

**Inspection report**  
**SOUTHEND-ON-SEA**  
**Local Education Authority**

Date of inspection: January 2003

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## **Basic information about the LEA**

Name of LEA:	Southend-on-Sea Local Education Authority
Address of LEA:	PO Box 6, Civic Centre Victoria Avenue Southend-on-Sea SS2 6ER
Lead inspector:	Angela Mukhopadhyay HMI
Date of inspection:	January 2003

## Introduction

1. This inspection of Southend-on-Sea 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'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 partly on documentary evidence, some of which was provided by the LEA, which included data, school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports, audit reports and a range of the LEA's documentation. The inspection also took into consideration discussions with elected members, officers of the local authority, representatives from LEA partners and focus groups of governors and headteachers. Use was also made of the LEA's self-evaluation. The inspection team considered the findings of the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission inspection of this LEA, published in September 2001. In addition, a questionnaire was circulated to schools seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA. The response rate was 93 per cent and the inspection team considered the findings.

3. For each inspected function of the LEA, an inspection team makes a judgement, which is converted, into a numerical grade. An inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made against criteria for each inspected function of the LEA. These criteria (and the guidance notes on functions of an LEA that may be inspected by Ofsted), can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report, along with short explanations of what each numeric grade represents. Judgements on inspected functions of an LEA are made during the inspection of the LEA and indicate the effectiveness of the LEA's performance of individual functions at the time of the inspection. The numeric grades awarded by the inspection team complement the areas of the report which comment on the individual functions scrutinised on this inspection, and, as such, must be considered in the light of those comments.

4. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be updated annually so the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next annual assessment.

5. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of several aspects of the local service, including pre-school and adult education. The CPA for education is composed of a number of inspection judgements, as well as other performance indicators, such as improvement trends at Key Stage 3. The assessment, published in December 2002, gives star ratings for each local authority for a range of local services, for example social services, benefits, environment etc, whereas this report focuses on the local authority's work to support school improvement.

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## Commentary

6. Southend-on-Sea borough council serves a community that is economically and socially diverse. The area is similar to the national socio-economic profile except that it does not include wards that are among the top ten per cent of the most or least disadvantaged nationally. Southend's traditional seaside focus remains important and it attracts about three million visitors annually. The proximity to London has encouraged many small businesses into the area and also people who live in the borough but work in London. The borough will benefit in future from the extensive regeneration proposals for Thames Gateway.

7. Standards in Southend schools are satisfactory. In the National Curriculum attainment tests at the end of each key stage, results are in line with those nationally and are also continuously improving. However, by the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is more mixed. Overall, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more passes in General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE) at grades A\*-C is higher than the national statistics. In some respects, this reflects the popularity of the four grammar schools that admit an additional 200 pupils annually who are successful in the selection tests and who live in a neighbouring authority. The percentages of pupils attaining five or more passes or at least one pass at grades A\*-G are lower than the national average and worryingly intractable. Ofsted inspections too, do not portray a consistent profile of improvement across all secondary schools.

8. The previous inspection of the LEA was conducted in 2001 when the new unitary authority had been in operation for three years. The findings showed the considerable variability in the effectiveness of the new organisation. It identified significant weaknesses in the areas of special educational needs (SEN) and social inclusion. Relationships with the secondary schools, most of which are foundation schools, were poor. Since then, the council has invested in a new senior management team and, with the appointment of a new director of education about one year ago, has made progress in every area of its work. The education department is now well organised with procedures and structures that ensure greater accountability, competent planning and newly developed systems of self-evaluation and performance management. There is a markedly better relationship with schools who recognise the LEA's greater willingness to enter into partnership through improved consultation and more transparent decision making.

9. The inspection has found that a good foundation has been laid for further development with a number of functions that are discharged very well.

There are particular strengths in:

- the LEA's strategy for school improvement;
  - the extent to which the LEA targets its resources;
  - the extent to which the LEA has in place strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value;
  - support for literacy;
  - asset management and property services;
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- grounds maintenance;
- the effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places;
- the speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision making;
- the leadership of senior officers;
- the advice which is given to elected members; and
- partnership with other agencies.

The following weaknesses remain:

- support for children of minority ethnic heritage;
- support for gifted and talented pupils;
- support for improving the behaviour and discipline in schools; and
- strategies to combat racism.

10. However, the improvements have not meant that all the problems have gone away entirely. While systems are in place, many are comparatively new and their implementation and impact have to be fully realised. Southend's secondary schools, in particular, are very diverse because of the differences in social and economic context and also the differences in the attainment and ability levels of the pupils. These differences, occurring within a very small number of schools, are stark. This makes developing a shared vision, agreeing relevant priorities and achieving consensus about the way forward, sometimes contentious and difficult to achieve.

11. This has most impact on provision for 14 -19 education, special educational needs and social inclusion, areas that are already proving very hard to solve nationally. Some initial steps have been taken toward the effective strategic co-ordination of all these issues. However, they will continue to pose the council significant challenges over the next few years especially in view of the weakness of the standards of lower attaining pupils at Key Stage 4. The findings of this inspection broadly accords with the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for education published in December 2002, although the CPA rates the capacity of the LEA to make improvements at the highest level. The effectiveness of the LEA is now highly satisfactory. The LEA has made highly satisfactory progress since the last inspection two years ago. On the basis of the acceleration in the rate of progress over the past year, the LEA has sufficient capacity to meet the future challenges.



## **Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement**

### **Context**

12. Southend-on-Sea became a unitary authority in 1998. Its socio-economic context is overall about average compared with that nationally. No ward is either in the top or the bottom ten per cent of the most advantaged or disadvantaged wards nationally. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister index of local deprivation 2000). In common with many seaside towns, Southend has higher levels of unemployment than the regional and national averages. Unemployment is particularly high in the three wards in the centre of the town. The council has given a high priority to regeneration and, in particular, to widening what was the narrow economy of a predominantly seaside town. There are approximately 5000 companies operating in the borough including nine major employers with over 500 employees each. Southend is part of the extensive regeneration proposals for the Thames Gateway.

13. The 2001 census shows that the population has fallen by 14,000 since the mid-term estimate in 1996 to 162,000. However, forecasts by the LEA's education department show a slight overall increase in the size of the pupil population in the foreseeable future. The percentage of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is marginally lower than that nationally. About 94 per cent of pupils are white and there is no other prominent ethnic group. Statements of special educational need are maintained for 2.6 per cent of pupils of compulsory school age. A comparatively low percentage is educated in mainstream primary or secondary schools. All three year-olds are offered a part-time nursery place and a high percentage of these are taken up. The percentage of pupils who stay on in full-time education post-16 is five per cent above the national average, but the percentage of students who progress to higher education is low compared with that nationally.

14. Southend has 59 schools. These include 42 infant, junior or junior and infant schools, 12 secondary schools and five special schools. The LEA has recently opened a pupil referral unit. Secondary education is largely selective with 700 selective school places available annually. This represents the highest percentage of selective places in an English education authority. About 200 of the selective places are allocated annually to pupils who live outside the authority. Four schools are grammar schools and four of the remainder have some element of selection by ability and a further two have an element of selection by aptitude. Ten of the twelve secondary schools have either foundation or voluntary aided status.

15. Primary and secondary schools are generally popular. The number of surplus places is low overall although two schools, both requiring special measures, have more than 25 per cent of surplus places. A high number of pupils, 16.7 per cent, who mostly attend the secondary schools in Southend, live outside the borough boundaries. An education action zone, comprising 16 schools, has been awarded an extension for two years until 2004, after which there are well-developed plans for it to become an excellence cluster.

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## Performance

16. Standards of attainment are satisfactory. At Key Stage 1, attainment in teacher assessments in English and science in 2002 are in line with and in mathematics better than, that nationally. Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2 are in line with those nationally and in similar authorities.<sup>1</sup> At Key Stage 3, the percentage of pupils attaining level 5 or above in mathematics tests is better than the national level although in line with similar authorities. In English and science, it is in line with that nationally and in similar authorities. The percentages of pupils attaining at least one and at least five passes at grades A\* - G at GCSE are below those nationally and in similar authorities. The percentage of pupils attaining five or more subjects at GCSE at grades A\* - C and the average points score are significantly higher than the national averages. Attainment in GCE advanced and advanced supplementary level examination is higher than that nationally and in similar authorities. Attainment in General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) is better than that nationally at intermediate level and is in line with that nationally at advanced level.

17. Attainment is improving and mostly faster than the national rates. Of concern, however, is the reduction in 2002 of the percentage of pupils attaining one or more and five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* - G.

18. The LEA's self-evaluation that has been conducted for this inspection records a concern about the variation in schools' performance. An analysis of the data indicates that the concern is well placed. Although the borough does not include wards which are in the top ten per cent of the most disadvantaged nationally, the pattern of admissions to secondary schools results in the under-attainment which is often associated with poverty, unemployment and family circumstances being intensely concentrated in very few secondary schools. The value added by secondary schools between Key Stage 3 and 4 is comparatively low and for individual schools shows a mixed picture.

19. The findings of Ofsted section 10 school inspections show a complex picture. In the last inspection, standards of attainment in a lower percentage of primary schools were very good or good. However, the percentages of schools that were good and very good for quality of education, management and efficiency and schools' climate reflected the national profile. With the exception of schools' climate, the changes between the schools' first and second inspections show an improving picture. While the small number of secondary schools can make percentage figures unreliable, the indications are of a weakening picture. With the exception of schools' climate, secondary school inspections show a higher percentage of schools requiring much improvement than schools nationally. Comparisons between the schools' first and second inspections do not show an improving picture.

20. Attendance in primary and secondary schools is marginally below with national averages and the overall trend over the last four years does not show improvement. In 2001, the rate of permanent exclusions was in line with the national statistics in both primary and secondary schools. Permanent exclusions have reduced in number in primary schools, but

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<sup>1</sup>The LEA's similar authorities are Bury, Bexley, Enfield, Trafford, Bournemouth, Sutton, Stockport, Solihull, Sefton and Brighton and Hove.

increased in secondary schools. The number of fixed-term exclusions in secondary schools has increased by two and a half times in the last year. The majority of exclusions take place in schools that have been identified as causing concern either by Ofsted or the LEA.

21. The percentages of schools, which have been identified as requiring special measures since 1993 or having serious weaknesses since 1995, are roughly in line with national average percentages. Currently, two schools require special measures. One of these schools has made only limited progress and has required special measures for nearly four years. Four schools have achieved Beacon status.

### **Funding**

22. Southend's total education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per pupil for 2002-2003 (£3,250) is about four per cent above the average for similar authorities (£3,115) and unitary authorities (£3,120), but broadly in line with the average for England (£3,273). During its first four years as a unitary authority the council increased its spending on education from below, to a little above, SSA. It has since fallen back slightly and is currently spending at SSA. The introduction of the new funding arrangements from April 2003 gives Southend a formula-spending share below the average for unitary authorities.

Financial Year	SSA for education (£m)	Planned expenditure on education (£m)	Planned expenditure as % of SSA
1998/1999	65.2	64.2	98.4%
1999/2000	68.9	68.2	99.0%
2000/2001	73.4	73.6	100.3%
2001/2002	78.4	79.2	101.1%
2002/2003	85.1	85.1	100.0%

*Source: LEA Form 2 return for the inspection*

23. The local schools budget (LSB) per primary pupil in 2002-2003 is below the average nationally and for similar LEAs. Planned expenditure for each secondary pupil is above the average for comparable LEAs, but below the national average. The local schools budget per special school pupil is low but, given the high percentage of pupils with statements who are educated in special schools, in line with needs.

	Southend LEA (£ per pupil)	Similar authorities (£ per pupil)	Unitary authorities (£ per pupil)	England (£ per pupil)
Primary LSB	2,682	2,759	2,830	2,929
Secondary LSB	3,615	3,502	3,606	3,768
Special LSB	18,048	24,558	20,026	23,141

Source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002/03

24. The high level of delegation and relatively low spending on centrally provided services noted at the time of the previous inspection continues. Expenditure for each pupil on all four of the main areas of the LEA's activity are below the average nationally and for similar authorities.

	[LEA] £ per pupil	Statistical neighbours £ per pupil	Unitary authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Strategic management	69	90	93	101
School improvement	23	29	26	31
Access	102	112	124	131
SEN	153	193	151	160
Total	347	424	394	423

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data.

25. In 2002-2003 Southend delegated 89.6 per cent of the local schools budget, and was the third highest delegating authority in England (English average is 87.3 per cent). This results in above average funding per pupil delegated to primary and secondary schools, although the individual schools budget per pupil in special schools is a little below similar authorities.

26. Southend receives average amounts per pupil from the Standards Fund. It has also been active and successful in securing additional funding from a range of other sources. The European Social Fund, the Single Regeneration Budget, the New Opportunities Fund and the education action zone continue to support a variety of projects with a particular focus on social inclusion in the schools and communities in the disadvantaged wards in the centre of the town. The LEA takes an innovative and strategic approach to future bidding for external funds. Schools and other learning providers join a consortium for co-ordinating bids for grants that, if successful, will be shared amongst participating establishments.

27. Capital spending on schools has increased each year since the authority was created and has nearly doubled since the previous inspection. This includes borrowing approvals for new secondary places from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and grants from the New Opportunities Fund, in particular, over £1 million each for sports facilities and for refurbishment work at aided schools in 2002-2003.

### **Council structure**

28. Southend-on-Sea borough council gained unitary council status in April 1998. The council has 51 councillors of which the majority, 33 members, are from the Conservative Party. The council introduced a leader and cabinet system in 1999 and this was fully implemented in 2001. The cabinet comprises ten executive councillors with portfolios representing services and issues. There are three scrutiny committees for social, environmental and economic scrutiny. The social scrutiny committee has 14 members of the council and seven co-opted members including diocesan and parent governor representatives. It meets monthly and covers health and social care, education and lifelong learning, and housing. It is also responsible for the new health scrutiny function.

29. Since the last inspection, the council has undertaken a major restructuring of its departments. This came into place in October 2001. The new structure includes a chief executive and directorates of education and lifelong learning, leisure, culture and amenity services, social care and housing, and technical and environmental services.

30. The newly appointed director of education reviewed and restructured the education and lifelong learning directorate in December 2001. Three new posts of assistant directors for access, planning and resourcing; learning achievement and school effectiveness; and inclusion, special educational needs and entitlement were appointed. The postholder for the latter took up his post as recently as September 2002. The director and three assistant directors form the senior management team. The director of the education action zone is also a member of the senior management team. This is one example of many, which demonstrates how the education action zone is effectively used to extend the capacity of this small LEA.

### **The LEA's strategy for school improvement**

31. The previous inspection considered the LEA's first Education Development Plan (EDP) and its implementation. That EDP was a good document that was well founded on a comprehensive audit. The progress report at the end of the first year was thorough. Its findings led to an appropriate reduction of activity.

32. Since that inspection a second EDP has been drafted which is also a good plan. It represents a robust and well-thought-through strategy based on a detailed and realistic audit. It sets out a very comprehensive and challenging programme for improvement. The priorities are relevant, clear and reflect local as well as national priorities. In addition, the education action zone action plan complements the programme well. The school improvement programme is good, activities are described in detail and links between priorities, actions and success criteria are of a consistently high standard. A particular strength is the way the plan is set out to facilitate ongoing evaluation.

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33. In response to a weakness identified at the time of the last inspection, the LEA has made support for disadvantaged groups much more explicit as a separate priority and by identifying where it is woven into other priorities. Mapping other cross-cutting themes such as leadership and management and school self-evaluation is good. Consultation with schools has been effective. Priorities and actions have been adapted appropriately in response to schools' views. However, while the priority to improve attainment at Key Stage 4 was extended to 14-19, it does not take sufficient account of other providers and the neighbouring LEA.

34. The strength of the plan is that it presents a comprehensive and detailed statement of the action that the LEA plans over the next five years. However, this has resulted in a plan that is compendious and sometimes repetitious. It is not easy for schools and partners to use. There is no index for ease of reference and no introductory summary setting out the vision or articulating the rationale that underpins the key priorities. If included, these could strengthen for schools the clear sense of direction.

35. The LEA has made sound progress with the implementation of its EDP and most of the scheduled activities have been completed to time. The very meticulous way the EDP is used to determine the work programme for the learning achievement and school effectiveness division is a strength. The work of the education action zone has contributed positively overall and particularly to the progress in the areas of information and communication technology (ICT) and assessment for learning.

36. Good progress has been made toward meeting targets at Key Stages 3 and 4. The targets set are challenging at Key Stage 3 and realistic at Key Stage 4. However, the target for the percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more passes at grades A\*-G is low. At Key Stage 2, standards in English and mathematics are improving every year, although the rate of improvement falls short of the challenging targets. The EDP does not make explicit the link between the planned activities and the achievement of the target. Nevertheless, in literacy and numeracy, sensible steps are being taken to accelerate improvement and to target schools where improvements do not meet the expectation.

37. Progress in implementing the EDP is maintained or accelerated through a rigorous monitoring and evaluation, which is supported by good electronic systems. Rescheduling is logical and pragmatic. Schools, especially primary schools, are satisfied with the progress that has been made.

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

38. The allocation of resources to priorities was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and is now good. The council continues to back its stated commitment to education by spending at SSA in 2002-2003. It also plans to allocate its formula-spending share for education in 2003-2004 fully for education.

39. The council is prudent and has the ability to meet its financial targets. It has taken appropriate steps to tackle the issues raised at the time of the previous inspection such as social inclusion. It has deployed additional resources to open the new pupil referral unit and

created new posts to monitor SEN provision and expenditure and providing support to raise the attainment of children who are looked after by the local authority.

40. Potential budget difficulties are identified early and firm corrective action taken. Planned expenditure on central administration is low when compared with national and similar authority averages and well within the target figure of £60 per pupil set by the Secretary of State. The requirements for transferring SSA increases to schools have been met.

41. The very high level of delegation contributes to school autonomy and headteachers and governors rightly value this. Consultation on the education budget is good and the educational rationale behind the funding formula is clear. The new schools' forum has been constituted and is already undertaking good detailed work on possible formula changes for 2003-2004 and the implications for the new funding blocks for schools and the LEA.

42. The LEA has responded adequately to the criticism in the previous inspection that the funding formula, although simple and well understood by schools, was not sufficiently targeted at educational need. The proportion of the total allocation based on pupil numbers was significantly reduced from 92 to 84 per cent. A careful analysis by the LEA shows that the needs-driven elements of the formula are now comparable with its similar authorities. A more fundamental review of funding for SEN, social deprivation and pupil mobility is planned for 2004-2005. This is an appropriate timescale given the uncertain impact of the new funding arrangements.

43. The LEA has taken action to address the criticism of the previous inspection that it was slow to challenge schools with large budget surpluses. School finances are now appropriately monitored through quarterly reports and advisers are kept informed. Total balances fell slightly in 2001-2002, but two thirds of primary schools continue to have surpluses in excess of five per cent.

### **Structures for achieving Best Value**

44. The previous inspection identified a combination of strengths and weaknesses in the council's arrangements for Best Value. Improvements have been made and the corporate approach, combined with education department procedures, result in good structures to ensure continuous improvement.

45. The council's approach to implementing the requirements of Best Value are sound. The Best Value Performance Plan continues to be clear and well presented and has received an unqualified opinion each year from the external auditor. Both the external auditor and inspection report for the corporate assessment (2002) regard the Best Value process as a positive agent for change. Recommendations made at the time of the previous inspection to broaden the scope of reviews and to focus action plans more clearly on measurable outcomes have been addressed. The Best Value toolkit provides a clear framework.

46. The involvement of elected members in performance monitoring has been strengthened. A cross-party working group now receives a quarterly 'Southend Health Check' report highlighting achievements and current challenges as well as progress against a range of national and local performance indicators. The work of the social care scrutiny

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committee is effective in scrutinising the decisions of the cabinet and discussing the findings of the relevant Best Value reviews and inspection reports.

47. A good process of comprehensive and regular self-review has been initiated within the education department, which complements the regular monitoring of performance indicators and the selection of particular themes for Best Value reviews. This is a two-part process that also takes into consideration the views of schools. The findings of the process are validated by a group of external partners.

48. The details of the self-evaluation that were provided for this inspection show that the strengths and weaknesses in the work are accurately identified. These have provided a suitable basis for identifying and tackling weaknesses and under-performance in services has been tackled in a determined and effective way. However, some evaluations, understandably in view of the newness of the initiatives, have focused more on the completion of activities rather than on ascertaining their impact.



## **Section 2: Support for school improvement**

### **Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement**

49. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has made improvements that have ensured greater consistency in the quality and effectiveness of support. All aspects of support apart from that for children of minority ethnic heritage and the gifted and talented are now at least satisfactory and some services such as literacy, the provision of data, property and ground maintenance, are good. These developments are complemented and extended by the work undertaken in the education action zone.

50. Within the limits of the LEA's stated policy to delegate maximum possible funding to schools, this small LEA has also enhanced the expertise that is available by creating some innovative new posts to lead key developments. Monitoring and support is based on a firm foundation of better relationships with schools and a clear rationale, shared with schools, that services are deployed in relation to schools' needs. Some systems and initiatives are still very new.

### **The effectiveness of services to support school improvement**

51. At the time of the previous inspection the management and effectiveness of services to support school improvement was satisfactory. There have since been improvements, especially in clarifying the accountability of officers and advisers for aspects of the work. The capacity of these better organised services has been enhanced by introducing some carefully considered additional posts, which have increased expertise and stimulated much needed developments in key areas. The overall management of services supporting school improvement is highly satisfactory.

52. The department's senior management team provides good leadership and has a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of their staff. Their ambition is to create high quality, skilled and effective teams. The deployment of staff in terms of their expertise and the match to schools' needs and priorities has improved and is clear and sensible. An electronic diary and monitoring system is used to log visits, but this is not used to its full potential. Expertise has been extended, albeit in a limited way, by the use of some consultants. Some of the new appointments have strengthened the third tier of management. There are still one or two weaknesses in effective operational management. Nevertheless there is evidence that under-performance has been tackled promptly.

53. Service planning is highly satisfactory. Schools understand the broad vision and direction. There is coherence between the plans, although, while the extensive detail is helpful to the services, it can sometimes inhibit schools from understanding the scope and direction of the individual initiatives. The procedures for evaluating progress are regular, honest and properly self-critical. A strength is the way that plans are amended or realigned as a result of the evaluations undertaken to improve their impact.

54. Arrangements for performance management are good and are particularly well embedded in the learning achievement and school effectiveness division. In this division,

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induction is thorough and professional development is well targeted and appropriate. Regular one-to-one meetings, in addition to the half-termly reviews, allow work patterns to be scrutinised, overload avoided and the quality and impact of work undertaken to be carefully evaluated. Work is strictly linked to priorities in the EDP and individual targets contribute to the overall service ones. Through this system, a few weaknesses in expertise have been identified and addressed in a timely way.

55. In a small and high delegating authority, services are lean and the schools entitlement to receive support is clearly differentiated according to identified schools' needs. Although the respective responsibilities of the LEA and schools are much clearer than at the time of the previous inspection and some broad service specifications have been circulated to schools, the LEA is rightly continuing to work on this with schools. Developments are being made clearer with more detailed service level agreements and extension of the brokerage arrangements. Overall the services for school improvement provide very satisfactory value for money.

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

56. The previous inspection found that the functions of monitoring, challenge and intervention were not sufficiently defined and the approach taken to the monitoring of schools was insufficiently differentiated, took too little account of school self-evaluation and did not ideally support the LEA's stated desire to promote school autonomy.

57. Since then, the LEA has made progress with its work on establishing definitions for monitoring, challenge and intervention and these are now satisfactory. Relationships with the schools are sound and provide a credible foundation for the LEA's work. Schools accept and understand the LEA's role in monitoring, challenging and intervening in under-performance.

58. Schools have had considerable involvement in the process of agreeing a set of detailed criteria that will determine the level and extent of the support provided by the LEA. The criteria for allocating support are complex and note is taken of the school's own evaluation and a varied range of other data. Insufficient use is made of the examination results of post-16 students. The criteria are still evolving in consultation with schools. In response to concerns raised by schools, the LEA made some changes to the original proposals. These criteria have been trialled once and formed the basis of the advisers' visits in the autumn term (2002). Following these visits, headteachers were much more convinced about the value of the process.

59. Monitoring and challenge are deployed in a highly satisfactory way and are focused on areas of greatest need. The LEA has identified four support categories. Advisers and headteachers discuss the school performance on the basis of the performance data and self-evaluation and, as a result, agree the most appropriate level and reasons for future support. These are then confirmed through central moderation by the education department's senior management team. A few schools changed category as a result of this. Schools had not always understood that as a result of the moderation process, a school could change the category. Other LEA services such as the education welfare service and the educational psychology service are allocated on the basis of appropriate formulae. A very useful

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electronic database tracks the number of visits made to schools. However, it is not used routinely to monitor the level of support that the school receives.

60. Headteachers indicate that, on the whole, the levels of support offered by the LEA have been appropriate. Nevertheless headteachers, particularly for schools in disadvantaged areas, while recognising that they do require additional support, still need to be convinced that there will be no stigma attached to being placed in a particular category.

#### *Recommendations*

##### **In order to improve the way in which support is allocated to schools:**

- finalise the detail of the criteria and procedures for categorising schools, including the way in which schools use evidence of self-evaluation;
- clarify the procedures for the central moderation of support categories; and
- ensure that schools understand that the purpose of the categorisation is positive.

##### **The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools**

61. This is highly satisfactory. The LEA monitors the work of its schools thoroughly and provides them with a good level of challenge. Primary headteachers, in particular, confirm that advisers have a good knowledge of the schools, regard the majority of their attached advisers expert and their visits useful. Until recently, however, secondary headteachers have been less positive. The school recently identified by Ofsted as having an inadequate sixth form, but not previously recognised by the LEA, demonstrates that sixth form provision was not routinely considered in the attached adviser visits. A secondary adviser has recently been appointed and schools have found subsequent visits more useful and challenging. Headteachers note that there is appropriate preparation for the visits.

62. Notes are made of all advisers' visits. These are mostly helpful and clear, although there is still some variation in the format and quality of reports. There has been some confusion about how far governors are involved in the attached adviser visits or whether they routinely receive the reports. Not all chairs of governors receive the reports on their school.

#### *Recommendations*

##### **In order to improve the effectiveness of monitoring and challenging schools:**

- ensure that governing bodies receive and consider the findings of the attached advisers' monitoring visits; and
- ensure that the procedures and agenda for attached advisers' visits to secondary schools include consideration of the effectiveness of the provision for post-16 students.

63. As at the time of the previous inspection, the LEA provides a good and increasingly comprehensive range of performance data that is effectively used to target support.

### **The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools**

64. At the time of the previous inspection, this function was discharged satisfactorily. The quality of support for schools causing concern was good, but there were weaknesses, mostly because the categories and triggers for intervention were not transparent.

65. The effectiveness of the LEA's work remains satisfactory. Overall, the number of schools in categories causing concern is small and is not increasing. The LEA has, with only one exception, been well aware of weaknesses before they emerged in an inspection. The one recent exception has been the identification by Ofsted of a school that was effective in all other respects but had an inadequate sixth form.

66. Weaknesses in procedures and triggers for intervention have been tackled. In the majority of schools, difficulties are tackled promptly and incisively. The inadequate sixth form was well supported, made speedy progress and was removed from the category by Ofsted within a year. Two schools remain a problem. One junior school was found to require special measures in 2001 when it had already been identified as having serious weaknesses and the other, a secondary school, has required special measures for an unacceptably long period of nearly four years.

67. Recently, the authority's approach has been much more determined and robust. In the case of the primary school, there are very positive signs of improvement. The current acting headteacher has benefited from excellent work by the attached adviser in developing management skills and outstanding support for ICT. This has generated confidence and optimism and the school is in a good position to make the progress necessary to come out of special measures before its amalgamation with the neighbouring infant school in the Autumn 2003.

68. The secondary school remains of serious concern and is in need of urgent improvement. The recent HMI monitoring visit found that it is making limited progress. The LEA has acted appropriately and provided the school with significant and extensive support. It has contracted external consultants to work with the school. The LEA has used its powers to appoint additional LEA governors and has provided these governors with additional support. The case is complex and there has been some slippage in taking appropriate action that has been outside the LEA's control. At the time of the last monitoring visit, the LEA was more explicit about the difficulties that the school faces and is now rightly pressing for greater urgency in bringing about the necessary improvements. Recent intervention has been better received in the school and reflects greater incisiveness on the part of the new attached adviser, the Key Stage 3 consultant and external consultants.

69. The LEA keeps governors well informed of the progress being made. The council's social scrutiny committee appropriately considers monthly reports on progress of the two schools requiring special measures.

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**Recommendations****In order to improve the support to schools causing concern:**

- ensure that the secondary school that requires special measures is given clear deadlines in which it must show improvement; and
- draw up contingency plans to improve the education of the children who attend the secondary school requiring special measures, which can be implemented with some urgency should the school not make acceptable progress.

**Support for literacy**

70. During the previous inspection support for literacy was good with some very good features. No additional fieldwork took place for this inspection. The LEA's self-evaluation, supported by the views of the schools surveyed and standards, which have risen in line with similar authorities and that nationally, shows that the support remains good. The LEA has improved its data collection and analysis and provided better pupil level data and challenge to schools.

**Support for numeracy**

71. At the time of the previous inspection, support for numeracy was highly satisfactory and improving with some good features. No fieldwork was carried out for this inspection. The support remains highly satisfactory. The management structure has improved the co-ordination of the work of attached advisers and numeracy consultants. The improved use of attainment data supports the LEA and schools in tightening up target setting.

**Support for information and communication technology**

72. At the time of the previous inspection, support for information and communication technology in the curriculum was unsatisfactory and there was too little effective strategic leadership. Support is now highly satisfactory and shows some strengths. The LEA has made good progress and has addressed the criticisms in the previous inspection report.

73. Pupils' attainment in information and communication technology (ICT) has improved overall. Attainment in Key Stages 1, 3 and 4 is sound or better, but weaker at Key Stage 2. In 2002, 65 per cent of pupils in Key Stage 3 achieved Level 5+ in the Standard Assessment Tests, which placed Southend in the upper quartile and on target to reach the target of 72 per cent in 2004.

74. Southend has a sound ICT strategy, which, although very new, sensibly encompasses curriculum management and administrative development. It was discussed with representatives from schools through a strategy management group. The strategy document has been refined and submitted to cabinet and it is currently being circulated to schools. Recently, the LEA has suffered from the lack of a suitably qualified Key Stage 3 strategy consultant so the ICT adviser has had to cover both roles and, as a consequence, his expertise

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is spread thinly. However, the LEA's capacity to provide strategic co-ordination and management of the strategy for the curriculum use of ICT, sensibly has been strengthened. The director of the education action zone has now assumed overall responsibility.

75. The education action zone has had an influential and positive role in developing ICT in all the authority schools. Initiatives are trialled and evaluated in schools in the zone and then disseminated to other schools. Schools in the zone have piloted the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority units and developed an appropriate assessment and moderation process to determine the level of support that pupils will need in Year 7. Primary, secondary and education action zone network meetings are now established and there is growing evidence of collaboration between schools.

76. The LEA has made good use of the National Grid for Learning. It has successfully met all the national targets for broadband connectivity and is on line to have all its schools connected by April 2003, before the national target date of August. The number of pupils in relation to the number of computers is slightly better than the national average and an increasing proportion of teachers are now provided with laptops, initially through the education action zone. New Opportunities Fund training is now complete. The LEA is sensibly reviewing the impact of the training to ensure that any variability and weaknesses are addressed and are built into the future programme for teachers.

### **Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3**

77. Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Even when the issues of selection are taken into account, standards of attainment and rates of progress between schools and between subjects remain too variable. Initially, the strategy for raising standards at Key Stage 3 received a mixed response from secondary schools. However, headteachers and subject leaders are now involved in developing a partnership approach based on rigorous self-review and detailed data analysis, although some schools continue to have some concerns about the overall management and co-ordination. The strategy is insufficiently embedded across all subjects, but the areas for development have been clearly identified and appropriate plans for further improvement are in place.

78. Support provided to schools is differentiated appropriately. Consultants are beginning to make an impact, although there is some variability in their work. There are particular strengths in literacy. Poor practice in some other strands has been identified and suitable action taken. Detailed data analysis has helped identify issues of pupil performance and rates of progress, although insufficient importance has been given to the progress of lower attaining pupils in mainstream schools. However, the needs of minority ethnic pupils and looked after children are now properly considered. The LEA is supporting arrangements for Year 7 teachers to observe lessons of children in Year 5 and 6 to develop a useful cross-phase perspective on teaching and learning.

79. Concerns about the amount of time teachers are required to attend training in school time and the lack of sufficient advanced information are being tackled. Details of core training are published in advance of the academic year. The programme and timing of optional additional training are agreed with managers in schools, but not always communicated appropriately to headteachers.

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80. Implementation of the Key Stage 3 strategy has not yet had a positive impact on improving attendance or reducing levels of fixed-term exclusion. While schools are increasingly confident about the quality of support they receive, the overall co-ordination and information on the development of the strategy is still not entirely clear to some schools.

*Recommendation*

**In order to improve LEA support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3:**

- strengthen the management of the strategy to improve coherence and consistency across the different strands and to improve communication with headteachers.

**Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers**

81. LEA support for minority ethnic pupils' achievement was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, although support for Traveller education was found to be satisfactory. The LEA has responded to the recommendations about clarifying strategic responsibility, establishing robust systems to setting targets and monitor progress and targeting the authority's grant funding to support schools to raise aspirations, expectations and achievement. However, many of the actions have been taken very recently so that, combined with staffing difficulties, insufficient progress has been made and provision remains unsatisfactory.

82. Results at the end of key stages and in GCSE were analysed by ethnicity for the first time in 2002 and illustrated significant variation in the progress and outcomes of different minority ethnic groups. The data, however, especially on the attendance and the incidence of special educational needs at school action or school action plus of children of minority ethnic heritage and the under-attainment of minority ethnic groups with small numbers of children are not sufficiently used to plan improvements.

83. The ethnic minority achievement service was restructured and realigned to sit within the learning achievement and school effectiveness division of the LEA in July 2002. Funding for an additional post was identified. Capacity for further improvement has been adversely affected by difficulties recruiting an appropriate postholder. Some interim cover was provided. However, the post remains unfilled. After this period of uncertainty, the LEA has now taken the positive decision to improve the prospects of recruitment by enhancing the post to that of senior adviser for equality and diversity from April 2003.

84. Sound advice on raising minority ethnic achievement and the attainment of children with English as an additional language was issued to schools in October 2002. The school self-review process now incorporates analysis of the progress of minority ethnic pupils and LEA attached advisers will routinely focus on their needs.

85. The EDP appropriately prioritises the needs of vulnerable pupils. Significant additional funding has been allocated, to enhance the DfES Ethnic Achievement Grant and a range of training made available, for example for teaching assistants and those working in early years' settings. Limited progress has been made on brokering services for schools to purchase from devolved budgets. Insufficient account of the needs of pupils in schools where

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there may be the only one or two pupils of minority ethnic heritage who require support. An advisory teacher works with up to twelve schools at any one time, focusing on new arrivals. While the support is effective, it may not always be sufficient to cover all children who need support.

86. The LEA's service for Travellers is provided through a service level agreement with Essex. While schools are positive, the agreement lacks specificity and annual information provided to the LEA on work undertaken is insufficient to monitor quality or to ensure value for money.

### *Recommendations*

**In order to improve the LEA's support to schools in raising standards of minority ethnic and Traveller children:**

- ensure that improved data available from schools from January 2003 is used to more accurately identify, monitor and effectively target underachievement;
- engage headteachers in discussions to further strengthen support to meet the needs of isolated pupils; and
- re-negotiate the agreement with the Essex consortium to ensure that the services provided are properly defined and that the details of the services and the outcomes of the support are regularly reported.

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

87. Support to schools for pupils who are gifted and talented is developing rapidly, but current provision is unsatisfactory. The LEA's draft policy and guidelines are currently under consultation. These have significantly improved the previous policy and provide a sound framework from which to move forward. Despite increased activity in this field, there has been insufficient attention to the needs of talented pupils. The strategic co-ordination of initiatives is unsatisfactory. Twenty five per cent of the excellence cluster funding due to come on stream in 2004 has been identified to promote support for gifted and talented pupils. The capacity for improvement is good.

88. The percentages of pupils gaining higher levels in Key Stages 1-3 and of pupils achieving five A\*-C grades have risen over the last four years. However, worryingly, the percentage of A\* or A grades at GCSE fell significantly across all subjects, and by over 25 per cent in English, mathematics and science last year. Ofsted school inspections have identified issues around challenge for more able children either generally or in a specific subject in 16 per cent of schools. Schools where Ofsted inspection has identified weaknesses have received support. The LEA makes good use of pupil level data for target setting and tracking individuals' progress.

89. Until recently, the capacity, which exists in schools to support developments, was not utilised well. However, a new network of school coordinators for the gifted and talented is working with LEA officers to map provision across the borough and produce a directory of providers and costs. This will include support available from specialist and Beacon schools

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and advanced skills teachers, and is intended to significantly improve schools' opportunities to purchase services.

90. Five schools are participating in action research projects through Oxford Brookes University. They, and other headteachers undertaking best practice research projects, have disseminated lessons learned to the wider group of headteachers. Schools in the education action zone are forming links with higher education institutions to increase the number of pupils who move on from school to university. There is emerging good practice in partnership work between schools.

91. A range of summer schools has been run each year. Evaluations from pupils and parents show these to have been valued. However, the impact of these courses has not been followed up to establish whether they have led to improvements in motivation or attainment. A conference that is being planned for July 2003 will formally launch the new policy and guidelines and will also feedback on summer school successes.

92. Provision for talented pupils remains under developed. The improvement in the number of children receiving music tuition, which has doubled since 1999, is positive. An artist in residence is working with three primary schools and six schools have shown interest in applying for the 'Artsmark' accreditation. Four schools have already successfully completed the "Artsmark" and three schools the "Sportsmark" accreditation. Apart from this, activities in sport, drama and the arts are limited and often the result of individual schools' initiatives rather than a co-ordinated strategy. There has been little provided to benefit talented children in special schools.

**In order to improve support for gifted and talented pupils the LEA should:**

- ensure that a high priority is given to developing and co-ordinating provision for talented pupils by setting specific, challenging targets to increase the range and uptake of activities for those in special schools.

**Support for school management**

93. At the time of the previous inspection, the support for improving school management was unsatisfactory. The support lacked coherence and weaknesses in the partnerships with some secondary schools undermined the LEA's ability to support school management. The LEA has responded appropriately to these findings from the previous inspection.

94. The LEA's support for school leadership and management is now highly satisfactory. The current EDP weaves aspects of leadership and management development through all its priorities and these are clearly mapped. The senior management team has built a sound relationship with schools and has demonstrated the intention to work in partnership with schools and yet to respect schools' autonomy. As a result of a good strategic decision, a new adviser for leadership and management has been appointed. This action reflects the priority within the EDP and also schools' needs. It has enhanced the LEA's capacity to undertake new initiatives and for greater strategic co-ordination. The post is innovative as it combines with the support for governors.

95. Particular strengths in the current support for school management include the provision of very good data on school performance, good advice about schemes for school self-evaluation and the availability of training on leadership and management for all levels of staff. Increasingly the LEA has taken a positive brokering role.

96. Attached advisers accurately assess individual schools' needs. Some headteachers have benefited from coaching, which has been offered to develop particular management skills. The induction of new headteachers is also good. They are allocated a mentor, but also find that the senior officers are approachable and supportive. The director of education meets all heads that are new in post, whether experienced or new to the role. This has helped to cement the more positive relationships between schools and the LEA.

### **Support for governors**

97. Support to governors was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection and has remained so. Therefore, no fieldwork took place to inspect this aspect. The responses to the school survey confirm that schools regard the support as satisfactory. However, secondary schools tend to be more critical than primary schools. The appointment of the new leadership and management adviser, with a brief for support to governors, is already having a discernible effect. In a short space of time, he has improved the quality of support and training. Any vacancies are filled quickly and the LEA has used its formal powers to place experienced governors in schools where there are concerns. Procedures whereby governors routinely receive the written reports of attached advisers following their monitoring visits are still not sufficiently clear.

### **The effectiveness of services to support school management**

98. As at the time of the previous inspection, the quality and value for money of individual management support services is at least satisfactory and often good. However, because the services are not presented in a comprehensive way, the effectiveness of services to support school management is only satisfactory. In response to the previous report's recommendations, schools are given clearer details of LEA support services through an improved directory of services. This helpfully includes centrally funded services such as education welfare and behaviour support, as well as traded services, which schools can purchase from their delegated funds. However, the development of fully costed service level agreements in a standard format and with a single order form has taken too long. The LEA's self-evaluation provides a clear analysis of the present arrangements.

99. Schools continue to use a wide range of providers with none of the in-house services purchased by more than 80 per cent of schools. Satisfactory client support is available through an independent procurement service based in a neighbouring authority. The procurement company plans to launch a catalogue of the wide range of services that are available locally. The LEA has informal but effective links with the procurement company. The LEA recognises its limited capacity and has rightly decided against offering a full range of services or heavily marketing existing services to foundation schools. The LEA could do more to help schools share information that could help to identify the best providers.

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100. The provision of both **financial and personnel support** were previously assessed as satisfactory. No detailed fieldwork was done in these areas. The LEA's evaluation indicates that these services are still satisfactory. Although the school survey shows an improvement since the last inspection, there is no room for complacency as schools rate both as satisfactory, which is only average when compared with the other LEAs surveyed.

101. **Property services** were effective at the time of the previous inspection. Despite some deterioration during a period of staff changes, which is reflected in some adverse comments in the school survey, the service has recovered from this and is now providing a good service. The bought-back service has a clear specification that provides regular visits from surveyors who know their schools and have access to approved contractors. The service is well integrated with asset management and school improvement processes. Surveyors have been proactive in developing schemes funded jointly by the LEA and schools. Relationships with foundation schools and external providers are good. They are included in discussions, and provided with advice, when it is appropriate and in the authority's interests.

102. Support for **ICT in school administration** is highly satisfactory. Strengths in the LEA's infra-structure outweigh the continuing weakness identified in the previous inspection in the technical support, which most schools purchase from an outside provider. The recommendation in the previous report to establish a corporate ICT policy and strategy has been implemented, albeit only recently. An ICT strategy for the education department has also been approved recently, although this has not held up developments on the ground. The LEA's self-evaluation correctly identifies areas for further development and there are realistic plans for addressing them.

103. All LEA statistical returns are collected electronically and good progress has been made in linking the department's systems to the central pupil database. Electronic communication with schools has become routine. An accessible document posting site has reduced substantially the amount of paperwork sent to schools. Much of the improvement since the last inspection is attributable to good teamwork between the education information and systems team, the ICT adviser and staff in the corporate ICT section. However, the council's website provides too little information for the public on education services.

104. Funding for ICT technical support was delegated to schools prior to unitary status. The majority of schools purchase support directly from an external provider whose response times, although improving, still fail to match expectations. Although the LEA is not party to the schools' contracts, it has helpful regular meetings with the provider to broker improvements and ensure co-ordination between the LEA's and schools' responsibilities.

105. Facilities services were not previously inspected. A higher than usual proportion of schools buy into the council-wide **grounds maintenance service**, which offers good value through economies of scale and a flexible, tightly monitored specification. The manager recognises that the service has a broader role in school improvement, for example through environment-related activities.

106. Community primary schools are part of a highly satisfactory group contract for **catering services**. Headteachers were fully involved in the tendering process. The contract with a private provider is efficiently managed by the independent procurement service that works well in partnership with both schools and the LEA.

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**The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers**

107. Strategies for the recruitment, retention and development of staff are highly satisfactory, with sound progress on all three fronts. This work has been included as a local priority in the EDP, in response to consultation with schools. The LEA's existing strategy group, made up of school representatives and officers, is formally linked to the council's recruitment and retention working party. A recruitment strategy manager and part-time assistant funded through the Teacher Training Agency are sensibly placed within the education personnel team. This structure provides coherence to the activities.

108. The overall level of vacancies in Southend was just over two per cent in 2002. This was above the total nationally and for the East of England, but below London's total. The actual number of vacancies is not high. The strategy team is building a sound bank of data. It throws light on current patterns of vacancies and is beginning to build up a longer-term view, tracking termly trends in order to predict future needs. It has only made a very initial start at providing information on the ethnic make-up of staff or the recruitment of newly qualified teachers.

109. A satisfactory range of positive and sometimes imaginative recruitment strategies is being developed. These include encouraging newly qualified teachers and returners, attending recruitment fairs, recruiting overseas teachers and linking with the education action zone on the teacher associate scheme and the undergraduate credit scheme. The materials produced for newly qualified teachers and teachers new to Southend are good. Although a start has been made, there is more to do on marketing the advantages of teaching in Southend-on-Sea, developing recruitment packages and housing schemes, increasing the number of graduates and improving the Internet site for schools to advertise vacant posts.

110. The link with the strategy manager from Essex LEA is constructive and joint work done to establish a list of supply teachers is developing well. Active consideration is being given to offering flexible working arrangements. The collaboration with the school improvement team on teacher retention and training is a strength. The programme for the professional development of teaching staff at all levels is comprehensive.

111. The LEA has established a sound basis for the future. In its self-evaluation, the LEA recognises the need to bring together all the various positive activities into a coherent strategy that is adopted by members and to measure the impact of each activity to establish Best Value.

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## Section 3: Special educational needs

### Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision

112. Provision for children with special educational needs was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. The provision is now satisfactory. The LEA has set out its vision and strategy in a new draft document that has been circulated for consultation. Some aspects lack detail, most specifically in terms of the future size and role of special schools. Nevertheless, it sets out clear and coherent stages for improving the quality of provision for lower attaining pupils. Confident new leadership, speedier response to concerns raised in schools and a focus on data analysis and target setting have resulted in greater optimism among headteachers, special needs co-ordinators and LEA officers. The capacity for further improvement is good.

### The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

113. Strategic planning for services to support pupils with SEN was poor at the time of the last inspection. However, the circulation to schools of a new draft policy and strategy, albeit very recently, demonstrates that the strategic planning is now satisfactory. The draft policy and procedures are straightforward, clearly set out and demonstrate an intention to secure pupils' entitlements and work towards the proposals in the government's programme of action. Given the importance of the draft policy, the consultation period, though recently extended, is short and the process does not adequately seek the views of parents and pupils.

114. Despite a significant increase in 2001-2002, the number of pupils with statements (2.6 per cent) remains below that found nationally and for similar authorities. The high rate of statutory assessments has begun to decline this year. The percentage of pupils educated in special schools within the borough is high at 46 per cent compared with 30 per cent in similar LEAs. The draft strategic action plan sensibly sets a target to bring this more in line with similar LEAs.

115. The strategic action plan is set in the context of a comprehensive audit of current provision. It sets out clear targets and time scales for actions required. However, it lacks a detailed analysis of trends over time and forecasts on predicted future need for developments in mainstream and special schools. Officers have identified the need to carry out this work. At this point it remains unclear how the LEA will develop local provision to further reduce the need for placements made out of the borough and respond when neighbouring authorities make decreasing use of this LEA's provision. Elected members do not yet have the data needed to make decisions about the medium- to long-term provision needed for children with special educational needs.

### *Recommendation*

#### **In order to improve the strategy for SEN:**

- ensure that members, headteachers and parents have a clear view of the implications and costs of developing more inclusive mainstream provision and the forecast for the future size and roles of borough special schools.

116. Insufficient detail is provided on how centrally provided services will dovetail with outreach and training developments from special schools as they work towards becoming centres of excellence. Outreach from special schools remains mainly the result of initiatives taken by special school headteachers rather than a coherent, co-ordinated response to need across the LEA. School access initiative funding has been deployed to improve physical access to school buildings across the borough, but in the absence of a strategy for the inclusion of pupils with SEN.

117. Planning at a strategic level with health and social services is improving. Systems are now in place to ensure effective monitoring of the attainment of pupils with a range of special educational needs. It is too early for the LEA to be able to demonstrate the impact of centrally retained services on raising attainment or that improvements in the rate of progress for pupils with SEN is in line with that for the overall school population. The recent appointment of an SEN monitoring officer, however, provides the capacity to undertake this work.

### **Statutory obligations**

118. At the time of the previous inspection the LEA was taking reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations. Its work in this area is highly satisfactory. In 2001/2002 the number of statements completed within the statutory time limits improved to 66.4 per cent, taking account of exceptions. Delays due to late reports from within the LEA and from outside agencies have been significantly reduced. More recent data indicates that the excellent rate of 100 per cent of the LEA's reports is completed on time.

119. The quality of statements is sound. The LEA has sensibly provided an electronic format for individual education plans to all special needs co-ordinators and provides appropriate feedback on the quality of annual reviews. Headteachers and special needs co-ordinators are routinely invited to the decision-making SEN panel and, as a result, have confidence in the fairness with which it operates. Information provided to parents by the LEA on the full range of provision is inadequate. There is no up-to-date 'guide' that sets out the range of provision available in special and mainstream resourced schools or through central services.

### ***Recommendation***

#### **In order to improve information to parents and other agencies:**

- publish a comprehensive and up-to-date 'guide' of all provision and services for children with special educational needs.

120. The parent partnership service is universally praised. The head of the service maintains an appropriate level of independence, while providing the LEA's officers with useful feedback about the need for further improvement, for example on the need for all schools to ensure parents are aware of advice and support available. Information leaflets are well set out and are available in a range of minority ethnic languages on request. More

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parents are accessing, and benefiting from, using the service and an appropriate number of parental supporters have been recruited and trained.

### **School improvement**

121. Support for school improvement in relation to SEN was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA was recommended to draw up service level agreements for all services, to develop better links between services (including special schools), and to improve the consistency of the educational psychology service. The LEA has made satisfactory progress and support for school improvement is now satisfactory.

122. Schools are clear about their entitlement to services. Support to schools is more differentiated and in line with need. The curriculum access service has now been placed within the school effectiveness division. There is improved sharing of data between the LEA's divisions and a focus on the progression and attainment of children with SEN is incorporated into the school self-review process. Systems are in place within the LEA for more sophisticated tracking of pupils with specific special educational needs over time, for example those with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This should support more informed challenge and support to schools.

123. The range of training to governors, teachers and learning support assistants has been extended and evaluations demonstrate that they are highly regarded. However, the LEA does not effectively monitor the impact of its training on the quality of teaching or pupils' progress. After some consideration, the training on the DfES 'Index for Inclusion' has not been followed through. There is little brokerage of services for schools to purchase from delegated budgets. The recent appointment of a monitoring officer for SEN is timely. Additional funding to schools within the education action zone has been well focused on raising attainment with initiatives such as the implementation of a reading recovery programme. Increasing use has been made of advanced skills teachers. Commissioning of specific work from special schools is underdeveloped.

124. The educational psychology service has only one vacancy although this is a senior post. It appropriately beginning to move away from a reactive approach to individual pupils to more proactive whole school support. Schools do not properly understand the change in emphasis or the benefits to be gained. The contribution of the senior management of the educational psychology service to the development of the SEN policy and practice is underdeveloped, although the commitment to work effectively with early years' providers and key health professionals is clear. The LEA's communication with special educational needs co-ordinators through cluster groups is improving. With recent strong leadership, the support provided by the LEA has improved and schools are generally optimistic about the changes and pace of change since the last inspection, although the school survey shows that primary schools remain more positive than secondary schools.

### **Value for money**

125. The LEA's SEN service did not provide satisfactory value for money at the time of the last inspection. The LEA has addressed the recommendation to ensure that resources are used to support inclusion by matching delegated funding to need and can demonstrate that it

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is now providing satisfactory value for money. The LEA's spending on special educational needs provision is broadly in line with similar authorities and the national average. It is a high delegating authority and retains less for centrally delivered services than similar authorities.

126. In order to address significant predicted overspends in the 2002-2003 statement budgets for mainstream and independent special schools, funds have been vired from other education department budgets. There has been a reduction in the number of pupils placed in out-of-borough independent or maintained special schools. A useful protocol over joint funding with social services is drafted. As yet, there is insufficiently detailed planning for further reductions in out-of-borough placements through development of local provision. The financial implications of this and likely future changes to income from providing places for Essex's pupils in Southend's special schools have not been sufficiently planned.

127. The formula for delegated mainstream funding is now transparent and better understood by schools. It reflects levels of need more clearly. The openness of the SEN panel's decision-making process has strengthened confidence in the robustness of decisions on funding levels for pupils with statements and others who are particularly vulnerable. The LEA does not yet provide guidance on thresholds for identification and support of pupils with SEN at school action/ school action plus.

128. The LEA has made a sound start in collecting data on progress made by pupils with special educational needs and on actual spending in schools against delegated budgets. The appointment of a monitoring officer provides the capacity to undertake work that will help to provide more robust evidence of value for money.



## **Section 4: Promoting social inclusion**

### **Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion**

129. At the time of the previous inspection, with the exception of the provision of school places and admission arrangements, the priority given and the work being undertaken to promote social inclusion was unsatisfactory. However, there have been significant improvements and, apart from support for improving behaviour and strategies to combat racism, all other areas are at least satisfactory. Leadership in all areas has improved. The scope and structure of services are clearer. Policies and plans give the work on promoting social inclusion a suitably high priority. Provision and support have been enhanced and, together with the number of grant funded initiatives including the education action zone, are varied. Relationships between the different agencies are good and there is a growing recognition of the need to overcome fragmentation and work in a more co-ordinated way. Schools in disadvantaged areas acknowledge progress, but still have concerns about the amount of support that is available for vulnerable families that can help to prevent further problems.

### **The strategy to promote social inclusion**

130. The previous inspection found that the effectiveness of the LEA's work in promoting social inclusion was unsatisfactory, despite some well-focussed projects funded under the Single Regeneration Budget and the innovative strategies employed by the education action zone. Improvement has taken place and the LEA's strategy is now satisfactory. However, the percentage of pupils who gain one or more and five or more passes at grades A\* - G at GCSE remains too low.

131. The scrutiny committee has investigated comprehensively the corporate parenting role for looked after children, but there has been no other detailed work undertaken that could lead to an informed understanding among councillors of some of the challenges faced by schools working in disadvantaged areas. However, the director of education leads a cross-council Best Value review of services for social inclusion that is at a very early stage of development. The scope of the review has been thoroughly considered and some pertinent questions have been formulated.

132. The restructuring of the education department has provided clear leadership for social inclusion. Education service plans reflect an understanding of the importance of developing strategies to promote social inclusion. All the aspects of related plans and work that is taking place to promote social inclusion has been drawn together in an overview of planned developments. Links with the school improvement strategy are being made, for instance by including social inclusion as a priority in all major plans, through good preventive work in supporting the healthy schools initiative and in the criteria for categorising schools, although this latter work is at an early stage.

133. A children's and young people's partnership linked to the local strategic partnership has been formed. This is starting the process of ensuring that the work of the services

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provided by different agencies is well co-ordinated. Relationships between services are good and there is evidence of productive joint projects.

134. Two conferences have been held to raise the awareness of schools and also to disseminate good practice. These events have been successful. Good initial work has taken place through issuing service level agreements to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the support services and the schools. A considerable amount of sound guidance on attendance, behaviour, child protection and looked after children has recently been circulated to schools. There has been some enhancing of staffing and provision, most notably the opening of a pupil referral unit. This, when added to existing provision, provides a suitable range of additional support. The authority is making good use of available opportunities to extend work in this area. It has been successful in winning the contract to provide personal advisers under the Connexions initiative. Bids are being made on many of the new initiatives.

135. Much of this work is either being planned or only very recently initiated. One major weakness currently is that the projects and provision are potentially effective but fragmented. It is difficult to find the clear strategic direction that identifies the gaps in services, provides a clear map of provision and demonstrates a clear hierarchy for prevention, support and intervention that ensures that children and young people at risk receive the most appropriate support. Moreover, schools in disadvantaged areas have concerns about the extent of support that is available to support families who have needs but do not fall within the threshold criteria of the specialist social and health services. In these circumstances, the development of a local preventive strategy is a priority. A joint report introducing this development by the directors of social care, education and lifelong learning and the chief executive of the primary care trust has already been drafted.

### **The supply of school places**

136. The planning of school places was good at the time of the previous inspection and remains so. Forecasts of pupil numbers remain accurate. There is no overall significant surplus in either the primary or secondary phases. Links between school place planning, asset management and admissions have strengthened. The LEA's self-evaluation of the function is perceptive and accurate.

137. Rising rolls in secondary schools have been addressed through successful basic need bids. Six of the twelve secondary schools have building projects. Opportunities have been taken to improve the suitability of accommodation as well as provide additional places. The overall surplus in primary schools is well below the national average. Overcrowding at five of the 42 schools may ease as primary rolls begin to fall. The LEA also has appropriate arrangements for managing the decline through the amalgamation of infant and junior schools.

138. There are effective arrangements for tracking cross-boundary movements of pupils and incorporating new housing developments. The 2002 school organisation plan is an accessible working document that complies fully with DfES guidance. The section on post-16 provision, which includes detailed information on participation rates and examination entries at each school and the college of further education, is particularly helpful. The school organisation committee meets regularly and has taken some difficult decisions to secure

sufficient secondary school places. Consultation with stakeholders, including the diocesan bodies is good.

### **Admissions**

139. The previous inspection found sound arrangements for admissions to schools. At that time a Best Value review of admissions had just been completed which, although lacking in challenge, was leading to some positive outcomes. The arrangements continue to be highly satisfactory, although the co-ordination of secondary transfers in a selective system with 11 admission authorities and significant cross-boundary movement remains complex. The admissions team is parent-focussed and keen to secure continuous improvement.

140. The information booklets for parents are satisfactory, although there is scope for further small improvements. The LEA and the admissions forum have been effective in keeping admission arrangements under review. Since the last inspection, for example, a common starting date for admissions to reception classes has been introduced. From September 2004, the LEA's ability to meet the needs of looked after children will be strengthened by giving them priority for admission to oversubscribed community primary schools.

141. The timetable for secondary transfers meets required standards. The LEA helpfully organises three open meetings for parents each autumn to explain the transfer arrangements. The admission team also offers consultations with individual parents. These have been successful in containing the number of appeals and reducing the number of children without a school place at the start of the autumn term. The small number of surplus places contributes to an above average level of primary admission appeals, although the proportion found in favour of parents is low. All appeals submitted on time in 2002 were completed before the end of the summer term.

142. Limited progress has been made since the last inspection in co-ordinating admissions to secondary schools, with the result that some parents still receive multiple offers whilst others are initially without the offer of a place at any of their preferred schools. Exchange of information with Essex has improved. It has taken the prospect of regulation under the new code of practice on admissions to secure consensus among secondary schools about the need to work together. A new admissions forum has been constituted and a scheme is being drafted under which all parents will receive a single offer on the same day has been prepared for admissions in September 2005.

### **Asset management**

143. As at the time of the previous inspection, asset management is good. The many strengths identified at that time remain strong. The links between asset management and capital planning are particularly good, with many examples of projects combining sufficiency, suitability and condition using funding from a number of different sources, including schools' own funds.

144. The asset management plan is a very accessible document. The statement of priorities lists specific projects for the next two years, identifies the sources of funding,

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expresses the intended outcomes expressed in educational terms and makes clear links to the EDP and other plans. The plan appropriately includes schemes intended to improve community perceptions of schools causing concern as well as enhancing facilities at popular schools. In the condition survey all work of the highest priority has been completed and significant progress has been made in Priority 2 items.

145. The LEA has responded well to recommendations from the DfES, which continues to grade asset management planning as satisfactory overall. Stakeholder involvement has been appropriately strengthened through an asset management group of headteachers. Schools are encouraged and trained to develop their own asset management plans that the group rightly takes into account when recommending projects to cabinet. Unusually, it makes decisions on the priority for some grant-funded initiatives. The group has built a high reputation for rigour, fairness and transparency.

146. The LEA has been very successful in bidding for capital funds from a variety of sources. Its work with aided schools has been particularly successful, a partnership which is highly valued by the diocesan representatives. After appropriate consideration of its merits, a private finance initiative scheme is not being pursued at present because alternative sources of capital are available.

#### **Provision of education for pupils who have no school place**

147. The previous inspection found that the management of support for pupils who have no school place had strengths, but was unsatisfactory overall, as the LEA had not registered a centre providing education out of school as a pupil referral unit.

148. Arrangements are now satisfactory and improvements have taken place. Most significantly, the LEA has opened and registered a new pupil referral unit that can offer full-time provision for excluded pupils and, in addition, some places that can be purchased by schools to support children who are at risk. The unit has a very high standard of accommodation and is well staffed. Procedures for admission and reintegration of pupils have been drafted and circulated to schools. However, the unit has only been in operation for a few months. Systems for effective use of the provision are in place, but need to be consolidated and embedded.

149. A panel that meets every fortnight, and includes representatives from schools, undertakes monitoring of pupils who have no school place. Procedures have been tightened recently and monitoring is regular, although, in the past, some pupils' cases had been allowed to drift without timely resolution. Very few secondary schools have surplus places and, while a suitable protocol is in place, in the context of a selective system, the brunt of the difficult work of providing schooling for pupils who have many different problems falls disproportionately on very few secondary schools. The education department has used its legal powers of direction to ensure that pupils have the opportunity of a school place. The LEA and education action zone makes use of vocational training and college placements to extend the opportunities of some pupils at Key Stage 4.

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**Recommendation****In order to improve the provision for pupils who have no school place:**

- in partnership with schools, develop appropriate ways of providing education for children with complex social problems who frequently move their schools at times other than the normal point of transition.

**Attendance**

150. Support for improving attendance was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and on the evidence available, it remains so. No new fieldwork was conducted. The service has been restructured to provide a core team working to improve attendance in schools and in addition some potential for specialist services. Schools have been provided with useful guidance and the formula is now used to allocate support in line with need. The police confirm that liaison is effective and that truancy sweeps are jointly organised.

**Behaviour support**

151. The previous inspection found the LEA's support for improving behaviour unsatisfactory and, although the LEA went to considerable lengths to provide support, many schools' needs were not met. Some appropriate steps have been taken very recently to improve the provision, but the support remains unsatisfactory. Worryingly, during the last school year, there has been a significant increase in the number of fixed-term exclusions from secondary schools.

152. The behaviour support plan has been amended to provide a clearer focus to this work. It is helpfully based on three well-chosen priority areas. The plan provides good and helpful background information. The action plan details the work that is to be undertaken, all of which is potentially useful. However, only a start has been made at addressing the key weaknesses of improving the strategic co-ordination of the services that support behaviour and assist in the process of developing a co-ordinated and staged continuum of support.

153. The provision of support for behaviour has been considerably enhanced recently. Four learning support units have been opened in schools, three additional teachers have been appointed to a restructured behaviour support service, a new pupil referral unit has opened and an advanced skills teacher provides outreach support from the school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The LEA's services of advisers, educational psychology and youth workers also provide support to top up the provision that schools make under the pupil retention grant. Some innovative services funded by the Single Regeneration Budget are also established. The LEA has recently been awarded the contract to provide personal advisers to schools under the Connexions initiative. The LEA has appointed two family support workers and the EAZ has appointed home-school link workers in five schools to work with children in need. Unusually, the child and adolescent mental health service has been prepared to work actively with schools. For a small authority, this represents very varied provision.

154. However, the provision operates in a fragmented way. Although co-ordination meetings are held and include representatives of the LEA's major services, in practice, support and training are not well co-ordinated. As a result, schools do not always know which service may be the most appropriate to the pupils' needs and there is no clear staged continuum of support whereby the most acute and serious problems are referred to the service with the most appropriate expertise. This weakness has been recognised. The matrix included in the behaviour support plan begins to address this weakness, but is insufficiently detailed to provide the degree of co-ordination that is required. The LEA has funded an external consultant to provide written guidance on appropriate support and referral routes for children and young people with behavioural difficulties. This is potentially a very good idea. However, although it is in draft, it simply lists the services and is not sufficiently specific either in detailing the work that schools are expected to provide before referral to specialist services or in helping to structure the services in a way that best meet needs.

155. Significant work is required to align the services and to provide a staged continuum so that children are referred to the most appropriate service. This is the only area where the LEA lacks the capacity to undertake this work. Currently, there is no manager at third tier with overall responsibility for this area and who could conduct this work, while at the same time embedding the work of the pupil referral unit into the continuum of support.

#### *Recommendations*

##### **In order to improve the provision of behaviour support to schools:**

- allocate a clear responsibility for the development and co-ordination of behaviour support to an appropriate third tier manager;
- co-ordinate the existing services to provide a clear, staged continuum;
- align and co-ordinate the services so that their work is matched to the most appropriate stage of the continuum; and
- develop the referral process so that schools make referrals to the most appropriate service.

#### **Health, safety, welfare and child protection**

156. The previous inspection found that the LEA fulfilled its statutory requirement in respect of child protection and provided health and safety guidance to its schools. This continues to be the case and there have been improvements, provision is highly satisfactory.

157. New procedures containing good, comprehensive guidance on managing abuse by professionals have been ratified by the area child protection committee and circulated to schools. The LEA is represented by officers with appropriate levels of seniority on the area child protection committee and its sub groups. The LEA makes a financial contribution to the area child protection committee.

158. Designated teachers and the training that they receive are carefully monitored. The LEA has a policy that designated teachers should attend training about every two years. All

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but two designated teachers have been recently trained. In addition, in a good initiative, the LEA organises a network group that gives opportunities to designated teachers to meet together and be briefed about new developments and pass on any concerns about working practices to the social services department.

159. A recent serious case has revealed weaknesses in the procedures and the way they were followed. The authority does not now employ the senior officers who were involved in managing the case. Good support has been provided to the staff, pupils and their families who were involved both during and since the criminal prosecution. An independent enquiry was conducted as a Part 8 review and the education department has followed up the findings. Headteachers will be briefed about the implications at their next meeting with the director of education.

160. Relationships with social care at a strategic level are good. The social care department has identified an officer who, as part of his responsibilities, liaises with schools. Some schools recognise that when urgent cases are referred the response they receive is timely and appropriate. However, headteachers have expressed concerns about the level of support that can be provided to children and their families which could help to prevent further difficulties.

### **Looked after children**

161. At the time of the previous inspection, the support for looked after children and young people was unsatisfactory and a very low percentage of young people had a personal education plan. Since then, comprehensive improvements have taken place and support is now highly satisfactory. Nevertheless, although there were significant improvements at Key Stage 2 and in the percentage of pupils obtaining one or more GCSE at grades A\* - G, the attainment of looked after children remains low.

162. Appropriately, the council has taken its corporate parenting responsibilities very seriously. The social care scrutiny committee has conducted a thematic review of their corporate parenting role. The scrutiny was very thorough and led to a helpful report and comprehensive recommendations that have been presented to the cabinet. This represents an excellent approach by this committee. It continues to meet young people who are looked after every six months to discuss progress.

163. Within the education department, some enhancement of posts has enabled much needed specialist work to support children who are looked after. An advisory teacher and education welfare officer provide this support, which includes training of designated teachers, advice on constructing and monitoring personal education plans and support to improve attendance. The percentage of personal education plans that have been drafted has increased.

164. The social services department has attempted, in so far as they are able, to give a high priority to maintaining the continuity of children's education. They have reduced the number of moves that children may be required to make and should a move be required, undertake to provide transport to ensure that the children can continue to attend school. Furthermore the LEA has come to an agreement with the admissions forum that a suitable and high priority will be given to admission of looked after children to community primary

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schools. As yet similar arrangements have not been agreed about admissions to secondary schools which would constitute an especially significant step in view of the low number of surplus places. A number of children are placed in residential placements outside of the authority. A lower percentage of personal education plans have been drafted for these children. In these cases, where the child or young person has a statement of SEN, procedures are in place for careful monitoring of progress. However, for those children who have no statement, closer co-operation is required with the LEA in which the child is placed to ensure appropriate lines of communication and that the necessary support is available to the child.

### *Recommendations*

#### **In order to improve the educational attainment of children who are looked after and placed outside of Southend:**

- improve the completion rate of personal education plans and devise procedures for monitoring progress, especially for children who do not have a statement of special educational need; and
- develop appropriate procedures to retain the role of corporate parent in so far as it affects the child and young person's education for children who are placed outside the borough.

### **Measures to combat racism**

165. At the time of the previous inspection, the effectiveness of measures to combat racism was poor. The council had not given sufficient priority to addressing the recommendations of the report of the committee of enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence and had failed to show leadership to schools on the need to combat racism. It was recommended to allocate responsibility to a named senior officer, to put in place a robust system for monitoring racial harassment and to develop and implement a strategic response to the recommendations arising from the report of the committee of enquiry. Progress has been very slow until recently. The leadership of this work has been strengthened and placed at an appropriately high level. The director of education has assumed responsibility. The rate of progress has recently quickened significantly. Much remains to be done to ensure systems are robust and schools recognize the importance of their contribution to this work. The capacity for improvement is now much improved. However, measures to combat racism remain unsatisfactory.

166. The LEA's draft race equality policy and strategy was circulated to schools in December 2002 and builds on the council's scheme. This provides a good level of guidance on producing a school race equality policy and implementation plan and adds to guidance issued last May on steps needed for compliance with the Race Relations [Amendment] Act (2000). It comes some months after schools were requested to comply with the statutory requirement to produce such policies. At the time of the inspection, 36 per cent of schools had not submitted the required documentation. Schools are being encouraged to aim to achieve external validation through the Commission for Racial Equality's standards. Such aspirations are entirely appropriate. However, progress on this will be a major focus in discussions with attached advisers only in the spring term 2003.



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*Recommendations***In order to improve support to schools to combat racism:**

- urgently follow up schools that have yet to comply with the requirement to have in place both a race equality and action plan; and
- ensure that schools have a thorough understanding of the standards of the Commission for Racial Equality.

167. The LEA has acted more speedily to ensure schools identify and act to address racial incidents in school. A well-attended conference in the autumn term 2002 has raised awareness and officers have introduced an electronic format for informing the LEA. Not all schools have seen the relevance and importance of this, despite periodic incidents. Incidents reported over the last year have now been analysed. Training provided for governors was poorly attended (15 per cent of schools) and there has been insufficient training for non-teaching staff in schools. Significant concerns remain at likely under-reporting of incidents.

*Recommendation***In order to reduce under reporting of racist incidents in schools:**

- provide training on identifying and acting on racist incidents for the wider range of staff in schools including support, administrative and supervisory staff.

168. The local authority does not have in place a system for routine scrutiny of all reports to elected members to ascertain the impact of policies on minority ethnic groups. Minority ethnic groups are under represented in the work force and in governing bodies. The LEA is working with representatives of local minority ethnic and faith communities, but there has been insufficient work to build the capacity of the different communities to ensure parents and pupils are properly represented and their voices heard.

*Recommendations***In order to improve the measures that the LEA takes to combat racism:**

- ensure that all draft policies undergo formal procedures to assess whether they are likely to impact on minority ethnic groups, before being put to elected members; and
- develop and support a wider range of minority ethnic representatives to ensure that the LEA is aware of their views.

169. The agreed syllabus for religious education 'Open Worlds' adopted by the LEA contains material to develop the curriculum to take account of different cultural and faith groups. There has been no other positive co-ordinated action by the LEA for further

curriculum development. Nonetheless there are some good examples of individual school initiatives.

## **Section 5: Corporate issues**

### **Introduction to corporate issues**

170. The council's corporate-planning processes are satisfactory. At the highest strategic level, the plans give a high priority to education and provide appropriate direction to developments. Decision making is timely and appropriate and the willingness to work collaboratively in partnerships is good. Leadership of senior officers is now good and the senior management team has rebuilt the partnership with schools and has earned their credibility. The leadership of members is satisfactory, although the council will need to do more to convince schools of their support for their stated priority to promote social inclusion. The likelihood of embarking on potentially contentious developments, notably in special education needs and 14-19 education will benefit from this foundation of determined leadership, effective decision making and the ability to work collaboratively in partnerships.

### **Corporate planning**

171. At the time of the last inspection the council's corporate-planning processes were developing systematically and coherently. They provided a highly satisfactory basis for translating corporate priorities into action, but had yet to be fully implemented. The situation remains the same and new strategic plans have been recently formulated and are in draft.

172. The council has complied with the new planning requirement to work within the context of a local strategic partnership to draft a community plan. The community and corporate plans provide an appropriate vision for Southend-on-Sea. The plans give priority to the importance of regeneration and broadening the opportunities from a predominately seaside town to a diverse social, educational and economic community that offers opportunities for lifelong learning. Learning is included as one of the seven broad priorities of the community plan and education one of the five ambitions of the new corporate plan. Within this priority, broad areas of development are identified. These areas reflect an analysis of the current performance of the education service and help to focus on appropriate areas of development.

173. Planning is comprehensive and coherence between the various plans is a strength. A clear structure for planning provides coherence and a route by which community and corporate objectives can be delivered. The three major strategic plans - the community plan, the corporate plan and the education and lifelong learning department plan successfully draw together and inter-relate the significant number of plans, priorities and the contribution of partnerships.

174. At the highest strategic level the plans provide clarity on the broad intentions. However, the prioritisation of activities and specificity of the actions that will need to be taken to achieve the ambitions are weaknesses. Priorities and objectives are very broad and difficult to contest. They are described using cautious language, such as 'providing', 'reviewing' and 'offering better' or 'the best', but illustrations of what this might mean in terms of the concrete actions or the specific challenges that may be faced remain unclear.

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175. Consultation and participation in the planning process is good, for instance a headteacher is a member of the local strategic partnership, which has held responsibility for drafting the plan. However, the relevance and the implications of both the community and corporate plan are not clear to schools so that these can be reflected in schools' own planning. Schools espouse the general vision for improvement, but there is potential for greater controversy within the detail. The detailed education service plans are compendious and more difficult to access. Their use in developing a shared understanding of the future developments that are required to promote 14-19 education, social inclusion and SEN, for instance, is at a very early stage.

176. The key plans such as the community plan, corporate strategy and education service plan have only recently been drafted and, therefore, it is too early to judge implementation. However, the track record in the implementation of plans such as the education development plan and the post-Ofsted action plan is good.

### **Decision making**

177. The cabinet has taken decisions in a timely way. Some difficult decisions have been taken effectively. Decision making is good. However, the cabinet draws on a very narrow base of members in its work. The portfolio member for education does not lead an advisory group of members who could provide wider support and consultation on educational initiatives and decisions that are likely to be controversial.

178. The social care scrutiny committee is too wide in its scope to be practical, although there is some evidence that its work has helped to draw the major services together. Scrutiny of executive decisions works quite well, although the number of issues scrutinised for education is comparatively low. With the exception of a review of corporate parenting, the work of researching policy issues through longer thematic work is under developed. There is a tradition of member working parties to conduct this work, but none are in operation currently for education. However, councillors make good use of Best Value reviews and external inspection reports that, rightly, they do not wish to duplicate.

179. The director of education has a high level of delegated powers. Headteachers and governors agree that the decision-making process is open and transparent. Communication with schools has improved. Mechanisms have been streamlined and are operating well. On the appointment of the new director, very good work took place in canvassing the views of schools about the work of the education department using small groups of headteachers. Very clear and practical outcomes of discussion were communicated to all.

180. Consultation is conducted in the right spirit as well as using efficient mechanisms. Schools still find timescales too short, for instance responses required between a cycle of governors meetings, but mostly these issues remain outside of the LEA's control. Sometimes schools also find the level of consultation that is required onerous. The director of education has tried to respond to this by giving advanced information on the consultations that are required during the term and reducing this to a small and manageable list, which is included in her termly report to schools.

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181. Financial decision making is prudent and schools value the very high levels of delegation.

### **Leadership of elected members and officers**

182. The leadership of members is satisfactory. Members of all parties give a high priority to education and they are ambitious for Southend. Members have invested in a team of competent senior education officers. They are confident and trust officers to manage improvement and to take the necessary day-to-day decisions. Schools, however, have some reservations about the extent to which members appreciate the pressures of working in schools in the more disadvantaged contexts and therefore, doubt that members' decisions are always informed by an appropriate analysis. In addition, the structure of secondary schools has a high percentage of selective places. The system is popular in the local area, but members do not have systematic and regular procedures for reviewing its outcomes.

### ***Recommendations***

**In order to consolidate the information available to members on which their policy decisions are based:**

- give consideration to the social scrutiny committee undertaking a thematic scrutiny of raising attainment of pupils from disadvantaged communities in which headteachers can illustrate the issues that confront their schools; and
- put in place a regular system to review the outcomes, including the value added, of the selective system of secondary education.

183. This is not the easiest context for officers to exert confident officer leadership of the education service. There is a history of mutual suspicion with no previously good tradition of effective school-LEA relationships on which to build. There is considerable diversity among the schools, which often results in them having very different needs and priorities. All of which, although historical, has an impact and has to be overcome. The new senior management team has the capacity to do so. The leadership of senior officers is good. Relationships with secondary schools have improved so that there is a good foundation of trust between schools and the senior officers. Secondary schools are now more likely to seek partnership with their LEA. The senior team is universally perceived as competent, accessible and responsive.

### **Advice to members**

184. Advice to members is good and supports members when they make difficult decisions. Communication, information and committee reports are clear. Officers are accessible. Members questions are answered in a timely way. There are regular and appropriate meetings and briefings.

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## Partnership

185. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA had successfully entered into a number of partnerships that were having positive outcomes for education and schools. This has been further extended and developed. The effectiveness of this aspect of the LEA's work is good. Fostering and contributing to a range of partnership is viewed as one way in which this small authority can extend its influence and its capacity to bring about change.

186. The on-going work within the local strategic partnership provides the foundation to lead some ambitious plans for regeneration. Specific partnerships on a range of specialist issues are affiliated to the local strategic partnership thus providing the potential to drive change in many different ways. In all relevant partnerships, education has a high priority.

187. Relationships with other government departments and agencies including the diocesan authorities, the health trusts, the social services department and the police are all good. There is sufficient evidence of joint projects and innovations, which will provide a good foundation for the future joint strategic planning.

188. A fully constituted Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership has working procedures that they and the LEA understand and to which they all adhere. The LEA has supported the partnership to develop its capacity to improve the range and quality of services with the result that provision for early years is of high quality and wide ranging.

189. The LEA has made very positive steps to establish firm partnerships to develop more effective provision for 14 - 19 education. These developments are at a very early stage as the LEA's long-term vision for 14-19 education is unclear. Relationships with the Learning and Skills Council are positive. There is general recognition by the LEA, the Learning and Skills Council and in schools that current provision for education 14 -19 will not deliver what is needed and changes will have to be made. Responding to the recommendations of a forthcoming area review will require the council to consider and implement a long-term strategy. The LEA has already undertaken some innovative and appropriate projects to improve provision at post 14 in partnership with the education action zone, the Learning and Skills Council, various universities, local colleges and vocational training providers. There is evidence that these are having a positive impact on staying on rates.

### *Recommendation*

**In order to develop a clear strategy and provision for education 14 - 19:**

- work with all partners to establish and implement a clear strategy for 14-19 education.

## **Appendix 1: Recommendations**

The report makes a number of recommendations.

### **In order to develop a clear strategy and provision for education 14 -19:**

- work with all partners to establish and implement a clear strategy for 14 -19 education.

### **In order to improve the way in which support is allocated to schools:**

- finalise the detail of the criteria and procedures for categorising schools, including the way in which schools use evidence of self -evaluation;
- clarify the procedures for the central moderation of support categories; and
- ensure that schools understand that the purpose of the categorisation is positive.

### **In order to improve the effectiveness of monitoring and challenging schools:**

- ensure that governing bodies receive and consider the findings of the attached advisers' monitoring visits; and
- ensure that the procedures and agenda for attached advisers' visits to secondary schools include consideration of the effectiveness of the provision for post-16 students.

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

- ensure that the secondary school that requires special measures is given clear deadlines in which it must show improvement; and
- draw up contingency plans to improve the education of the children who attend the secondary school requiring special measures, which can be implemented with some urgency should the school not make acceptable progress.

### **In order to improve the LEA's support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3:**

- strengthen the management of the strategy to improve coherence and consistency across the different strands and to improve communication with headteachers.

### **In order to improve the LEA's support to schools in raising standards of minority ethnic and Traveller children:**

- ensure that improved data available from schools from January 2003 is used to
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more accurately identify, monitor and effectively target underachievement;

- engage headteachers in discussions to consider ways to further strengthen support to meet the needs of isolated pupils; and
- re-negotiate the agreement with the Essex consortium to ensure that the services provided are properly defined and that the details of the services and the outcomes of the support are regularly reported.

**In order to improve support for gifted and talented pupils the LEA should:**

- ensure that a high priority is given to developing and co-ordinating provision for talented pupils by setting specific, challenging targets to increase the range and uptake of activities for those in special schools.

**In order to improve the strategy for SEN:**

- ensure that members, headteachers and parents have a clear view of the implications and costs of developing more inclusive mainstream provision and the forecast for the future size and roles of borough special schools.

**In order to improve information to parents and other agencies:**

- publish a comprehensive and up-to-date 'guide' of all provision and services for children with special educational needs.

**In order to improve the provision for pupils who have no schools place:**

- in partnership with schools, develop appropriate ways of providing education for children with complex social problems who frequently move their schools at times other than the normal point of transition.

**In order to improve the provision of behaviour support to schools:**

- allocate a clear responsibility for the development and co-ordination of behaviour support to an appropriate third tier manager;
- co-ordinate the existing services to provide a clear, staged continuum;
- align and co-ordinate the services so that their work is matched to the most appropriate stage of the continuum; and
- develop the referral process so that schools make referrals to the most appropriate service.

**In order to improve the educational attainment of children who are looked after and placed outside of Southend:**

- improve the completion rate of personal education plans and devise procedures for monitoring progress especially for children who do not have a statement of



special educational need; and

- develop appropriate procedures to retain the role of corporate parent in so far as it affects the child and young persons education for children who are placed outside the borough.

**In order to improve support to schools to combat racism:**

- urgently follow up schools that have yet to comply with the requirement to have in place both a race equality and action plan; and
- ensure that schools have a thorough understanding of the standards of the Commission for Racial Equality.

**In order to reduce under reporting of racist incidents in schools:**

- provide training on identifying and acting on racist incidents for the wider range of staff in schools including support, administrative and supervisory staff.

**In order to improve the measures that the LEA takes to combat racism:**

- ensure that all draft policies undergo formal procedures to assess whether they are likely to impact on minority ethnic groups, before being put to elected members; and
- develop and support a wider range of minority ethnic representatives to ensure that the LEA is aware of their views.

**In order to consolidate the information available to members on which their policy decisions are based:**

- give consideration to the social scrutiny committee undertaking a thematic scrutiny of raising attainment of pupils from disadvantage communities in which headteachers can illustrate the issues that confront their schools; and
- put into place a regular system to review the outcomes, including the value added, of the selective system of secondary education.

## Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
<b>SECTION 1 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY</b>			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	4	
2	The performance of schools	3	
3	Funding, including the co-ordination of external funding	3	
4	The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	2	NI
5	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	3	
6	The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities	2	
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	2	
<b>SECTION 2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</b>			
8	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools	4	
9	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	3	
10	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	3	
11	The effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	4	
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	2	NI
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	3	NI
14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	3	
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	4	
16	Support to schools in raising standards of ethnic minority and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grants	5	
17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	5	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value	3	
19	Support to school governors	4	NI
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	4	

20a	Financial services	3	NI
20b	Human resources	3	NI
20c	Property services	2	
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	3	
20e	Cleaning and caretaking		
20f	Grounds maintenance	2	
20g	Catering	3	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	3	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement	3	
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	3	
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	3	
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	2	
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	3	
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	3	
28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	3	
<b>SECTION 3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</b>			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	4	
30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	3	
31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	4	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money	4	
<b>SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION</b>			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	4	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	2	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	

37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place	4	
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	3	NI
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	5	
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	3	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	3	
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	5	
<b>SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES</b>			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	3	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	3	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	2	
46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	4	
47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	2	
48	The quality of advice given to elected members	2	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	2	
<b>OVERALL JUDGEMENTS</b>			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	3	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	3	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	3	