detailed audit of their performance. The capacity of the service to support ethnic pupils has been increased recently. The literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3 strategy teams are recruiting specialists in supporting ethnic minority pupils to lead and share their expertise with colleagues. Good quality training has been provided for co-ordinators in schools for ethnic minority achievement and there are plans to extend this to all teachers. Given the high proportion of pupils not fluent in English in many schools, it is appropriate that much of the support is targeted on mainstream school provision. It is too soon to measure the full impact of this strategy, as plans are not yet fully implemented. There is still very considerable under-performance by some ethnic minority pupils, particularly Black Caribbean boys at Key Stage 4.

77. Link advisers are provided with a good analysis of data at school level on attainment, fluency levels, admissions, mobility and exclusions of ethnic minority pupils. However, there is no consistent recording by schools of individual pupil level data on attendance, exclusions or mobility of pupils from ethnic minorities. Criteria for the delegation of the ethnic minority achievement grant are clear. There is a high level of delegation and additional funding is available to schools with high numbers of African and Caribbean pupils. Training is targeted on low performing primary schools to raise the attainment of under-achieving groups of ethnic minority pupils. Plans are in place for link advisers to focus more on monitoring the performance of ethnic minority pupils and the use made by schools of available funding.

78. A separate inspection by OFSTED of support for Traveller children was carried out in parallel with this inspection as part of a national survey. It found that the Southwark Traveller Education Project (STEP) plays an effective role in meeting the educational needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. The service is very well led and managed and gives good value for money. It achieves considerable success in securing pupils' access to school and good rates of attendance at primary and secondary level. More recently, this effective work has been extended to the post-16 sector with the first students gaining apprenticeships and other vocational opportunities. A very important factor in these successes is the trust and positive relationships developed over many years with the vast majority of the families who feel well supported by STEP. The service has good links with a wide range of local and national initiatives, for example SureStart, which complement and extend its work from pre-school children to young adults. The

work in schools to support pupils and their families is effective and well received by teachers.

79. The work of STEP is effectively co-ordinated with other support services. Membership of a consortium of six other London boroughs brings a number of advantages, including access to comparative data on Traveller pupils' progress and achievement. The performance indicators for the service include targets for raising pupils' achievement. However, the actions to be taken by the schools to meet these targets are not sufficiently clear.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

80. Support for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory with many strengths and few weaknesses. The programme to enhance the work of gifted and talented pupils was initially developed through the EiC initiative and involved all 13 secondary schools. It was extended in September 2001 to 17 primary schools. Although it is too soon to evaluate the impact of this provision, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 7 in Key Stage 3 tests in five of the 12 secondary schools has risen significantly, with the greatest improvement being made in mathematics.

81. The initiative is well managed by the co-ordinator for gifted and talented pupils. All schools have an appropriate policy, which has been translated into departmental action plans. However, targets in some schools relate to the completion of activities, rather than to raising attainment. There are clear criteria for selecting pupils for the gifted and talented programme. All schools have pupil tracking systems in place, although they vary in sophistication. An external evaluation of the provision in primary schools has recently been completed and its findings are being acted on. Good quality general training has been provided, but there is a lack of more specific, subject-based training for primary teachers.

82. Extra curricular activities are very well managed and co-ordinated through a very successful complementary studies programme, which takes place after school, at weekends and during the school holidays. There is a wide and appropriate range of activities for secondary pupils which include: an introduction to philosophy; practical chemistry; web page design and learning Latin, using computer-based resources. Primary school pupils also benefit from a number of activities, including a poet in residence, after school French and a local history project. Headteachers consider this provision a significant strength.

83. Although links with Beacon schools and specialist colleges are under-developed, effective use is being made of contacts with two local independent schools to support master classes in mathematics and accelerated learning. The 130 places allocated for pupils completing their GCSE examinations at three university summer schools have all been taken up in the last two years. This opportunity has been well received by pupils, but it is too soon to evaluate its impact on increasing the proportion going on to higher education.

Support for school leadership and management

84. Support for school leadership and management was judged as unsatisfactory in the previous inspections owing to the LEA's lack of effectiveness in promoting autonomous schools and its inability to challenge and support senior management in schools. Improvement has taken place since the last inspection and support for school leadership and management is now satisfactory but it still has several important weaknesses. This finding reflects those of the school survey and OFSTED school inspections.

85. Link adviser visits involve a consideration of the school's self-review process, building the capacity of senior managers to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning through joint classroom observations and evaluating the quality of strategic planning. Although schools are still at very different stages in developing self-evaluation, the focus of link adviser visits on developing school autonomy has done much to raise its profile.

86. A few secondary schools continue to receive additional centrally funded support from link advisers, originally brokered by the LEA from an external agency, prior to the setting up of the contract. Apart from running counter to the strategy for encouraging school autonomy, this has led to some confusion over roles where there are two link advisers. This situation will be resolved once the contractor ceases to pay for the brokered support in September 2002.

87. Notes of visits to schools written by advisers and consultants are of good quality: they are informative, evaluative and appropriately detailed. However, there is a lack of consistent practice in their distribution. Headteachers do not necessarily receive reports from numeracy consultants, as these are sometimes directed to the key stage manager. Governors do not automatically receive copies of notes of visit. Moreover, it is left to headteachers to circulate the agreed summary statement on school performance to governors.

Recommendation

In order to improve the quality of monitoring by schools' senior managers:

- agree a protocol with schools for the distribution of notes of visits arising from consultants' visits; and
- ensure notes of visit, including any agreed summary statements on schools' evaluation of performance, are distributed directly to chairs of governors as well as to headteachers.

88. Headteachers now have access to an improved training programme for senior management. Training and guidance materials on the evaluation of school performance and a programme of keynote speakers on current education issues have been well received by headteachers and other senior managers. Good support has also been brokered for 20 primary headteachers completing their leadership programme for serving headteachers. Although governors received some time ago a checklist of good practice arrangements, there has been insufficient training and support for developing best value principles in schools.

Recommendation

In order to establish Best Value principles in schools:

- provide or broker appropriate training for headteachers and governors on Best Value.

89. Induction arrangements for new headteachers are satisfactory for primary headteachers, but unsatisfactory for secondary heads. All headteachers receive a useful induction booklet and all new heads and acting headteachers are invited to the education offices to meet key staff. New or acting secondary headteachers have received little more than this. In contrast, new primary headteachers and deputies have access to a course which includes training on topics such as finance, buildings, personnel and raising pupil performance. Good use is made of consultants and seconded heads and deputies to support school leadership.

Support to governors

90. The quality and effectiveness of support for governors was last reported in the LEA's first inspection when support was found to be satisfactory, with significant strengths and few weaknesses. Although strengths still outweigh weaknesses, improvements that might have been expected have not materialised.

91. The governors' clerking service and training section have been amalgamated and the new service is sensibly located in the school improvement division. This move has helped strengthen liaison between the school link advisers and governor development advisers. The school survey indicates that the work of governor services continues to be well regarded and a high proportion of governing bodies buy back support, even though it is at very high cost. The quality of advice is generally good and support from the link adviser in drawing up action plans and in appointing senior staff, including headteachers, is highly valued.

92. There has been no audit of governors' needs and a scheme to evaluate the effectiveness of governing bodies is not due to be introduced until later this year. Arrangements to communicate electronically with governors are under-developed, although governors will have access to the Southwark intranet from May 2002. Governors have access to a comprehensive training programme which remains very well regarded but there has been little training on Best Value. Chairs of governors are briefed by the contractor's director of education each term but overall, governors feel more informed than consulted. There is also variation in the extent to which governors are kept informed of the outcomes of visits made by link advisers and consultants to their schools.

93. Governor vacancies have reduced from 10 per cent in 1998 to 8.2 per cent in 2002, with LEA governor vacancies averaging only 3.5 per cent. This reduction in vacancies is due, in part, to the repetition of a successful recruitment campaign targeted at local community groups. However, information on the proportion of governors from ethnic minority groups is not available.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

94. The previous inspections identified significant weaknesses across most services supporting management. Schools were highly critical of most of the services and many sought alternative providers. Although there have been some improvements, several important weaknesses remain and the support continues to be unsatisfactory overall.

95. The information from the contractor on services to schools was helpfully provided in an electronic format, but it arrived unacceptably late. Schools were led to believe that the rise in prices for 2002/03 would be around three per cent, but the actual increase was closer to 10 per cent. Schools are unclear about the basis for these apparently high increases. The information on services is limited, with only brief descriptions of provision, charges and performance standards. It includes details of alternative providers recommended by Southwark schools, but without any quality assessments. There is very limited advice to schools on procurement. The contractor intends improving quality assurance arrangements by surveying schools during 2002/03 on a rolling programme to assess satisfaction and identifying the improvements required by schools. Changes to services and packages will be subject to better consultation with schools.

96. **Financial services** were previously judged as unsatisfactory because of the variable quality of support provided to schools. They are now satisfactory, although some important weaknesses remain. The team has worked hard to regain the confidence of schools and about 70 per cent of schools now buy back support for budget setting. Despite some difficulties encountered with the budget 'ready reckoner' the majority of schools are satisfied with the support they receive. There is a clear commitment from the finance team to promoting school autonomy and support school improvement. A positive development is the inclusion of financial services as part of the co-ordinated approach to supporting schools causing concern. The finance team is well led and all staff are now employed on permanent contracts and experienced in school finance matters.

97. The range of systems used by schools and the requirements of the corporate finance system require a substantial amount of inefficient manual reconciliation. There are plans to introduce more consistent financial practices across schools in preparation for the introduction of the government's proposals for common financial reporting. Mainstream schools received notification of budget allocations much earlier this year, but for special schools it was later than previously. Information on standards fund allocations is clear and helpful and schools value the support provided on this. A major change to the contractor's corporate financial systems caused severe problems for some schools and other establishments in paying invoices. The contractor is addressing this as a matter of urgency but schools and others remain very dissatisfied.

98. Schools have until recently been highly critical of internal audit reports. These have now been greatly improved by being written in more user-friendly language and being produced on time. They are now satisfactory.

99. **Human resources:** the first inspection of the LEA identified serious weaknesses in both human resources and payroll and it was agreed that the council would cease to trade these services. The position had deteriorated further by the time of the second

inspection. The implementation of the single status agreement was poorly handled and schools were given very short notice to find alternative payroll provision. There were serious gaps in some teachers' service records and pension contributions. The council did not fulfil its responsibilities as an employer effectively.

100. The service is still unsatisfactory, but some of the most basic requirements of an education personnel service have now been put in place and the service has been restructured to focus better on the needs of schools. Staff are experienced in human resources and have experience of schools' issues. Although there is still dissatisfaction with this service overall, some schools report good support on specific issues. Dedicated support has been provided to address the problem of gaps in records of service and pension contributions. Most discrepancies have been resolved and mechanisms are in place to follow up any further difficulties. Appropriate model contracts, differentiated for teaching and non-teaching employees, have now been developed. Satisfactory model policies on grievance, discipline and capability are also in place and work is planned to update others. Some training on personnel issues has been offered to headteachers, but this has been limited in scope and is mainly focused on those newly appointed.

101. There is inadequate data to support teacher recruitment and retention and workforce monitoring. The LEA does not have an accurate picture of teacher vacancies by subject and sector. Both the LEA and the contractor have made strenuous efforts to persuade schools to provide this data, but there has been strong resistance from schools owing to historical mistrust about how the data will be used and because some payroll providers charge schools for supplying this information.

Recommendation

In order to improve information on staffing in schools:

- as a matter of priority, secure all schools' agreement to providing accurate, timely and reliable staffing data.

102. Industrial relations are problematic. Following the poor implementation of the single status award and an opposition in principle to outsourcing, discussions on terms and conditions have been very difficult. There has been progress in dealing with model contracts and policies but there continues to be strong resistance by the trade unions and professional associations to the contractor undertaking the personnel function on behalf of the LEA.

103. **Property services** are unsatisfactory, although there are some significant strengths. Each school has a property officer provided as part of a core entitlement. These are experienced premises officers who commission specialist advice. Property issues raised in OFSTED school inspection reports are monitored and followed up. Regular condition surveys of school buildings have been carried out since 1990 and there is an effective programme of works to maintain school buildings to a good standard. There will be no outstanding backlog of condition work from 2002/03, which is a significant achievement. However, there is no planned programme of school visits and contacts with schools have only just started to be logged. The records do not include

agreed follow up actions. There has been little direct support to schools in managing their premises responsibilities and schools do not rate this service highly, although some individual projects have gone well. There is no system in place for ensuring that schools undertake their responsibilities as tenants with regard to school buildings

104. A small team has responsibility for the council's significant schools' capital programme. The team has started, belatedly, to issue post-project completion surveys to schools. Six post-completion surveys have been carried out and schools have found these useful. As a result of feedback from schools, changes will be made to the council's approved list of contractors.

Recommendation

In order to improve the service supporting property in schools:

- ensure that the role of property officers more effectively meets the needs of schools and introduce more effective monitoring of the support provided to schools.

105. **Information and communications technology (ICT)** support for school administration is unsatisfactory. This function was not previously inspected, but the school survey indicates that it has worsened in the last two years. Schools receive poor support for electronic communication and inadequate administrative support. Following the previous inspection, an unwise decision was made to discontinue training and support for ICT administrative staff. As a result, schools opted for several different administrative and management systems. This makes comprehensive support to schools by a central team very difficult and potentially prohibitively expensive. The range of different software systems used by schools makes the collection and effective use of management data difficult.

106. Despite the lack of a corporate ICT strategy, the contractor is clear about what needs to be done to bring about improvements. It has established a strategy group for ICT. Training on a limited range of software products has been well received. There is effective brokered support for schools experiencing problems with the completion of the pupil level annual school census. The first tranche of 26 schools to receive broadband and access to the London Grid for Learning (LGfL) will be online by August 2002 and it is intended to extend this to all schools by the end of 2003. Access to the LGfL offers potentially significant benefits for electronic communication which will be improved with the launch of the education web site. However, there is yet no training programme to support teachers and administrators in making the most effective use of the new technology. Calls to the ICT helpdesk are now monitored and efforts are being made to reduce the number of unresolved problems. The contractor has drawn up an appropriate set of service level agreements to provide ICT traded services to schools from April 2002, but this does not include brokering support for products obtained from key software and hardware providers.

107. Primary schools send pupil data to the contractor for transfer to secondary schools. This time-consuming exercise contributes to the late arrival of information in the secondary schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve the quality of support for school administrative systems:

- as a matter of urgency, agree and implement a strategy with headteachers for reducing the number of management systems used by schools;
- put in place traded or brokered services that fully meet the needs of schools; and
- provide training on the implications of broadband for school managers, administrative staff and teachers;

Assuring the supply and quality of teachers

108. Support for the recruitment and retention of teachers was not previously inspected. The evidence from this inspection indicates that this function is carried out satisfactorily.

109. The vacancy rate for teachers is a major concern in the borough. The recruitment and retention of teachers is a priority in the EDP and identified as a key priority by the contractor for 2002/03. There is a good range of initiatives to tackle the problem but the lack of comprehensive data on the teaching force in the borough inhibits long-term strategic planning.

110. A recruitment strategy manager has been funded through the Teacher Training Agency. He is responsible for a number of positive initiatives, including a school vacancy bulletin and a recruitment toolkit for governors and new headteachers. Strenuous efforts have also been made to market the borough as a place to live and teach in, to provide affordable housing for new teachers, to improve childcare provision and to increase overseas recruitment. These efforts have met with some success, but the vacancy rate remains above that of similar authorities and well above the national average.

111. The programme for the recruitment and retention of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) is effective and schools rated the support for NQTs highly in the school survey. In 2000/01, newly qualified teachers made up eight per cent of the teaching force and 82 per cent were retained for a second year. However, the longer-term retention of these teachers is more problematic and the contractor rightly sees the need for further work in this direction. The contractor has a clear vision for the development of teaching as a career in Southwark, which is underpinned by the emerging programme of continuing professional development for teachers and senior managers, but there is still a long way to go before this vision becomes a reality.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Summary of effectiveness of SEN provision

112. SEN was not inspected fully previously but aspects of provision, such as the statementing process, were found to be unsatisfactory when the contractor took over. Good progress has been made, especially in relation to meeting statutory requirements and providing support for school improvement. These functions are now performed satisfactorily. However, while policy development has proceeded, some shortcomings in strategic planning remain.

The strategy for SEN

113. The last inspection did not comment in detail on the quality of strategic planning for special educational needs. Considerable progress has been made by the contractor during the last year but some aspects of strategic planning for special educational needs remain unsatisfactory.

114. The SEN policy establishes an appropriate set of objectives and targets for the education department in relation to special educational needs. However, it is not made sufficiently clear how these objectives and targets are to be achieved. The same lack of clarity exists in the education development plan, where support for pupils with SEN is included as part of a separate priority for social and educational inclusion. Links with other priorities are not always made explicit. The SEN policy statement is not underpinned by a coherent action plan. The service development plan does specify actions to be taken but these do not cover all aspects of the policy statement. A general financial strategy underpins the policy, but the lack of a coherent action plan makes more specific resource planning very difficult.

Recommendation

In order to improve strategic planning for SEN:

- develop a more coherent action plan, with clearly identified timescales, responsibilities and costs, to achieve the objectives set out in the SEN policy

115. A sound policy for inclusion and meeting special educational needs has been drawn up and approved by members, following extensive consultation with schools and the wider community. There is a commitment to the inclusion agenda by the contractor and elected members. The policy on inclusion is coherent and sets out the commitments of the LEA and the contractor. There is a helpful set of protocols that define the respective responsibilities of the contractor, schools and other stakeholders.

116. A number of important steps have been taken to enhance SEN provision. These include improved support for pupils with communication disorders and autism in the primary sector. The previous report recommended that the LEA should move more quickly to increase the number of schools specially resourced for pupils with SEN. Although this has not taken place, the contractor has quite rightly concentrated on

ensuring key functions are performed well and developments proceed within an agreed policy framework.

117. There is a useful handbook on SEN for schools and parents, with individual leaflets covering a range of issues. The leaflets are of good quality and well presented but have the shortcoming of not providing a clear statement of the respective roles and responsibilities of the LEA in relation to SEN.

Statutory obligations

118. Meeting statutory obligations for SEN is a high priority and, from a low starting point, considerable progress has been made. The performance is now highly satisfactory. In 2000/01, only half of statements were completed within 18 weeks; this had risen to 90 per cent by 2001/02, although it falls to 57 per cent when exceptions are taken into account. The contractor has been proactive in working with other agencies to reduce the number of exceptions and has set ambitious targets for achieving this. The most recent evidence indicates good progress is being made. The assessment and administration of statements has improved substantially as a result of restructuring the service and reviewing administrative procedures. The schools have begun to see the benefits of the improved service and there is increased confidence in the contractor's ability to deliver on SEN.

119. The quality of statements is sound and annual reviews are carried out satisfactorily. The contractor has recognised the need to develop the quality of advice accompanying statements and the need to involve officers more closely in annual reviews. There is a slightly higher percentage of pupils with statements and a much higher referral rate for assessment than in similar authorities. There has been insufficient dialogue with schools during the trialling of the new criteria for statutory assessment to ensure understanding and ownership of them. Thirty-four referrals were sent to the SEN tribunal in the last 12 months but only four of these were eventually determined by the tribunal. Twenty-five of the referrals were on the grounds that an assessment was refused. This reflects a lack of transparency in the assessment criteria and a lack of understanding of the process by parents and schools. The contractor is already taking appropriate steps to improve this situation and has made the sensible decision to use the London disagreement resolution service to assist in resolving cases before they reach tribunal.

School improvement

120. Support for SEN as part of school improvement is satisfactory. While schools were critical of the support for SEN in the school survey, they report recent improvements in services. OFSTED inspection data indicates that the progress of pupils with SEN is satisfactory. The appointment of a professional SEN manager has helped improve the quality of support, although the lack of specialist advice remains a concern for some schools. There is variation in the effectiveness of support services but they are satisfactory overall. The work of individuals is often well regarded and there is evidence of it impacting on raising achievement. The contractor has acted decisively to improve acknowledged shortcomings in the educational psychology service. An experienced consultant has been engaged and there is now a good improvement plan in place for this service.

121. The criteria for statutory assessment have been developed in line with the new Code of Practice and these are being piloted. Pupils with statements are allocated to one of ten bands which releases funding for the schools to meet their needs. There is also an allocation of funding for non-statemented pupils with SEN. This process is effectively monitored and the allocation of support is reviewed annually.

122. There is good guidance to schools on target setting for pupils with SEN, which is appropriately developed through individual education plans. However, insufficient use is made of data to monitor pupil progress. Insufficient attention is also given in the EDP to raising the achievement of pupils with SEN. A SEN training plan has recently been devised, which provides a useful start to the development of a strategy for supporting school improvement. The audit suggested in the plan is vital in ensuring training needs in schools are met. Good advice and guidance is provided to parents on SEN, with a well respected parent partnership scheme in place.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for pupils with SEN:

- ensure that effective procedures are in place to monitor the progress of pupils with SEN.

Value for money

123. Satisfactory procedures are in place to monitor SEN expenditure. Total spending on SEN is high, although the proportion of the budget retained centrally is below that of similar authorities. A large proportion of total spending is on support in mainstream schools. Schools are allocated additional funding for the number of pupils at 'action plus' and above in the new Code of Practice and for individual pupils with statements, according to the level of need. The allocations are reviewed annually. The contractor recognises the need to improve the guidance to schools on the use of SEN funding. The school moderation process is effective and involves officers and headteachers visiting a sample of schools to check strategy, pupil data and individual education plans. The contractor has effective systems in place to monitor spending on SEN from central budgets. Individual services have begun to develop their own monitoring systems and performance management arrangements are robust.

124. OFSTED inspection evidence indicates that progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory in schools. Services to support schools are at least satisfactory and improving, with good development plans and performance management arrangements in place. Value for money is satisfactory.

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

125. The previous inspections did not make an overall judgement on social inclusion. The evidence from this inspection indicates that the LEA and the contractor are promoting social inclusion satisfactorily. Strengths outweigh weaknesses in all functions except for behaviour and combating racism.

126. The contractor had clear priorities for the first year of the contract, including tackling shortcomings in particular services, building trust with partners and recruiting and inducting staff. With key posts now filled, new policies agreed with partners and plans in place, the contractor is now in a strong position to make further improvements and meet targets. Corporate plans for social inclusion and regeneration are coherent and form the basis for development planning and collaborative working with other local authority services and other agencies. There is good strategic planning of inclusion initiatives and co-ordination of major operational plans, such as the EDP. There are some shortcomings in the speed and effectiveness of the response of social services to requests from schools and there are also some significant weaknesses in strategic planning for behaviour support.

127. The council's education and social services sub-committees receive regular reports and monitor the progress being made on the social inclusion agenda. The results of monitoring are used to target resources to priorities. However, the LEA does not have effective procedures in place for monitoring racist incidents in schools.

128. There is a clear intention among all strategic partners to improve attainment amongst pupils at risk of social exclusion. Attainment currently varies from good for primary age children in public care and African pupils, to poor for older children in pupil care and Black Caribbean pupils. Challenging targets have been set for all groups of vulnerable pupils and resources are allocated to low-performing groups. It is too soon to judge the full impact of these measures.

The supply of school places

129. The provision of school places was judged as satisfactory when it was last inspected in 1998. It continues to be satisfactory.

130. Projections of pupil numbers are provided by the data management and analysis group of the Greater London Authority and are accurate to within one per cent. The school places planning officer makes effective use of these projections, together with housing and demographic data, to produce local analyses for the school organisation plan. However, school by school analyses currently have the disadvantage of only relating to the primary sector.

131. Surplus places have been reduced since 1998 in both primary and secondary sectors and are now close to the national average. The most substantial reduction in surplus places has been in the secondary sector, achieved mainly through school closures. However, there is pressure on places and overcrowding in several schools and this is likely to increase as a result of urban regeneration projects and strategies

designed to improve the popularity of schools in the borough. Some schools have agreed to increase admission numbers as a short-term solution to the shortage of places and a number of effective strategies have been employed to adjust the gender balance in schools. Plans are well advanced for two new City Academies, one of which will replace an existing secondary school, and consideration is also being given to developing another new secondary school in East Dulwich.

132. The school organisation plan meets statutory requirements. Although it identifies the pressures facing the planning areas, it does not set out a five year programme of work to address these issues. Diocesan authorities are concerned that they are not fully involved at an early enough stage in planning school places. The LEA has met the requirements of the class sizes plan.

Asset management and planning

133. Asset management planning was not previously inspected. This function is performed satisfactorily.

134. The DfES has assessed the authority's asset management plan and local policy statement as satisfactory. The council has demonstrated its commitment to improving school buildings by agreeing a £20m capital investment programme over a period of five years, with an additional £1.25m annually to sustain the rolling maintenance programme. Buildings are generally in a good state of repair, compared to the majority of authorities. The allocation of new investment is clearly assessed against educational priorities. There is satisfactory monitoring of devolved capital to schools.

135. There is insufficient, active involvement by schools and diocesan authorities in asset management planning. Despite members agreeing to a steering group being re-established, it has not yet met and does not include diocesan representatives. The local policy statement on asset management is well written and sets out what is required. However, there is little evidence of schools and other stakeholders influencing it and it does not drive the council's substantial schools' capital programme.

136. Schools have been given only limited guidance on completing suitability surveys. The moderation of returns from the surveys gave insufficient attention to ensuring that schools took sufficient account of the suitability of their accommodation for delivering the curriculum. There has been limited training for new headteachers and governors on asset management planning.

Recommendation

In order to improve asset management planning:

- ensure the asset management steering group actively promotes the full participation of all partners; and
- implement a programme of training and provide guidance for schools on asset management planning, particularly suitability assessments.

Admissions

137. Admissions was last inspected in 1998 when it was found to be satisfactory. It remains satisfactory but now has more weaknesses, some of which are important.

138. The information booklets available to parents are satisfactory but only the primary booklet is produced in several community languages. Admissions criteria are set out in priority order and all are clear, apart from one relating to SEN. There is an efficient and regularly updated electronic management system that has improved the accuracy and timeliness of information for schools and parents. There are appropriate links with the team responsible for planning school places and with admissions authorities in neighbouring boroughs. Regular meetings are held with secondary headteachers on admissions issues. Although the contractor has tried to co-ordinate admissions procedures within Southwark, this has not been wholly successful and work is in hand to secure better arrangements for the next round. An admissions forum has now been established.

139. The lack of a head of admissions for 18 months, until July 2002, hindered the introduction of developments to improve the effectiveness of the service. There are high levels of appeals compared with other London authorities, although around 90 per cent are unsuccessful and a very high proportion in 2001 related to one school. The target for holding appeals for entry to primary schools and at secondary transfer is properly within three to four weeks of receipt of the appeal, giving sufficient time for pupils to be inducted into their new schools. However, in 2001 only 60 per cent of parents were allocated their first preference of primary school and only 30 per cent for secondary schools, although this has increased to 60 per cent in 2002. These figures indicate a lack of understanding by parents of the likely chances of their children gaining admission to particularly popular schools. The admissions team is working with secondary headteachers to organise an exhibition for parents to help develop a better understanding of the process and the options available. There is also useful work taking place with headteachers on developing a code of practice for admission arrangements.

Recommendation

In order to reduce the high level of appeals:

- improve the co-ordination of admissions procedures and provide better information to parents on the likely chances of their children obtaining places at each school.

Provision for pupils with no school places

140. Provision of education for pupils who have no school place is satisfactory, with considerable strengths and few weaknesses. This function was last inspected in 1998 when it was judged to be unsatisfactory.

141. The contractor conducted a much needed review of provision in April 2001 that resulted in a reconfiguration of provision for pupils with no school place and a refocusing of provision in the pupil referral units (PRUs). The reshaping of the service has effectively brought all provision for pupils not educated in schools under the direction of

one head of service, facilitating better liaison with schools and other agencies. The three PRUs now cater for distinct groups of primary and secondary age pupils likely to return to school. Year 11 pupils are on planned programmes, involving work-placements with either college or unit based support. An improvement under these new arrangements is the PRUs greater involvement in outreach work to prevent exclusions. The rate at which pupils in PRUs are being re-integrated in schools has increased significantly in the last term. Appropriate placements have been arranged for older pupils in further education colleges. While it is too soon to judge the full impact of these changes, there are encouraging signs of rising attendance and improving attainment.

142. Hospital schools provide appropriate support for pupils who are ill, on hospital wards, in tutorial groups or at home. There is good communication with pupils' schools. Sound support for young people with mental health problems is provided through a package of support based at a local clinic. There is good support for pregnant schoolgirls aimed at facilitating early reintegration to school.

143. An effective system for managing pupils off roll is now in place and includes those permanently excluded from schools. A pupil placement panel meets fortnightly to place pupils referred by schools, with priority being given to children in public care. Reintegration is the prime aim and a school is identified to re-admit the pupil at an early stage in the process. Schools visited during the inspection reported this system was working well. Good systems are in place for ensuring that no children become 'lost' to the education system. Plans are in place to provide full-time education for pupils excluded for more than 15 days from September 2002. Dual registration arrangements mean that all primary age pupils currently receive full-time education and older pupils receive an average of 20 hours. Clear policies and practices are in place for monitoring the education and welfare of pupils educated at home.

School attendance

144. Support for attendance is good. Recommendations from the first inspection led to a review both of strategies to improve levels of attendance and the deployment of education welfare officers. The second inspection reported that good progress had been made and the function was judged as satisfactory. Further improvements have been made since then to make the service more responsive to the needs of schools. Schools rated the support for attendance as unsatisfactory but this view was not borne out by the inspection.

145. Attendance is above statistical neighbours in primary and secondary schools and only slightly below national figures. This is good, given the considerable challenges facing schools in the borough. Attendance is improving in most of the schools targeted for extra support, but the ambitious 2001/02 target for attendance in the borough's schools is unlikely to be met.

146. A high priority is given to improving attendance and this is reflected in key plans and the relatively high level of resources devoted to it. There is a clear and coherent strategy for promoting attendance and the service level agreements with schools are of good quality. The service is effectively managed and employs well-qualified staff. Restructuring of the service has facilitated more effective delivery of preventative work, monitoring and support. Schools with poor attendance and vulnerable groups of pupils

are prioritised for additional support. As well as regular visits, all schools have register inspections, followed by a written report with recommendations. Intensive support for schools is based on a good analysis of data, followed by practical advice and support. School visits and documented case studies revealed success in tackling non-attendance of ethnic minority pupils, lateness and post-registration truancy. The service is successful in encouraging schools to share good practice.

147. The education welfare service liaises effectively with other services, LEAs and schools. A multi-agency risk assessment group shares information about pupils and plans interventions to re-engage them in education and prevent criminal activity. There are effective working relationships with the police on rewarding attendance, truancy sweeps and youth offending. Appropriate use is made of prosecutions for non-attendance and supervision orders. A jointly funded post with social services is helping to improve the attendance of children in public care living in residential homes. An education welfare officer has responsibility for supporting children resident in Southwark but educated outside of the borough, as well as unaccompanied minors and pupils from other authorities. Effective support is provided to schoolgirl mothers to help their attendance at school.

Behaviour support

148. The support provided to schools for managing pupil behaviour was not previously inspected. Although exclusions have been substantially reduced, and the behaviour support service is well regarded, there are significant weaknesses in the strategic planning to improve behaviour in schools and this makes the support unsatisfactory overall.

149. The target of a reduction by one third in permanent exclusions has been reached, although exclusions in secondary schools are still high in comparison to similar authorities and national averages. Eighty-two per cent of permanent exclusions in 2000/01 were boys.

150. The proportion of excluded pupils who were either Black African or Black Caribbean pupils rose from 48 per cent in 1999/2000 to 66 per cent in 2000/01. This is a considerable concern but the behaviour support plan does not provide a convincing strategy to tackle this issue.

151. The contractor recognised that the original behaviour support plan for 2001-2004 was weak in so far as it did not assist schools in understanding the roles and functions of the support services or how they were meant to work together strategically. The revised plan for 2002-2003 is much clearer, with appropriate actions based on the audit of need. However, it still has some weaknesses in terms of its links with the work taking place through the EiC on learning mentors and learning support units. The actions to be taken to target support for particular groups of pupils are also unclear. At present there is no approved behaviour policy, although an initial draft has been prepared.

152. Direct support to schools is provided by the recently formed mainstream support service, which provides behaviour support. Individual support is provided on a referral basis and is traded to schools. Access to the service is clear and take up by schools is increasing, with over 70 per cent of schools using the service this academic year.

Schools value the service they receive. Good guidance is given on pastoral support plans and advice on managing behaviour is given on an individual school basis, although there is no systematic process for sharing good practice. There are some positive developments, such as the pathways project, aimed at vulnerable 14-16 year olds and the use of Standards Fund to provide four inclusion centres.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support to schools to improve behaviour:

- increase the coherence of the strategy for improving pupil behaviour, including the actions to be taken to reduce exclusions of boys and Black African and Black Caribbean pupils.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

153. Health, safety, welfare and child protection were not inspected in 1999. This inspection finds that health and safety provision is satisfactory and support for welfare and child protection is good.

154. The LEA rightly gives a very high priority to protecting children from harm. The contractor takes an active role in the local area child protection committee. There is good collaboration with social services and the police at a strategic level in the provision of training and development of clear procedures. Schools receive good quality guidance on referrals, investigations, the transfer of pupils between schools and the child protection plan. There was a high take up of a comprehensive two-day training session run jointly with social services and the police for designated child protection teachers. Training is provided for all new staff in schools and nominated governors. Up-to-date lists of designated teachers and nominated governors and their deputies are maintained. There is a management duty rota which enables staff in school to obtain advice from an officer who also has access to social service managers.

155. At an operational level services and initiatives are strongly targeted on children at risk. This puts pressure on social services resources. Schools expressed concerns about social workers' ability to respond to requests for help, owing to heavy caseloads and staff turnover. This situation causes considerable difficulties for schools in meeting their responsibilities for children at risk. An innovative initiative involving police officers based in secondary schools is working well to reduce pupils' fear of crime, as well as prevent criminal activity. The education welfare and attendance service works well with unaccompanied asylum seekers, young people at risk, schools and the youth offending team. A safer parenting handbook is provided for parents at key points of entry to primary and transfer to secondary school.

156. The contractor takes all necessary steps to meet its statutory obligations for health and safety. There are appropriate policies, guidance and emergency plans for schools and these are in the process of being updated. A suitable range of traded services is provided, including health and safety inspections, risk assessment and training on health and safety. Inspection reports and school action plans are monitored for health and safety issues. There is a trend of improvement in schools' compliance with requirements. Good links exist with the health service over communicable diseases. There are well-publicised arrangements for dealing with emergencies during and out of school hours.

Children in public care

157. Support for children in public care is satisfactory. This function was not previously inspected.

158. The council takes its corporate responsibility for children in public care very seriously and gives a high priority to raising their attainment and improving pastoral support. Members take an active interest in the quality of provision for children in public care. The social services and education committees receive and respond to reports on the educational progress of children in public care. The social service department and the contractor have the same challenging targets for improvement and are working together effectively at a strategic level. However, comments in the school survey and visits to schools in this inspection reveal some failings in communications and the speed of response by social services at the operational level.

159. Resources are deployed effectively. New posts have been created and services refocused on achieving the attainment targets for children in public care. An advisory teacher provides effective support, guidance and training for teachers, education welfare officers, social workers and foster carers. Joint training by education and social services is co-ordinated well. Every school has been visited and training provided on personal education plans and a system for monitoring the quality of the plans recently been introduced. Assistance is given to schools in obtaining personal education plans of children in the care of other boroughs.

160. An advisory teacher, jointly funded by social services and the contractor, provides support for unaccompanied minors in schools and helps them with the transfer to post-16 provision. An education social worker, also jointly funded, is proving successful in raising the attendance and aspirations of children in residential homes. The education welfare service checks that schools have identified children in public care and that they are monitoring attendance. The pupil placement panel gives priority to any children in public care who are out of school. Good use is made of the voluntary sector to support children in public care.

161. While much remains to be done in raising the achievement of children in public care, particularly at Key Stage 4, there are some positive signs of improvement. In Year 6 the proportion of children in public care achieving Level 4 in English is the same as the national average, and above it in mathematics. Only a small percentage of children in public care are permanently excluded. Attendance of children in public care was better than inner London boroughs and the national average. Targets set for attainment of children in public care are very challenging but realistic.

Combating racism

162. Support for combating racism was not previously inspected. While much is being done to combat racism in schools, there are important weaknesses in the monitoring of racist incidents which result in the support overall being unsatisfactory.

163. Since the last inspection, the council has responded positively to the report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence by establishing a strategic advisory group, formulating an action plan and carrying out the council for racial equality's standard audit. The council's equal opportunities and diversity statement has been revised to take account of the Race Relations Act, 2000. A strategy support officer for race relations has been appointed recently and an equalities and diversity team created. Recent OFSTED school inspection reports are mostly positive about the work of schools in promoting racial harmony.

164. Since the death of Damilola Taylor in 2000, inter-agency working has focused sharply on developing a better understanding of the problems facing local communities and responding to them. Schools form important parts of the communities they serve and within their own institutions have done much to combat racism. However, racism in the community does impinge on schools. The police, social services and the contractor work together effectively to target young people at risk of being drawn into hate crime and to respond to fear of crime.

165. While the council, strategic partners and schools are committed to the principles of improving race relations, they are held back by the lack of fundamental procedures that help inform strategy. Despite consultation with schools, there is still no agreement on the recording and reporting of racist incidents. Very few schools report racist incidents to the authority and nil returns are not required. This is unsatisfactory. There has also been insufficient recent training for staff in schools on combating racism in schools.

Recommendation

In order to combating racism:

- ensure that schools record racist incidents; parents and governors are informed of the nature of incidents and the schools' responses; governing bodies inform the authority about the pattern and frequency of incidents, including nil returns; and
- provide up-to-date training for staff in schools on combating racism.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction to corporate issues

166. The last inspection identified a failure in the strategic management and leadership of the authority by officers and members. The inspection report was critical of the multiplicity of plans, their lack of coherence and strategies to turn aspirations into reality. Since then a new chief education officer has been appointed and all education functions, except early years and adult education, have been outsourced. This inspection finds that there have been significant improvements in corporate planning, the leadership provided by officer and members and collaborative working with other agencies. These functions are now performed effectively.

Corporate planning

167. Corporate planning is satisfactory, with many strengths and few weaknesses. The council has a strongly held and widely supported strategic vision that focuses on the need for economic and social regeneration in the borough. Raising educational achievement and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of schools are seen as vital to achieving this. Actions to promote improvements in education are effectively co-ordinated across directorates. Education is strongly represented on the recently formed local strategic partnership, which has the promotion of educational achievement as one of its key strategic aims.

168. A new corporate planning framework was introduced in April 2002, but many elements of this were already in place before then. Responding to a recommendation from District Audit, the new planning framework aligns departmental planning more closely with the council's Best Value Performance Plan. It also strengthens the integration of financial and performance data and has more effective mechanisms for dealing with cross-cutting issues. There is a satisfactory alignment of service planning and budget planning cycles and this will be strengthened further in 2003/4.

169. The corporate vision and objectives are reflected in the contractor's business plan and through other key plans, including the education development plan. There is a very strong emphasis on raising the performance of schools across all education services. The contractor has identified five appropriate primary objectives for 2002/03 that include the recruitment and retention of governors, headteachers and teacher and the development of leadership and management. The performance of the contractor is measured against a series of indicators that have recently been rationalised and brought into line with other targets. A set of key performance indicators has been developed by the partnership which are ambitious and go beyond the best value performance indicators. The council has also been successful in securing a Public Service Agreement for youth which includes further stretch targets for other departments, as well as the contractor. However, the LEA and the contractor recognise there is still work to be done in making some of the performance indicators more meaningful and establishing accurate baselines against which to measure progress. This is particularly true of indicators relating to social inclusion.

Effectiveness of decision-making

170. A clear and effective process of decision-making enables corporate education plans to be turned into actions. Decisions, including key financial decisions, are timely and are rarely subject to sudden reversal. Consultation with schools and other stakeholders has been improved since the last inspection and generally informs decision making. There have been exceptions to this; for example, there was a lack of effective consultation with schools and trade unions on the behaviour support plan. Headteachers also feel there is sometimes insufficient feedback on the reasons why a particular decision was made.

171. There are appropriate levels of delegation to officers. Responsibilities and lines of communication are generally clear. However, the precise division of responsibilities for strategic planning between the chief education officer and the contractor's director of education is not sufficiently explicit and this leads to some confusion on the part of headteachers, governors and other agencies.

172. The quality of advice provided to elected members by officers is good. Members are provided with timely and well presented reports which set out policy options and their likely implications. The reports are supported by an appropriate level of data and management information. Additional information is available to members of all parties on request. Regular reports from the contractor on progress against key performance indicators provide a very useful mechanism for keeping members informed. Members receive good information on the performance of schools in general but have insufficient information on the progress of individual schools or schools in a particular area.

Leadership of elected members

173. Elected members provide sound leadership in education. They are better informed and more able and willing to challenge officers on the performance of schools and the education service than they were at the time of the last inspection. There is cross-party agreement on the strategic vision for education and consensus about the main priorities. There is a strong commitment by all parties to improving the quality of education in the borough and a willingness to try and make the partnership with the contractor work. Members demonstrate a close interest in schools and about half are involved as governors.

174. The full implementation of the modernised council structure was delayed until after the local elections of May 2002, but the new cabinet style structure has already enabled members to gain a better grasp of cross-cutting issues and make more informed decisions. The council has recently established a scrutiny panel for education but this has yet to undertake any work. Minutes of the ratification committee show that members are fully involved in discussing education issues and are prepared to challenge officers on strategy. At the same time, members do not interfere unduly in the management of the LEA or the contract. Members' monitoring of the performance of the education service is helped by regular reports from the contractor on progress towards achieving targets and key performance indicators.

Leadership of senior officers

175. Senior officers in the LEA and Atkins Education provide effective leadership. The chief education officer was appointed a year before the contract started. He started to build the capacity and expertise of the service and ensured that the contract was put in place as soon as possible. The relatively smooth transition to the new contractual arrangements is a reflection of the sound leadership provided by officers and members in partnership with the DfES and the contractor. However, now that the contract has been in place for over a year, the role of the chief education officer and the residual LEA is less clear. The possible outsourcing of early years and adult education may reduce their role further. The LEA has a continuing key role to play in monitoring the contract but it currently lacks the capacity to verify the data provided by the contractor and is reliant mainly on the monitoring reports provided by the contractor. These are useful but only provide a partial picture of the impact of the contract. In particular, LEA officers have little direct contact with schools. This, coupled with the lack of financial and staffing information, makes it difficult for the council to judge whether the contract is giving good value for money and how services are to be provided once the current contract ends.

Recommendation

In order to improve the strategic leadership of the authority:

- redefine the role of the chief education officer and the residual LEA; and
- establish mechanisms for verifying the financial and other data provided by the contractor.

176. The LEA and the contractor have done much to restore effective working relationships with schools, which were at a low ebb at the time of the last inspection. They have achieved this by establishing more effective consultation arrangements and encouraging schools to engage more effectively in discussions on key educational issues. The evidence of increased confidence by schools in the expertise and capacity of the contractor to support them, particularly with respect to school improvement, is convincing. However, there is still some way to go in actively engaging the support of all schools. A substantial proportion of headteachers and chairs of governing bodies do not attend consultation meetings and have little contact with the contractor, other than through their link adviser.

177. An independent survey, carried out on behalf of the contractor, shows improved motivation of officers and staff in the education service since the contractor took over. Vacancies and staff turnover have been reduced and the contractor is attracting a greater number of external applicants for posts. Performance management arrangements in the LEA and in the contracted services are well established and linked to service objectives.

Partnership with agencies

178. The last inspection report identified some weaknesses in the LEA's partnership arrangements with other agencies. The LEA has now developed effective partnerships with the contractor, other local authority services and other agencies.

179. Working in partnership with other agencies is rightly seen as being of key importance in raising standards and improving social inclusion in the borough. By far the most important partnership is that with the contractor. Both sides in the contract see the relationship as a partnership and not simply one of a client-contractor. There is therefore a degree of flexibility built into the contract which allows for negotiation on targets and strategic direction. This is sensible, given the likelihood of changing demands by both central and local government during the period of the contract. While there are obvious dangers in not having a clear division between client and contractor, the relationship in Southwark is a mature one that works to the benefit of schools and pupils. The contractor has taken a broad view of its role and sees its work with other local authority services and external agencies as vital to meeting its targets.

180. The chief education officer has done much to develop better liaison between education and other local authority services, such as social services and housing. This is reflected, for example, in education playing a much enhanced role in major urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal programmes. There is good liaison with the police. The council and police have worked together to produce a clear and coherent strategy for tackling youth crime. The investigation into the death of Damilola Taylor in 2000 and growing juvenile street crime were important factors in changing the emphasis of the work of the police with schools to being more focused on targeted intervention strategies, mainly in secondary schools. There is evidence that much of this work has been successful, but it has not met with the approval of all schools, particularly primaries, some of whom regret the loss of the type of contact with the police they previously enjoyed.

APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has made a number of fundamental recommendations, which are key to the further progress of the LEA. Work should begin on them immediately. They are:

In order to improve the strategic leadership of the authority:

- redefine the role of the chief education officer and the residual LEA; and
- establish mechanisms for verifying the financial and other data provided by the contractor.

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- ensure that the financial reporting arrangements specified in the contract are fully implemented.

In order to improve the effectiveness of the EDP:

- reduce the number of success criteria and targets and ensure they are quantifiable;
- strengthen links with plans for the EAZs and EIC to form a coherent strategy; and
- ensure the links between the support for pupils with SEN and other priorities are made explicit.

In order to improve the quality of support for school administrative systems:

- agree and implement a strategy with headteachers for reducing the number of management systems used by schools;
- put in place traded or brokered services that fully meet the needs of schools; and
- provide training on the implications of broadband for school managers, administrative staff and teachers.

In order to assist secondary schools with the organisation of Year 7 pupils:

- work with schools to overcome the problems of transferring pupil performance data and other information to secondary schools before the end of the summer term.

In order to improve information on staffing in schools:

- secure all schools' agreement to providing accurate, timely and reliable staffing data.

In order to improve support for pupils with SEN:

- develop a more coherent action plan, with clearly identified timescales, responsibilities and costs, to achieve the objectives set out in the SEN policy; and
- ensure that effective procedures are in place to monitor the progress of pupils with SEN.

In order to improve the support to schools to improve behaviour:

- increase the coherence of the strategy for improving pupil behaviour, including the actions to be taken to reduce exclusions of boys and Black African and Black Caribbean pupils.

In order to combat racism:

- ensure that schools record racist incidents; parents and governors are informed of the nature of incidents and the schools' responses; governing bodies inform the authority about the pattern and frequency of incidents, including nil returns; and
- provide training for all staff in improving race relations and combating racism.

The report also makes the following recommendations. They are:

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- simplify the school funding formula, particularly in relation to additional educational needs, and relate it more closely to the activities being undertaken.

In order to improve the quality of schools' work:

- develop a strategy for the dissemination of good practice which co-ordinates the use of available expertise in the borough, including specialist and Beacon schools.

In order to improve the quality of monitoring by schools' senior managers:

- agree a protocol with schools for the distribution of notes of visits arising from consultants' visits; and
- ensure notes of visit, including any agreed summary statements on schools' evaluation of performance, are distributed directly to chairs of governors as well as to headteachers.

In order to improve the support to schools in raising the attainment of pupils in and through ICT:

- carry out an audit of schools' needs for support to improve the quality of teaching and learning in ICT, including its use across the curriculum; and
- in consultation with schools, draw up and implement a plan to support ICT, giving priority to those schools with greatest needs.

In order to ensure schools are fulfilling their responsibilities with regard to Best Value:

- the LEA and contractor should agree clear processes for supporting this function.
- provide or broker appropriate training for headteachers and governors on Best Value.

In order to improve the service supporting property in schools:

- ensure that the role of property officers more effectively meets the needs of schools and introduce more effective monitoring of the support provided to schools.

In order to improve asset management planning:

- ensure the asset management steering group actively promotes the full participation of all partners; and
- implement a programme of training and provide guidance for schools on asset management planning, particularly suitability assessments.

In order to reduce the high level of appeals on admissions:

- improve the co-ordination of admissions procedures and provide better information to parents on the likely chances of their children obtaining places at each school.

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