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APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999 insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, focus groups of headteachers and governors, staff in the education department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEAs partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEAs work was circulated to 91 schools. The response rate was 95 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one special, 11 primary and five secondary schools. A further eight schools were visited as part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy monitoring. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Southampton took control of its own affairs as a new unitary council in 1997. It has high ambitions, aspiring to become a leading European city, a regional centre and a city of learning. Although much has been accomplished in the way of regeneration and the city is thriving in some respects, parts of it remain deeply disadvantaged and harbour concentrations of social problems. The city houses a university, other higher and further education institutions, primary schools that are rapidly improving their results and secondary schools that are not.

5. The LEA inherited low achievement in the primary phase and rightly opted to make tackling this a priority. Improvement has been rapid, and has outstripped the national rate. At GCSE, however, improvement rates are below the national and the gender gap is of particular concern. It is significantly wider than nationally and particularly marked in English, where in 1999, 56 per cent of girls but only 36 per cent of boys achieved higher grade passes.

6. The legacy to Southampton included substantial difficulties concerning school places, buildings and behaviour. The new LEA has moved systematically to sort these problems out. Against the backdrop of a shared view of what the city could become and the role that education should play, the LEA has established excellent communication and solid partnerships with its schools, and it is on this basis that it has proceeded to grapple with difficult issues.

7. Through joint working with schools to develop policy and practice in the management partnership groups, the LEA has tackled complex and fundamental issues successfully. Although there may be disagreement on some of the details of implementation, there is now general support for inclusion. A concerted effort to tackle behaviour problems and drive down exclusions has been spectacularly successful, if not without pain for schools. School re-organisations, building programmes and Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) to address the school places issues are underway, with the support of schools.

8. The LEA has espoused the Government's drive to raise standards enthusiastically, and, working through the chief inspector and education quality services, has supported schools' efforts to improve. Supported school self-evaluation has promoted autonomy and established a climate of striving for improvement. Headteachers are involved in parallel processes of self evaluation by the LEA and also in the review of services offered by the LEA. This involvement has ensured responsiveness and improvement in the quality of LEA services.

9. The LEA carries out many of its functions well and some extremely well, for instance:

- implementation of the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations;
- support for school management;
- support for schools in special measures;
- challenge to schools to improve performance through supported self evaluation;
- Special Educational Needs strategy and practice;
- education otherwise than at school;

- consultation and communication with schools through its management partnership arrangements;
- asset management planning and building works;
- personnel support;
- client support for cleaning and caretaking;
- decision making; and
- performance review within education.

There are weaknesses in the following areas:

- support for attendance;
- education planning;
- information and communication technology in administration;
- links with social services; and
- corporate planning and performance review.

10. Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. Strong, informed and committed political leadership on education by an executive member (now also the leader of the Council) who is well known in schools and enthusiastically endorsed by them, has played a major role in getting the LEA this far. So too has the work of the high calibre senior management team within education services.

11. There are, however, weaknesses within the corporate whole. The Council's vision is one of partnership and collaboration, but neither its corporate planning processes nor its short-term financial planning, support the translation of that vision into reality. Parallel weaknesses in education planning, particularly in relation to the raising of secondary achievement, weaken the LEA's capacity to fulfil its educational ambitions. Regeneration and education are not yet sufficiently meshed together to reinforce one another's effectiveness. Joint working with social services is ineffective at the operational level.

12. The impact of these weaknesses on education is not, however, major. This is a good LEA; action-focused, with the right priorities and mechanisms for delivering them. Sharper and more precise planning could now help it to move faster towards its goals and to become a very good LEA. It clearly has both the will and the capacity to carry out the recommendations of this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13. Southampton is a city of 210,388 with a school age population of 29,137. Known for its international port, which is a major element in the local economy, the city also has a developing service and financial sector. The newly opened West Quay retail development has created 3500 new jobs and is making the city a regional magnet for shoppers. However, prosperity has bypassed both some areas of the inner city, which remain deeply disadvantaged, and parts of fringe estates. These areas are now the focus of regeneration projects.

14. The city has a 4.9 per cent ethnic minority population: ethnic minorities constitute 10.5 per cent of the primary age population and 11.7 per cent of the secondary. For 6.5 per cent, English is an additional language. The largest single population is of Indian heritage. The minority ethnic population is heavily concentrated in certain wards: in one inner city school, it constitutes 98 per cent of the roll. Twenty two percent of pupils overall are in receipt of free school meals, slightly above the national average. Just under one percent of primary aged pupils and 1.3 per cent of secondary aged pupils have statements of special educational needs, as compared with 1.6 per cent and 2.8 per cent nationally.

15. Southampton has 91 schools. There are 14 secondary schools, 67 primary schools, one nursery, six special schools and three pupil referral units. There are also two maintained Early Years centres. Three thousand and seventy eight pupils under compulsory school age are on the roll of primary and nursery schools. Seventy four per cent of all three-year-olds in the city, all those wanting places, now receive pre-school provision. Six out of the 14 secondary schools are single sex, three for girls and three for boys. There are two Beacon schools. Only one secondary school has a sixth form and most of the 71 per cent of pupils who continue their education post-16 transfer to one of the two sixth form colleges in the city, the city further education college or one of the Hampshire colleges.

Performance

16. OFSTED data show that attainment on entry to school is just below the national average. Analysis by the LEA reveals that from this early age girls make better progress with reading and writing than boys, and there is already a gap in performance by the end of Key Stage 1.

17. In 1999, attainment in end-of-key stage tests at KS1 and KS2 was below national averages, but in line with statistical neighbours. For the period 1997-9, at both key stages improvement rates were better than nationally. For instance, at Key Stage 2 the gap between the LEA and the national figure reduced from 9.4 per cent to 5.7 per cent in mathematics and from 11.6 per cent to 7.4 per cent in English.

18. There is a stark contrast in secondary schools, where attainment is not improving rapidly enough, particularly in mathematics, science and in boys' English. In 1999, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more higher grades was 41.3 per cent, compared to a national average of 46.7 per cent. Key Stage 3 attainment in

English, mathematics and science is below national averages, but in line with statistical neighbours. For the period 1997-9, improvement rates were below national ones at GCSE level and for English and mathematics at Key Stage 3.

19. Results for 2000 confirm previous trends. There has been a continued improvement at Key Stages 1 and 2, but limited progress in secondary schools, and the LEA did not meet most of its targets for Key Stage 3 or GCSE.

20. Girls attain better than boys and the gap in performance is significantly higher than that found nationally. Boys underachieve in English particularly; for instance in 2000, 56 per cent of girls gained a higher grade at GCSE, but only 36 per cent of boys did so.

21. Forty-three primary schools have been inspected twice and 65 per cent were graded good or very good, below the national average of 70 per cent. Evidence from these schools suggests improvements have been made with regard to the quality of education, school climate and management. Eleven secondary schools have been inspected twice and eight of the eleven were graded good or very good, above the national average of 66 per cent.

22. Attendance rates are broadly in line with national averages in secondary schools; unauthorised absence is above the national average in primary schools. Permanent exclusions have fallen very significantly from 117 in 1996/7 to 23 in 1999/2000.

Funding

23. Education standard spending assessment (SSA) allocations for Southampton in 2000/01 are above the average for both unitary and metropolitan authorities, as the table below shows-

Standard Spending Assessment per pupil 2000/01 £		
	Primary	Secondary
Southampton	2,534	3,296
Unitary Authority Average	2,424	3,127
Metropolitan Authority Average	2,433	3,144

24. In 2000/01 the LEA has budgeted to spend more than the SSA allocation on education (102 per cent). Expenditure on under-fives (not including expenditure on four-year-olds in primary school reception classes), post-16 and other education is well below the SSA allocation. The education budget has increased significantly since Southampton became a unitary authority in 1997 from £74.8m to £91.4m (22.2 per cent). The LEA has succeeded in passing all of the 2000/01 increases in SSA on to schools giving them an increase in delegated budgets per pupil of 10.1 per cent. The LEA delegates 86.1 per cent of the local schools budget (LSB); this is above both the unitary and metropolitan averages, 84.2 per cent and 84.9 per cent respectively.

25. The LEA has developed the funding formula it inherited at Local Government Re-organisation to take account of Government requirements for further delegation and to meet the particular needs of the city. Primary schools are funded at a level that is well above SSA and metropolitan and unitary averages. Secondary schools, in contrast, are funded at a level that is only slightly above average.

26. To date, no fundamental review of the formula has been carried out. Effective systems exist to consult schools about changes to the formula and these are well regarded by schools.

27. Schools in Southampton are funded at a higher level than the average for both metropolitan and unitary authorities.

	Overall Schools Budget (LSB) per pupil - £	Total Funding Counted as Delegated Includes Standards Fund - £	Delegated Schools Budget (ISB) per pupil - £	
			Primary	Secondary
Southampton	2,784	2,397	2,011	2,595
Unitary Average	2,679	2,252	1,817	2,515
Metropolitan Average	2,644	2,217	1,785	2,462

28. The LEA delegates a higher than average proportion of funds to meet Special Educational Needs (SEN). Within centrally retained budgets, expenditure on educational psychology and pupil referral units is above average for both metropolitan and unitary authorities, whilst that on pupil support and excluded pupils is well below. This pattern of expenditure reflects the city's successful strategies for SEN and social inclusion. Expenditure on school place planning is also above average because of a rapidly growing capital programme and a planned major PFI project.

29. Capital expenditure on education has grown rapidly in recent years in response to the need to improve the quality of school buildings. The 2000/01 capital budget has doubled to £9.3m, having varied from £3.1m to £4.9m over the previous three years. This growth has been funded from a variety of sources including government grants, capital receipts and balances. The LEA is also negotiating a PFI project of £36m to rebuild three secondary schools completely. It has benefited from the New Deal for Schools receiving £3.7m over the last two years; a further application has been made on the basis of the Asset Management Plan.

30. The LEA has provided sufficient local resources to enable take-up of the full Standards Fund allocation for each of the last three years. Standards fund allocations have grown from £3.3m in 1999/00 to £8.1m in 2000/01, of which £3.4m is accounted for by increases in capital allocations.

31. The central regeneration team co-ordinates bids for regeneration funding. Pre-LGR, Single Regeneration Budget bids included education only tangentially, but more recent successful SRB and other bids are already supporting education

32. Within education services, procedures for budget management and monitoring are effective. The infrequent significant variances are reported promptly to education management team, executive board and corporate committee.

Council structure

33. Southampton as a unitary authority came into being in 1997. Initially Labour led, but elections in May 2000 resulted in a Council with no overall majority, consisting of 22 Labour, 16 Liberal Democrat and 7 Conservative members. The Council is currently in transition to a leader and cabinet system. The key transitional decision-making bodies are the full Council, which approves key strategic plans and the corporate committee, which consists of 16 members, reflects the political composition of the Council and is chaired by the leader of the Liberal Democrats. The overview and scrutiny management committee, a politically balanced group, chaired by an opposition member, is responsible for four standing scrutiny panels. Both diocesan representatives and parent governor representatives sit on the education scrutiny panel. Council business is grouped into seven portfolios, each of which is held by an executive member. The high profile lead member for education and employment is also the leader of the Council. These members all have seats on the corporate committee and, together with the council's senior management team (executive board), meet regularly as the leader's advisory board. In due course, this body will become the cabinet.

34. Another important element in the arrangements is the 25 strong education and employment consultative committee which includes representatives of the dioceses and governors. The creation of this committee has ensured that important groups are not disenfranchised as a result of the changes in Council structures. Although there is nostalgia in some quarters for the old committee system, with its detailed public scrutiny of education reports by a wide range of Councillors, the new arrangements, under which papers for noting are posted on the intranet and only those requiring a decision go to corporate committee, create more time for informed discussion in committee and have the potential to streamline business. Scrutiny arrangements have the potential to create clearer public understanding of the rationale behind decisions, and make officers more accountable, but could also cause delays in implementing decisions. The Council has been rather slow to get scrutiny off the ground and the committee has only met once, so it is too early for judgements.

35. Education in Southampton is led by the executive director for education who heads a four-strong senior management team consisting of the chief inspector/head of education quality services (EQS), the head of children and young peoples services, the head of policy and planning management and the education manager.

The Education Development Plan

36. The School Improvement Plan (SIP) is the statutory document which has been approved by the DfEE. It has some strengths, but also significant weaknesses. The priorities identified in the SIP are appropriate, with one notable omission, and are based on a comprehensive audit. The priorities for the plan are:

- raising standards of achievement (including literacy, numeracy and emotional literacy);
- improving the quality of provision;
- working together;
- ensuring equality, entitlement and inclusion;
- promoting lifelong learning.

37. Support to schools causing concern is not a priority, although this has been a major issue for the LEA and has been allocated considerable resources in practice.

38. However, the major planning tool for the LEA is the Strategic Education Plan (SEP) which preceded the SIP. It has five key issues which correspond to the five priorities in the SIP. There is extensive overlap, and this undermines the rationale for having two plans. There are some differences: for instance, the SEP contains targets for SEN and the revised version has actions and targets for schools causing concern. On the other hand, the SIP contains activities relating to work-related learning, GNVQ implementation and improving standards in secondary science, that are not replicated in the SEP. In practice, the SEP is the plan to which the LEA works. The schools agree with its priorities and identify with it and the annual conferences of headteachers are planned around it.

39. The SIP was updated in February 2000 with regard to data only. The SEP has been revised more fully. It clearly identifies the many improvements in the priority areas, but it is less explicit on the subject of targets not fully met in the first year. As a result, the planning to address them lacks conviction in some cases. Strategies to raise attainment in secondary schools and by boys, for instance, require a sharper focus.

40. The two plans are supplemented by individual plans. In relation to literacy and numeracy, for example, the planned actions have begun to impact positively on standards in primary and special schools. The information and communication technology (ICT) development plan is suitably linked to the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) strategy. There is a very convincing approach to improving behaviour and promoting emotional literacy generally.

41. Although there was insufficient clarity in the original plans on strategies to support underachieving groups or pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, the SEP has now been revised appropriately.

42. The LEA has set itself challenging targets. In addition to those statutorily required, it has set additional targets including Key Stages 1 and 3 and English, mathematics and science. The LEA is meeting its targets for improving attendance and reducing exclusions and for attainment at Key Stage 2. It has not met its interim targets for attainment of secondary pupils and is not on course to meet its 2002 targets.

43. Although there is no formal evaluation of the statutory SIP, there is thorough monitoring and evaluation of actions and targets within the SEP by the education management team. Outcomes of this scrutiny are shared with the schools at an annual conference. In practice this works reasonably well, because of the close relationship and regular contacts between the LEA and its schools. There are annual reports to elected members on implementing the SEP and quality and standards by the chief inspector. These are generally of good quality and serve to inform members well. Individual reports to members on aspects such as numeracy and science are useful.

The allocation of resources to priorities and Best Value

44. Southampton has achieved a good alignment of resources and priorities within education, although the mechanisms for corporate resource allocation are complex and unclear. Improving quality and standards in education is one of Southampton City Council's strategic priorities. In pursuit of this aim it has successfully increased revenue funding for education in each year since it became a unitary authority.

45. Funding within the formula reflects the initial priority given to raising achievement in the primary phase. Within the education service the poor condition of school buildings inherited at LGR has been identified as a priority and capital expenditure has been increased to address this. Social inclusion is a priority and budgets for SEN, behaviour support and related areas have been re-aligned to implement the City strategy more effectively. The intention to allocate additional support to schools causing concern has been implemented, but mechanisms for doing this are not clear enough.

46. The Council budget strategy seeks to identify priorities in relation to plans and the resources likely to be available in the coming year. In practice it involves identifying items to be protected and potential reductions and savings in order to reach a budget target. Nevertheless against this rather static background education services, which has its own policy review process, has achieved notable success in promoting inclusion and re-directing resources formerly used to purchase places at independent special schools.

47. The Council sets its budget one year at a time. It has not written a financial forward plan, so that it is difficult for departments to plan longer term re-allocation of resources. Financial imperatives rather than strategic priorities largely drive the budget making process and there is no resource plan to match the visionary city strategy. Careful attention is paid to planned budget balances to ensure that the city remains in good financial standing.

48. Southampton was a pilot authority for Best Value. The district auditor commended the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) for its relevance to the City strategy, and noted the need to continue to improve its performance management framework and apply it more consistently across the council. Corporate systems are under developed, although in education effective systems have been put in place. These involve annual service reviews and the benchmarking of performance against that of other LEAs. Service review groups within management partnership set

service standards and monitor delivery. These arrangements are very good and acknowledged as such by schools. No Best Value reviews were planned for the education service for 2000/01 because of the LEA inspection.

49. Southampton operates a recharge system for support services provided by corporate departments. The Council is committed to providing services in-house as far as is economic and practical. The level of recharge is negotiated between departments but in Southampton corporate departments set the price so the only adjustments possible are in the level of service. This method of setting prices is unsatisfactory. It protects the corporate services at the expense of the purchasing departments, which may prevent them from obtaining Best Value.

Recommendations

In order to improve the LEA strategy for school improvement:

- rationalise and improve planning for the Education Development Plan and discontinue the dual production of the School Improvement Plan and the Strategic Education Plan;
- improve corporate performance management systems; and
- revise the process for negotiating service level agreements between corporate departments and service departments to ensure service departments obtain Best Value.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

50. Since its creation as a unitary council, Southampton has set about systematically creating a context and an infrastructure to support the raising of standards in schools. Inherited management partnership arrangements have been developed to ensure that both policy and practice on school improvement are owned and directed by the LEA and schools jointly. The powerhouse is the headteachers' executive, incorporating six heads and the education management team. This feeds through to separate management partnership groups for education quality services, (EQS) policy and planning and children's and young peoples' services. These groups and their sub-groups initiate and develop policy, review services and provide feedback.

51. Working through these mechanisms, the LEA has undertaken a major shake up of its approach to behaviour, exclusions and related issues. This has reduced permanent exclusions dramatically, and created new arrangements that should in due course support improvements in achievement. In particular, the work on emotional literacy has already helped several schools to create more calm and purposeful environments for learning.

52. The good arrangements for providing services to schools and in particular, the process of service review, feedback and change ensure that schools have the services they need and do not have to waste time sorting out problems on these matters. The leadership of the chief inspector and the work of EQS, itself subject to review by management partnership groups, has been and is fundamental to school improvement in Southampton.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

53. The exercise of these key functions is a strength of the LEA. Relationships with schools are very good, with a high degree of trust and confidence in officers involved with school improvement issues. The provision for challenge and intervention is very good. Monitoring and support, whilst highly effective, have not been sufficiently targeted to be consistently the most efficient use of resources in schools designated as 'light touch', but steps are being taken to improve this. The cornerstones of success have been the high quality of the data gathered by the LEA, the very effective supported self evaluation (SSE) by the schools and the skilled personnel supporting the schools.

54. All schools receive one visit per term as part of the self-review process. These have a clear agenda that has been negotiated after full consultation with the schools. Visits focus on school performance, target setting, quality of education and leadership and management, respectively. These are analysed in more detail in other parts of this report, but all are well done. All visits to schools are followed up with a written record. These are succinct but very informative with observations, an evaluation of strengths and weaknesses and developmental points for action. These visits are highly valued by the schools.

55. School performance is monitored by the LEA and, as a consequence, schools are allocated, with their knowledge, to one of three categories; intensive, medium or 'light touch'. The performance review by the EQS in 2000 shows that both medium and 'light-touch' schools receive, on average, approximately ten visits per year, including ones purchased by the school. The number of centrally-funded visits for successful schools is too high and should be reduced. Appropriately, the LEA is discussing the delegation of funding for LEA inspection visits, but is it clear that head teachers will wish to purchase the SSE visits because of their high standing with the schools.

56. The service is very well led with clear strategic direction and a rigorous performance management system that links outcomes in schools with the effectiveness of advisory support. There is good provision for ensuring that EQS members are kept up-to-date with national initiatives and that newcomers are inducted into the procedures of the team; eight days are allocated to meet training needs. The link inspector role in all secondary schools has been carried out to a high standard by the principal secondary inspector. This has ensured a consistently high quality of challenge to schools, but has also militated against the performance of a more strategic role by this key member of staff. Appropriately, this is being reviewed in the light of the slow progress in raising pupils' attainment and other team members are being trained for the link inspector role.

57. Challenge and intervention strategies are consistently very well applied. Support for primary and special schools is very good, while that for secondary schools is a mix of strengths and weaknesses. Overall, the moderately-sized EQS team provides good value for money.

Collection and analysis of data

58. The LEA's provision of data to primary and secondary schools is good, highly rated by schools and improving. Guidance on the use of data to set targets is good, but some schools need more help to identify the key messages from the very extensive set of data provided. Special schools have received good LEA support and examples of effective work, resulting from LEA input, were observed in schools visited.

59. The data complements that provided by national sources and is analysed by gender and socio-economic indicators. It enables schools to compare their performance against other schools in the LEA with similar pupil intakes. Primary schools can also use this data to identify and share good practice; the anonymity of subject data in the secondary school profiles militates against this sharing. The LEA is also improving the quality of value-added analyses. These are already in place for measuring progress from Key Stages 1 to 2, 2 to 3 and from Key Stage 3 to 4 and other analyses are currently being developed.

60. In all schools, the link inspector discusses targets with the headteacher, and governing bodies are increasingly involved in the process. These negotiations are challenging for headteachers and subject leaders, and have led to schools raising their expectations of what pupils can achieve. Where primary schools achieved 2000 targets in the 1999 Key Stage 2 tests, they agreed to raise their targets for

2001. The process is rigorous, but is becoming more realistic about the different prior attainment of successive cohorts, so that with small year groups year-on-year increases cannot be guaranteed. However, to be consistent with overall LEA figures, targets for the core subjects of English, mathematics and science need to be set at a higher level in secondary schools.

61. The LEA monitors data closely, knows where standards are too low or declining, and uses this knowledge to categorise schools for levels of inspectorial support as reported above. In primary schools, it is used to target intensive numeracy and literacy support that is having an impact on raising standards. The targeting of support in secondary schools based on an analysis of data has some weaknesses. Analysis by the LEA shows that pupils' progress slows in Key Stage 3 and the LEA intends to direct a greater proportion of its resources to secondary schools. The EDP, however, is vague on how this will be achieved.

Support for literacy

62. Support for literacy is good in primary and special schools. Attainment in Key Stage 2 English tests has improved since 1997 at just above the national rate. If this rate of improvement is maintained, the LEA will reach its challenging target of 80 per cent in 2002. At KS1 also, the LEA is reducing the gap between performance in Southampton and the average for schools nationally. That gap was nine per cent in 1997; in 1999, it had fallen to four per cent.

63. The Strategic Education Plan sets out the targets and key objectives to meet them. The literacy action plan is of sound quality and details the actions to meet the objectives, it is updated annually. The four main areas identified for 1999-2000 are Family Literacy Projects, National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in KS1/2, improving literacy in KS3/4 and raising the attainment of boys in English.

64. The NLS is effectively managed. Schools value the training and advice given by the literacy team; four headteachers are engaged in monitoring, and there is additional support for the literacy consultants from another headteacher. Together they form a strong team, although much remains to be done. Some schools receiving intensive support made significant progress in 1999-2000, although on average in 1998-9, the progress for the 15 schools was less than for other LEA schools. All schools submit a literacy action plan to the NLS manager. LEA monitoring revealed that many schools were not implementing these plans effectively, and the LEA provided additional guidance. In addition, there were particular weaknesses in the teaching of writing, spelling and phonics and these are receiving special attention in the current programme of support. The LEA has established a climate whereby teachers are making considerable efforts to raise pupils' standards.

65. The LEA has not been effective in raising standards in secondary schools, although there are instances of sound support to individual schools. GCSE attainment in 2000 is much as it was in 1996; the gap between boys and girls achievement remains unacceptably wide, and the LEA did not meet its Key Stage 3 or GCSE targets in 2000. Support is being improved. Two secondary schools ran

summer schools in 1999 and three in 2000, and a literacy consultant for Key Stage 3 is to be appointed.

Support for numeracy

66. Support for numeracy is good in primary and special schools, and this is reflected in pupils' progress. The attainment of pupils in end of Key Stage 2 tests, while still below national averages, has significantly improved over the last three years. In 2000, 63 per cent of pupils achieved level 4 and so the 2002 target of 75 per cent is still a challenging one.

67. The LEA numeracy project in 1998/9 has provided a focused lead and a sound foundation for the implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS). The impact was very significant at Key Stage 2 with an average increase of 22 per cent in the percentage gaining level 4 or higher in the eight project schools. In the six project schools receiving OFSTED inspections since the project, the quality of teaching of mathematics has been judged as good in five, and as sound in the sixth.

68. The support for NNS is well led and efficiently managed. Link advisers have received appropriate training to monitor in schools; five headteachers have received additional training and provide effective support too. The schools value the work of the seven leading mathematics teachers and particularly access to useful demonstration lessons in each of the year groups. The strategy manager has evaluated the impact of the NNS; appropriate use is made of the steering group. In 1998-9, fifteen schools were given intensive support, while this year the figure is 28. In some successful schools, this is not an efficient deployment of resources, particularly in the light of slow progress in the secondary schools.

69. Support for secondary schools has not been effective in raising standards. At GCSE level, the percentage of pupils gaining a higher grade has been static over the last four years and well below national averages. In 1999 and 2000, the results for Key Stage 3 mathematics were well below targets set by the LEA. Support is being enhanced. The LEA is running a transition project involving teachers of Year 6 and Year 7 pupils. The recent training for the extension of the NNS into Key Stage 3 was well received by schools.

Support for information and communication technology

70. Southampton has been ambitious and largely successful in establishing an ICT infrastructure for its schools which integrates administrative and curriculum uses. It has made good progress in the electronic transfer of information between schools and the LEA. In some aspects, particularly the provision of telephone support, it has not been able to support this rapid expansion effectively and the situation is unsatisfactory.

71. The LEA has been very successful in implementing the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). Every school was connected by February 1999, well ahead of most LEAs. The LEA did a very good job in negotiating and managing installation contracts. Support for ICT across the curriculum has strengths but also some weaknesses.

72. The LEA provides good support for NGfL and has made rapid progress in developing a communications infrastructure, recommended hardware, and good quality software chosen for its relevance to schools. All schools have ICT development plans which are updated annually and quality is assured through the NGfL steering group.

73. Training for the 'kitbag' of software supplied through NGfL is valued by the schools. Additionally, the LEA has actively and successfully provided training through the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). By the end of July 2000, 43 per cent of schools had signed up for the training, above the national average. LEA support for using ICT across the curriculum is more limited, but this has been acknowledged and the LEA has helped schools to identify effective training.

74. The LEA's knowledge of pupils' standards of attainment is limited; recent inspection reports that all standards are in line with national figures in secondary schools, but below in primary schools. However, this is in a context of under-achievement nationally.

75. The LEA supports a range of ICT functions through the ICT support in schools (ISIS) team. Schools purchase this support through a service level agreement. This SLA is very much cheaper than similar services offered by alternative suppliers. This together with some management and staffing difficulties has left ISIS under-resourced and in some areas unable to deliver a satisfactory service to schools. In particular, the telephone helpline has not been able to respond promptly or effectively to school requests for help. The LEA is addressing the problems; a consultant review of the service recommends strengthening management and staffing. An improved service may lead to higher costs for schools.

Support for schools causing concern

76. Currently, one primary school is in special measures. Two secondary schools and a PRU are designated as having serious weaknesses. Additionally, 14 schools are given intensive support, including one school identified by OFSTED as under-achieving. Given that this is almost one quarter of the city's schools, receiving a high allocation of resources, it receives inadequate attention in the EDP. As a consequence, a few headteachers are unclear about the level of support to which they are entitled.

77. In practice, procedures for supporting schools have evolved and are now good. The LEA has a comprehensive knowledge of its schools through monitoring, and this is used to identify schools potentially causing concern. In such circumstances, the headteacher and chair of governors are notified of the LEA's concerns and given a clear written explanation as to the causes for that concern. A task group is then convened and meets at least termly. This group oversees the production and implementation of an LEA action plan. Those for schools in special measures are models of good practice. The current process is a very rigorous and challenging one involving close collaboration between the school, the education officer who coordinates cross service support, and the link inspector. The format is the same for the more serious categories, but the task group has a wider composition, for

instance, pupil services or personnel, if appropriate. The task group is responsible for identifying what support the schools need and this contributes to appropriate targeting of resources by the LEA.

78. Each half-term, all schools are reviewed by the schools monitoring group comprising senior officers and inspectors. In addition, there is appropriate monitoring by a sub-group of elected members who receive a termly confidential update on progress made by each school receiving intensive support. Annual evaluations, however, are not sufficiently focussed because of weaknesses in the initial planning for schools causing concern and do not, for instance, include the length of time that a school remains in intensive support.

79. Support to schools is effective now, but was less so in the first two years. For instance, a school that went into special measures in 1999 received a good package of support; targeted Standards Fund money, intensive support for numeracy and literacy, seconded headteacher and behavioural support. This school improved rapidly and emerged from special measures in 16 months. However, four schools, a pupil referral unit and an early years centre have been receiving intensive support for over three years. In the first two years, the LEA gave intensive support to two schools that subsequently went into special measures. The LEA has been willing to adapt and continually improve its support.

Support for governors

80. The governor support service has established itself as an effective and responsive service, particularly since it took full responsibility for training and clerking in April 1999. Previously, these governor support services had been purchased from the former county authority. Schools rate governor support as being good and this has been affirmed by interviews and school visits during the course of the inspection. The service oversees statutory work and schools can also purchase services through two types of Service Level Agreement (SLA); one for governor training with differentiated levels of access, and one for the clerking service. An appropriate mix of governor training is provided and course evaluations are positive; in particular training for individual governing bodies is well regarded.

81. The number of unfilled governor vacancies is quite high, particularly for LEA governors. Strenuous efforts including bus advertisements, posters and displays have been made to recruit more governors. The LEA has a very thorough appointment process for LEA governors and has been successful in making 153 appointments in the past year, thereby reducing the number of LEA vacancies to 17 per cent. To date, there has been little targeting of minority ethnic groups in order to recruit governors who are fully representative of their local school community.

82. Service planning is sound and is based on an audit of needs and effective liaison with other services, in particular, the education quality service (EQS). A service priority is to improve the effectiveness of governing bodies, particularly through the development of supported self evaluation. Development work this year has included a pilot project involving five governing bodies. Further targeted support to governors of schools causing concern is a positive feature of the LEA's work. Although the LEA has not used its powers to appoint additional governors in schools

requiring special measures or with serious weaknesses, in most of these schools where governance was a weakness, the LEA has been effective in filling any vacancies with high calibre governors.

83. There are effective procedures for communication and consultation with governors. Senior elected members and officers meet on a termly basis with chairs of governing bodies and these meetings are seen as valuable opportunities to discuss relevant issues and matters of policy. An independent governors' forum also meets on a termly basis to discuss matters relating to school governance and LEA services, and is attended by senior officers and elected members.

Support for school management

84. Support for school management is good, and is successfully improving the expertise of headteachers and senior managers to evaluate their own schools and establish a clear focus on improving standards.

85. The main elements for support are through the quality of data provided to the school, the supported self-evaluation process, and the consistently high quality of link inspector support. The latter is a success story for the LEA. As reported in Section 2, all schools receive three visits. The process is rigorous and productive. Each school prepares a self-assessment, including a summary of actions taken and key results, and a comparison with targets as appropriate. From this analysis, the school identifies its strengths and weaknesses. This then forms an essential part of the agenda for the LEA visit. There is a written report by the LEA including confirming any targets agreed. Evidence from school visits shows that the SSE is a very thorough process with a strong element of challenge, but underpinned by support where necessary. It has led to improved school development planning in schools and several examples were noted where subsequent action has led to a rise in pupils' standards. The success of the initiative means that some schools have reached a position of autonomy such that they do not need the termly visits.

86. Recently appointed headteachers have received sound support. All new headteachers select a mentor, but the lack of a documented induction programme means that an introduction to key LEA strategies, such as the inclusion policy, is occasionally omitted. Senior staff who have participated in headteachers' and deputy headteachers' conferences and development programmes rate them highly. Support for middle managers is also sound. There are network meetings for primary and secondary middle managers, serviced by the LEA. In addition, there are management courses aimed at these groups. The latter are valued, but a lack of accredited programmes offered by higher education institutions increases the pressure on scarce EQS resources.

87. Given its small size, the LEA provides a reasonable range of courses. A complementary strategy has been to provide schools with information about training by alternative providers, and this is valued by schools. A consequence of a 'lean' EQS is that the LEA has not always had the resources to target under-achieving subject departments in secondary schools. There is sound support for schools in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning.

88. The LEA gives sound support to governing bodies for the appointment of heads and deputy heads. However, the recruitment and retention of teachers, including headteachers, are major issues for the LEA. In two schools visited inability to appoint appropriate staff had depressed standards, but it is an issue for most secondary schools, in particular. The LEA has been slow to adopt a co-ordinated response, but has recently formed a working group. Support for newly qualified teachers is sound.

Support for early years

89. The support for early years is satisfactory and improving. The LEA's strategy is clearly set out in the Early Years Development and Childcare plan and is based on a thorough audit of local needs, together with an extensive consultation with parents, carers and providers in the maintained, voluntary and private sectors. Provision is in place for all three and four year olds whose parents want it. Membership of the partnership comprises representatives of the full range of providers as well as officers from education and social services, and elected members. Partnership working is effective and consultation is maintained through a structure of partnership working groups.

90. Pre-school liaison groups involving all infant and primary schools and pre-school providers have been established to secure good quality pre-school education and to ensure effective liaison with the partnership. Pre-school play groups have been established in primary schools as part of the LEA's strategy to remove surplus places. Good examples were seen of effective liaison between playgroups, schools and LEA services to ensure that the special educational needs of pre-school children were being addressed at an early stage.

91. The LEA is making a positive contribution to raising standards in early years settings through the establishment of its quality and training strategy. Central to this strategy is the development of the early years centre (Start Point Schooling) as a model of good practice. A key target is to establish a supported self evaluation scheme for all early years settings. This work will be overseen by the early years and childcare management team and will complement the supported self evaluation scheme currently used within schools. All of the 40 early years settings inspected by OFSTED to date were judged to be satisfactory, with three quarters judged to be good. All reports are monitored and follow-up support provided, including assistance with the preparation of post OFSTED action plans.

Other areas

92. Support for gifted and talented pupils is now being put in place. An inspector has been allocated overall responsibility, a teacher has a co-ordinating role and a steering group has been established. A draft plan identifies actions, persons responsible and has provisional timescales, but as yet there are no success criteria, or monitoring and evaluation procedures. The new strategy is not incorporated into the revised EDP.

93. The LEA does not have any specialist schools, but three schools are currently considering bids and are being supported by the LEA. The LEA is providing good

opportunities and support for talented musicians to develop their talents further; for instance the youth orchestra has earned a high reputation for the quality of its performances.

Recommendations

In order to improve LEA support for school improvement:

- review procedures for the recruitment and retention of teachers and headteachers;
- improve the support for numeracy and literacy in secondary schools;
- reduce support to 'light touch' schools;
- Improve support for ICT, in particular the telephone helpline, and in consultation with schools, review the service level agreement to ensure that the service is correctly priced;
- accelerate the appointment of suitable, high calibre governors, particularly for schools causing concern; and
- develop strategies for the recruitment of governors from minority ethnic groups.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

94. Southampton Council has a clear, ambitious and imaginative vision for the future of the city which is set out in 'The Renaissance of the City', a collection of city strategy working papers. The city has espoused a culture of continuous improvement expressed through the commitment 'what we do, we shall do well'. The city performance plan translates the vision into intended action and performance, and incorporates appropriate objectives and performance targets. These two documents are well aligned and education features centrally in both.

95. The next stage of the planning process involves the production of annual commissioning plans to which resources are allocated, followed by the production of service improvement plans, showing how performance targets and the outcomes sought by commissioning plans are to be achieved. This process for translating the objectives and targets into costed action to be undertaken by education services is complex and compartmentalised, lacks transparency and overlaps with service planning, resulting in duplication. The narrow service by service focus provides a poor basis for partnership working. Commissioning plans are not fully aligned with city strategy papers. Hence it is very difficult to see how the vision is to be turned into action on the ground.

96. The weaknesses and anomalies in planning identified above militate against effective corporate performance management. Reporting of achievement is currently on the basis of city strategy themes. This cannot, for instance, quantify the relationship between costs and results and does not constitute an adequate or effective performance management system. Within education, however, performance management is good. There is a very effective system of service reviews, operating within the management partnership structures.

97. Corporate financial planning is on an annual basis and is not well integrated with service planning. On occasion, this constrains education. For instance, education services would be in a position to draw up a five year education building plan now that the Asset Management Plan has been completed, were the council not on an annual budget planning cycle. The relationship between corporate strategic priorities and resource allocation is weak, and the current budget strategy process is a historical one which in essence maintains existing patterns of expenditure with some slight amendment. In education, the arrangements are different. Policy review is a robust process by which the key priorities of the work of the service are challenged, expenditure is classified as priority or discretionary and managers and headteachers jointly are presented with options for change. This system is transparent, rigorous and effective. It ensures all-round ownership of financial decisions. Increasingly, it is being adopted by other parts of the Council.

98. Since its inception three years ago, the unitary Council has moved rapidly and effectively to deal with issues inherited at LGR. Within education, for instance, school places and buildings issues have been tackled systematically. Decision making is clear and, since the changes following last May's election, necessarily more consensual. Arrangements for consultation are good at all levels, and very

good within education, where management partnership group arrangements ensure that schools and headteachers are equal partners in decision making. This partnership has enabled the authority openly to debate such difficult issues as inclusion. Citizens panel arrangements are a long standing feature of the Council as a whole. Although internal communication is generally sound at the strategic level, there are on occasion serious problems relating to communication with social services at the operational level.

99. The quality of political leadership at the top of the Council is exceptional. It is open, accessible, informed and highly capable. The leader draws plaudits from across the spectrum, with good cause. A long standing school governor, she is well known in schools across the city and makes it her business to know well what is going on in all aspects of education. Nonetheless, there are clear and appropriate dividing lines between the roles and responsibilities of officers and members. Arrangements for briefing members are a particular strength, with routine briefings preceding committee meetings and customised briefings available to members on demand and widely used. The new political arrangements have led to an increase in demand for face to face briefings which is being well met. Papers and reports to members are intelligible and relevant.

100. The Council enjoys fruitful relationships with the diocesan authorities and the unions and productive partnerships with the local Chamber of Commerce, Project Headstart and Southampton City College on education business partnership and the development of the work related curriculum. It shares a curriculum centre with the university and both the executive director and members of the education senior management team teach on higher education courses. There is some effective joint working with the police at school level, but only limited progress has been made on issues that run across functional delivery within the Council.

101. There have been difficulties in setting up effective lifelong learning partnership arrangements. Southampton pre-empted government moves by setting up its own Lifelong Learning Alliance in 1998. Central government then ordained the general creation of such partnerships, but the Southampton one was to be within different boundaries. Further difficulties arose from factional differences. Although the city was at the cutting edge of national thinking initially, development on the ground has not kept pace. Evidence of lifelong learning initiatives impacting on schools is very limited, although the community schools do acknowledge some impact on parental expectations and parental support for schools.

102. The operational partnership between social services and schools is not working satisfactorily. In July, a conference was set up by primary headteachers to try and improve the links and five new Educare liaison groups were created. There is, however, no evidence of things getting better and considerable evidence of schools struggling to secure effective joint working with social services on difficult issues.

103. Regeneration is a key priority for the city. The Southampton Community Regeneration Alliance pulls together key players including the executive director for education, and has produced a Community Regeneration Plan which is set within the context of the city strategy. 'Increasing access to training, learning and education for

all' is one of the seven key objectives within the plan. SRB 2, the first major regeneration programme in the city, included education only marginally but the new SRB6 and New Deal for Communities programmes feature it as central elements. SRB 6 will create Learning Hubs based on secondary schools with satellites in primary schools and other key locations. The education project officer developing the New Deal for Communities delivery plan is a seconded headteacher whose preliminary diagnostic work looks very promising. There is now strong partnership with education on these initiatives.

104. Overall, the picture on partnership and cross cutting approaches is a very mixed one. The existing arrangements for strategic planning and management are not yet such as to guarantee delivery of the Council's strategic vision for joined up local government in the city.

Management services

105. Southampton offers a full range of services to schools. Service level agreements (SLAs) are clear. For some services the range of options is structured inflexibly. Core services are priced at the same level as the funding delegated to schools for that purpose. Several services are offered on an 'insurance' basis so that schools receive the level of service they need at a particular time rather than a specified quantity. The majority of schools are comfortable with this arrangement and believe that any additional costs are more than matched by the security of knowing that if they need support it will be available to them. However, it militates against individual schools ensuring they plan for Best Value.

106. The LEA provides good financial support services to schools. The SLA covers financial management support; payroll, creditors and debtor services; banking and the provision of financial management software, including effective support and training. Five service options are available, but none of them allows schools to make their own arrangements for payroll, but purchase the rest of the package. Schools rate these services as good.

107. At the end of the 1998/99 financial year, 55 per cent of primary schools and 50 per cent of special schools had surplus balances greater than 5 per cent. The LEA has good procedures in place to follow this up and schools are required to explain how they plan to spend any surplus. Rigorous arrangements are in place to help the small number of schools with deficit budgets to prepare recovery plans and to monitor their implementation.

108. The staff of the education finance section are part of the corporate finance team, and ultimately report to the head of finance services. They are physically located and operationally integrated in education services reporting for day to day work programming to the head of policy and planning. This ensures effective day to day links between the education department and the corporate centre. Arrangements for internal audit are sound. The section produces some financial benchmarking data to enable schools to compare expenditure patterns with like schools. This could usefully be extended to allow schools to compare costs and funding levels as part of an approach to Best Value.

109. Personnel support to schools is excellent. The LEA provides a comprehensive manual of policies and procedures. Schools receive sensitive, effective casework support when dealing with complex issues, including competency, long-term sickness and school re-organisations.

110. Client support for cleaning and caretaking is very good. The majority of schools employ their own cleaners, others have their own agreement with contractors or continue with the city contract. All these different arrangements are effectively supported.

111. Grounds maintenance provision is satisfactory. Occasionally schools need to follow up contractors when work is not carried out according to the specification and the response to this is usually prompt. The LEA is re-structuring the management of grounds maintenance services in order to improve responsiveness and service quality.

112. The building repair and maintenance service provided through building design services (BDS) is very good. Emergency repairs are carried out promptly, often on the same day they are reported. Longer term work is managed effectively. The LEA operates a successful scheme for schools to pool delegated revenue funding for repairs and maintenance. This ensures that funds will be available should an emergency occur for any scheme member. The LEA reports back to schools on how this fund is used.

113. The school meals service is generally good and is well managed. The LEA recognises the contribution that good quality meals make to social inclusion. Funding for meals is delegated and nearly all schools buy the service from the city Council.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management:

- simplify corporate planning procedures to ensure greater transparency, eliminate duplication and provide a better basis for joint working;
- to enhance implementation of the city strategy and ensure better integration between service and financial planning, move towards medium term financial planning; and
- as a matter of urgency, improve operational links between schools and social services.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

114. The LEA has a clear and effective strategy for special educational needs (SEN) based on three major principles. The first is extending inclusion, so that the needs of pupils with SEN are met in mainstream schools wherever possible. The second principle is to extend provision within the LEA, and thereby reduce the number of pupils for whom placement outside the LEA is necessary. The third principle is to devolve funding to schools so that they are able to meet the needs of pupils with SEN within school, rather than using statutory assessment and the demands on resources of time and personnel that this incurs. These principles are well known and are supported by schools. The consultation on the review of SEN provision in the LEA has been wide-ranging, involving schools, governors, parents, members and other key partners. The LEA is now working on the third phase of the review towards a longer term strategy for future provision.

115. The LEA has already made significant progress in the implementation of all three principles of the strategy. The provision of a range of effective support to schools, including the development of outreach services from special schools, particularly for pupils with behaviour difficulties, has enabled a significant number of pupils to be supported in mainstream schools. The development of resourced units located in mainstream schools, together with other forms of support, has made possible a significant reduction in the number of placements of pupils with SEN outside the LEA; this number continues to fall. This reduction, combined with funding devolved to mainstream schools, has enabled additional resources to be provided to schools so that they are able to meet effectively the needs of pupils within the school. As a consequence, the number of requests for statutory assessment has reduced and educational psychologists and SEN officers spend less time on statutory assessment work. This in turn has enabled more time to be released for pro-active work by educational psychologists, greater effectiveness in the management of casework and an increase in attendance at annual and transitional reviews by officers in the SEN section, where schools feel this is appropriate.

Statutory obligations

116. The LEA is effective in meeting its statutory obligations. Cases of statutory assessment leading to the issuing of a proposed statement of SEN are completed within the eighteen week period required by the SEN Code of Practice in almost all instances. Where there are delays, these fall within the allowed exceptions and are due in a few cases to parents missing appointments with health services or, in the majority, to delays in obtaining advice from the social services department. In these cases, the appropriate procedures are followed in notifying parents and others that the case will be an exception. Samples of casework files indicate that cases are dealt with thoroughly, speedily and sensitively by officers in the SEN Section. There are very few appeals to the SEN tribunal as a result of this good casework, and none have been decided against the LEA. Information to parents is clear and written in appropriate language. The LEA places a high priority on effective working with parents and other involved agencies.

Improvement and value for money

117. The various forms of support to pupils with SEN operated by the LEA are contributing effectively to the improvement of standards in schools for pupils with SEN. LEA support for SEN was judged to be satisfactory or better in all of the schools visited during the inspection and good in one third. Educational psychologists provide very good support which is highly regarded by schools; in particular, their work to improve emotional literacy in schools. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) are well supported through the SEN panels and the work of the SEN advisers. The outreach provision offered by special schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) is highly valued by mainstream schools, although within the primary sector there are concerns about whether the level of provision is sufficient to meet the needs of schools. The SEN support services are effective in meeting the needs of most children. However, in a minority of cases, some schools find it difficult to recruit the necessary specialist expertise.

118. The LEA delegates a high proportion of funding for SEN through a formula. Each school undertakes an audit of need and funds are then allocated. The audit is time consuming but leads to funding allocations that are fair and are seen as such by schools. The LEA has recently piloted a thorough but time consuming monitoring of how SEN funds are spent through visits by the SEN inspector. This monitoring of the resources provided to school for pupils with SEN and for those spent centrally by the LEA ensures that the LEA provides good value for money. There is less clarity however, regarding the accessing of discretionary exception funding and how schools qualify for this additional funding. The LEA has been instrumental in developing local services for autistic pupils on behalf of a group of LEAs and these provide both an effective service to these pupils and their parents and good value for money.

Recommendations

In order to improve the management of SEN:

- continue to pursue with the social services department ways of reducing delays in the completion of statutory assessments with exceptions within the eighteen week target period;
- produce for schools a comprehensive directory of the support currently available for pupils with SEN, including contact and referral points; and
- supply regular reports to LEA and governors showing how schools have used SEN funds to discharge their responsibilities and raise standards.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

School places

119. Southampton inherited problems with school places which it is addressing effectively. In 1994, the age of transfer to secondary school was changed from 12 to 11. At the same time, middle schools were re-designated junior schools, and first schools infant schools. The overall consequence of this is that the city has a surplus of places in the primary phase and a shortage, particularly in the east of the city, of secondary places.

120. The LEA has developed sensitive and appropriate policies to remove places in the primary sector. It has taken out 1193 primary places by various means, including removing temporary buildings and re-assigning accommodation for alternative uses, such as pre-school learning, community education and SEN. When this is likely to raise standards, it merges infant and junior schools into all-through primary schools. Since 1997, mergers have been successfully carried through. In the secondary phase, 225 permanent and 690 temporary places have been added at six different schools. The temporary places will be removed when further planned permanent accommodation is completed. Three secondary schools are to be completely rebuilt under the Private Finance Initiative with 710 places added in two of the schools as part of the programme.

121. The school organisation committee agreed the 2000/01 revision of the school organisation plan in September. The LEA has successfully prepared and implemented a plan to ensure that infant classes have fewer than 30 pupils; the target was achieved for September 2000.

Admissions

122. The LEA meets statutory requirements in relation to admissions to school and administers them well. Admissions criteria for all schools are based on catchment areas and the LEA has rightly decided to review catchment areas where there are stresses in the system. Children are admitted to infant or primary school in the September of the year in which they become five. Some start on a part-time basis, but the whole year group has been in full-time education since January. Primary school admissions are administered locally in schools.

123. Transfer from infant to junior school is mostly straightforward, but because there are more infant schools than junior schools there are some complications. There are cases where children will change infant school during Key Stage 1 in order to enhance their prospects of securing places at a popular junior school. This causes financial and planning difficulties for the infant schools concerned.

124. Secondary school admissions are efficiently administered by the central LEA team. Appeals during the annual admission round are relatively few and largely concluded by Easter, which allows plenty of time for schools and children to prepare for the transfer. Voluntary aided schools manage their own admissions; liaison with the LEA is effective.

Asset Management Plan

125. The school buildings stock that Southampton took over at LGR in 1997 included some buildings in a very poor state of repair. The LEA has improved the situation and has enhanced spending on school buildings. It has been successful in attracting funds under the New Deal for Schools and has made effective use of them to improve the condition of school buildings.

126. The Asset Management Plan (AMP) is very good. Condition surveys have been completed and the results shared with schools. The LEA has compiled a composite priority list of building work, which has also been shared with schools and extensively discussed. As a result, schools are confident that the programme of work set out by the LEA does fairly address the needs of schools.

127. Suitability surveys have been done by schools, buildings officers and curriculum advisers working together. Again, this has produced outcomes that are credible and consistent. Officers of the LEA meet with heads and governors in each school annually to review the school's AMP and to agree priorities for the year. This provides a good basis for aligning expenditure of delegated and centrally managed funds. In future, the LEA should ensure that the diocese is invited to these meetings when they concern church schools.

Provision for education otherwise than at school

128. Provision for pupils educated out of school is good. The LEA has a clear strategy for providing alternative provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school. Since September 2000, all Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils have access to full-time provision, one year ahead of the Government's requirement that they do so. The reorganisation of the city's pupil referral units (PRUs) and the LEA's pupil support service (PSS) into a single unified service will enable the LEA to secure this pupil entitlement to education. This centralised provision also incorporates the LEA's former support for pregnant schoolgirls and teenage mothers, school phobics, school refusers and pupils with medical needs who may still be able to access some education. Home tuition is no longer provided and all pupils not on a school roll are placed on the roll of the city PRU provision and are dual registered. Pupils, their parents and the school are all party to an intervention agreement with the aim of establishing a date for return to school. Full-time packages which combine core national curriculum subjects, personal, social and health education (PHSE) and various opportunities for work related learning and work experience are offered to pupils. Each pupil is assigned a caseworker teacher who monitors their progress and liaises with the relevant agencies.

129. Referral for alternative provision will be through the LEA's pupil placement panel which is due shortly to be established. There are clear procedures and the work of the panel will cover the placement of excluded and hard to place pupils and the allocation of PSS support for pupils at risk of exclusion and who have pastoral support programmes, some of which may involve school-based support and/or off-site support. For primary pupils, support may involve a behaviour support teacher or additional learning support. The work of the pupil placement panel is overseen by a larger policy and monitoring group whose membership includes headteachers,

officers and representatives from other agencies such as social services, health and the youth offending team. The LEA monitors carefully the numbers and progress of pupils currently receiving alternative provision.

130. There are currently 22 children being educated at home through parental choice. Education services provide clear and appropriate guidance to parents and undertake annual visits to ensure that the education provided at home is efficient and suitable.

Attendance

131. LEA support for attendance is improving, but remains unsatisfactory overall. The education welfare service (EWS) has been subject to a thorough review, and policies and procedures have been overhauled. Staff shortages and the associated lack of continuity have created difficulties for schools. The service now has a full complement of staff and some schools are beginning to see signs of improvement. However, of the 17 schools visited during the inspection, support for attendance was judged to be unsatisfactory in five of them.

132. Attendance in Southampton is in line with the national average in secondary schools, but is below average in terms of its overall level and the rate of unauthorised absence in primary schools. Appropriate targets for a reduction in the rate of unauthorised absence have been set in the LEA's School Improvement Plan (SIP) but they are not supported by an action plan within the SIP, detailing how these targets will be achieved. In view of the above average unauthorised absence in primary schools, this omission is an error.

133. Primary schools with lower levels of attendance, and those in the LEA's intensive category for support, receive additional time from the education welfare officer (EWO), but overall the targeting of resources to need is unsatisfactory. Evidence from school visits indicates a lack of clarity and understanding about resource levels on the part of some primary schools. The contact level agreement currently used in primary schools does not define the different levels of support which a school can expect, nor have any targets for improvement been agreed as a result of this additional support.

134. In most cases, support for secondary schools is better targeted and Social Inclusion funding (Standards Fund 19) has been deployed to good effect, bringing together multi-disciplinary teams, including EWOs, to deliver intensive support to pupils at risk of exclusion. Multi-agency work is a strong feature of the service and is valued by the schools involved, particularly in the individual case conferences known as education planning meetings. These meetings take place for pupils where earlier intervention by the EWO has not resulted in the necessary improvement and may, in some cases, result in legal action. There were twelve prosecutions in the previous year, nine of which were successful. The LEA uses its legal powers appropriately.

135. The recently produced professional practice manual for the EWS is comprehensive and provides greater clarity and guidance on how schools and the service can work together to improve the levels of attendance across the city. Costs of the service are in line with other unitary authorities but slightly above the national

average. Currently the service provides unsatisfactory value for money. The LEA is aware of the weaknesses in the service and has done much already to address them. The further consultation with schools on the management and functioning of the EWS, the filling of staff vacancies and the recently revised policies and procedures will go a long way to addressing these weaknesses.

Behaviour support

136. Support for improving pupils' behaviour at school is good. From the outset of the new authority, the LEA has worked closely with schools to reduce the number of permanent exclusions and to improve the quality of support for pupils with challenging behaviour. The LEA has been very successful in reducing the previously high level of permanent exclusions. The LEA target for reducing exclusions has been exceeded in each of the last two years. The number of exclusions in 1999/2000 is 23, well below the target figure of 39. The strategy has been a bold and radical one. Changes in the LEA's approach were necessary but these reductions have not been achieved without some cost to the schools.

137. The LEA's Behaviour Support Plan is very good and provides a clear strategic framework, linked to practical advice for schools, officers and service staff. The LEA's pupil support service (PSS) has been subject to a radical restructuring following a detailed consultation with schools. Since September 2000, a school support team has been established, additional staff have been appointed, an intensive training programme has taken place and there is a much stronger focus on curriculum quality and pupil attainment. The work of the service is now to be commissioned through a central pupil placement panel which includes headteachers and officers. To date, most of the work of the PSS focuses on the needs of secondary schools where the successful 'Promoting Pupil Inclusion Project' has been running for the past three years. This year, schools have been offered a package from across a range of LEA services, including the youth service. Thirteen of the fourteen secondary schools have opted to buy into this package of support. However, the LEA is also very aware of the need to provide support for the increasing number of primary age pupils with behaviour difficulties. Although the outreach service for EBD pupils provided currently by a local special school is highly regarded, there are serious concerns that the level of resource is insufficient. Consequently, this term a seconded primary headteacher is working with primary schools in order to undertake further consultation on action to respond to their support needs.

138. Another important strand of the LEA's strategy to promote social inclusion is the strategic priority to develop emotional literacy, defined as the 'ability to recognise, understand, handle and appropriately express emotions'. This innovative project was initiated jointly by the education psychology service (EPS) and the EQS in 1998. Over 60 anger management groups for pupils at risk of exclusion have now been run in schools across the city, and there are projects designed to promote pupil self esteem and the associated staff training, all supported by the EPS. This work is highly valued by the project schools and is contributing to improved levels of behaviour management in schools. In addition, the modular training on behaviour management which the EPS runs is also highly regarded by schools.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

139. The LEA takes the issue of health and safety very seriously and has comprehensive policies. Policy advice to schools is good. There are well established child protection procedures which reflect the joint arrangements agreed with the Hampshire and Portsmouth Child Protection Committees. A designated senior officer is responsible for the oversight of child protection and attends the multi-agency Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC). LEA support for child protection is rated highly by schools. Each school has a designated Child Protection Liaison Officer (CPLO) and the local programme of training and support is judged by schools to be very effective. However, links between schools and social services in this area are poor. Evidence from visits to schools during the inspection indicates high levels of frustration and in some instances, reported cases of serious delays or inadequate responses from social services.

Children in public care

140. Provision for children in public care is good. The education and well-being of children in public care is a high priority in Southampton where the responsibilities of the corporate parenting role are taken very seriously by elected members and senior officers. Within the city there are 383 children and young people in public care, 270 being of school age. This is a high figure and represents 0.86 per cent of the total school population, compared with 0.44 per cent nationally. In 1999, 29 per cent of the children in public care held a statement of special educational needs as opposed to 2.5 per cent of the general school population. Within the education service there are five designated link workers representing the key services, including an educational psychologist with the lead responsibility.

141. Following local government reorganisation in 1997, the Council inherited a social services education team (SSET). The team consists of two qualified teachers who liaise between education and social services in order to gather and maintain reliable data on the progress of children in public care, to support them and to advocate on their behalf. Whilst a common electronic database has not yet been established, a database of all children in public care, including details of the education provider, is regularly maintained by the SSET, together with automatic notification to the education service of any additional children. The infrastructure for effective cross service working is well established. However, despite this good provision, it has been reported that there are occasions when social services fail to keep schools informed of changes in the care arrangements for some children in public care.

142. A looked-after children in education (LACE) group has been established to take the lead on the development of policy and good practice in order to improve the educational attainment of children in public care. The group's remit has been extended to 'children in need' (as defined by the Children Act) in recognition of the fact that many children will move in and out of the category of 'looked after' and in order to provide greater continuity of support. This group includes representatives from the education and social services, schools and the voluntary sector and is chaired by the head of children's and young people's services in education. The group monitors attainment at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 in relation to the targets

which have been set. Current work also includes the maintenance of the network of designated teachers and the development of a toolkit of support materials for use in schools. The LEA has used the maximum funding available under the Standards Fund to allocate funds to schools supporting this work; £900 per secondary and £500 per primary and special school.

143. This year, 60 per cent of children in public care attained a GCSE qualification, as opposed to the target set of 75 per cent. This compares with the national average of 37 per cent and is the fourth highest percentage in the country. However, the city did achieve its Quality Protects target of no permanent exclusions of children in public care. Further targeted work is underway this year to raise attainment. The LACE group has developed a raising achievement plan for consultation with schools and all Year 10 and 11 children with particular learning needs will be offered additional support to maximise their chances of success. Overall, the LEA support for children in public care is good and provides good value for money.

Ethnic minority children

144. Support for ethnic minority children is satisfactory, with a number of good features and some weaknesses. Southampton ethnic minority achievement support service (SEMASS) has come a long way in a short time. Following a well planned and thorough review and extended consultation between May 1999 and Feb 2000 it was reorganised into its present shape. The review rightly identified the need to support schools in tackling English as an additional language (EAL) issues themselves and in focusing on minority ethnic achievement. Funds were then delegated to schools according to an agreed and appropriate formula and most appointed ethnic minority achievement co-ordinators. Most schools have also bought back into SEMASS for a range of support.

145. The SEMASS team of 14 teaching staff and 36 bilingual assistants is flexibly deployed to schools with only the co-ordinator and an administrator based centrally. Teaching staff and bilingual assistants deliver carefully planned partnership teaching in schools and support the delivery of the literacy and numeracy strategies for bilingual pupils. SEMASS staff also deliver training, including some for newly qualified teachers, work with schools on race equality issues, and carry out home school liaison work. A useful aspect of this work has involved targeting support to the Bangladeshi community and working with families and community leaders on absenteeism, extended visits to the sub continent in term time and staying on post 16, particularly for girls. The good integration of SEMASS into EQS facilitates effective joint working on literacy, numeracy and minority ethnic achievement.

146. Southampton schools have admitted 55 refugee or asylum seeker children in the last year. SEMASS has a small New Arrivals contingency fund which is activated by the arrival in school of an eligible child. Within three days, SEMASS will deliver some support, usually in the form of a bilingual assistant. Evidence of the effective working of this arrangement was gathered on some school visits. Having previously bought into Hampshire arrangements for the support of Traveller children, Southampton recently decided to end this arrangement and align support for Traveller children more closely with other ethnic minority support. Since then a

SEMASS member of staff has been involved in preliminary needs analysis, fact finding and liaison with the relevant person in the social cohesion team.

147. The service works hard at the training and accreditation of its own staff and, in association with the university, has created a pathway for bilingual assistants to progress towards qualified teacher status. The first of these internal graduates is now teaching in a Southampton school. Quality assurance is bought in from the Hampshire inspector for multi-cultural education who monitors the work in schools and produces an action plan. This is noted and acted upon. In addition, the service manager carries out annual work reviews with all staff and produces an annual review.

148. The service is now well placed to further develop its analysis of under achievement, which is not yet sharp or rigorous enough. Once that is done, it will be able to focus its efforts more precisely on the development of particular strategies to counter underachievement.

149. In the main, schools value the work of SEMASS. In the school survey it was rated as fairly good in both phases and visits to schools confirmed these judgements. A few schools have exercised their right to go elsewhere for some support and only buy in to selected services from SEMASS.

Social exclusion and action against racism

150. Southampton City Council takes social exclusion seriously. It has established a social cohesion team with a cross cutting function within the Chief Executive's office. The team's work has contributed to the LEA's strategy and actions on disaffected young people for instance, through research into the causes for their disaffection. An officer within the team leads corporately on race issues and links closely with education. A multi-agency group on racial harassment, incorporating the police, meets regularly. Corporate moves to respond to the Macpherson report inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence were swift and appropriate, culminating in a second big public meeting in March 2000. Corporate procedures are in place and work is now going on at departmental levels to implement recommendations.

151. Education has had a policy and guidelines for combating racial harassment since 1991, (adopted from Hampshire) revised in 1995. The sensible and sensitive newly revised policy and procedures are being launched this month. SEMASS and ethnic minority coordinators in schools are working together with the social cohesion officer, training whole school staffs on dealing with racist incidents and helping them to develop school policies. The LEA is doing all that it should be doing, promptly, thoughtfully and in its usual consultative mode.

152. A caveat here concerns the small and fragmented minority ethnic communities of Southampton. These have not been well served in the past by representative bodies and the view was expressed to the inspection team that neither the Council nor the education authority sought or listened to their views. This perception needs to be addressed, so that the good work being done by officers is understood and underpinned by regular communication with the communities.

Music Service

153. Southampton Music Services bid successfully for Standards Fund social inclusion money. Opportunity and excellence are their twin goals and in line with these, they have developed a number of very successful initiatives. In special schools, they have supplied music specialists and, inter alia, developed a special schools brass band. They have invested in World Music so that they are able for instance to supply specialist instruments and an Asian music teacher to the Bhangra band based at Maytree Nursery and Infant School. Youth jazz groups and rock bands have engaged the interest of disaffected youngsters. The orchestras and bands have been successful enough to tour China and other countries.

Recommendations

In order to improve aims to education:

- investigate further ways of ensuring that agreed liaison procedures for child protection are implemented fully and without delay at an operational level by social services;
- develop further the analysis of minority ethnic under achievement and devise sharply targeted strategies to counter it;
- review the provision of infant and junior school places and related transfer arrangements in those areas of the city where the number of infant schools exceeds junior schools;
- ensure that representatives of the dioceses are invited to relevant annual Asset Management Plan meetings; and
- establish a forum for regular communication and consultation with ethnic minority communities.

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 1

In order to improve the LEA strategy for school improvement:

- rationalise and improve planning for the Education Development Plan and discontinue the dual production of School Improvement Plan and the Strategic Education Plan; and
- improve corporate performance management systems; and
- revise the process for negotiating service level agreements between corporate departments and service departments to ensure service departments obtain Best Value.

Section 2

In order to improve LEA support for school improvement:

- review procedures for the recruitment and retention of teachers and headteachers;
- improve the support for numeracy and literacy in secondary schools;
- reduce support to 'light touch' schools;
- Improve support for ICT, in particular the telephone helpline, and in consultation with schools, review the service level agreement to ensure that the service is correctly priced;
- accelerate the appointment of suitable, high calibre governors, particularly for schools causing concern; and
- develop strategies for the recruitment of governors from minority ethnic groups.

Section 3

In order to improve strategic management:

- simplify corporate planning procedures to ensure greater transparency, eliminate duplication and provide a better basis for joint working;

- to enhance implementation of the city strategy and ensure better integration between service and financial planning, move towards medium term financial planning; and
- as a matter of urgency, improve operational links between schools and social services.

Section 4

In order to improve the management of SEN:

- continue to pursue with the social services department ways of reducing delays in the completion of statutory assessments with exceptions within the eighteen week target period;
- produce for schools a comprehensive directory of the support currently available for pupils with SEN, including contact and referral points; and
- supply regular reports to LEA and governors showing how schools have used SEN funds to discharge their responsibilities and raise standards.

Section 5

In order to improve aims to education:

- investigate further ways of ensuring that agreed liaison procedures for child protection are implemented fully and without delay at an operational level by social services;
- develop further the analysis of minority ethnic under achievement and devise sharply targeted strategies to counter it;
- review the provision of infant and junior school places and related transfer arrangements in those areas of the city where the number of infant schools exceeds junior schools;
- ensure that representatives of the dioceses are invited to relevant annual asset management plan meetings; and
- establish a forum for regular communication and consultation with ethnic minority communities.

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