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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
SEFTON
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997 and Section 10 of the 1999 Local Government Act. The inspection used *The Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (July 1999)* which focuses on the effectiveness of the work of the local education authority (LEA) to support school improvement.
2. The inspection involved the analysis of data and scrutiny of documentation from the LEA, information from school inspections and audit reports. Discussions were held with LEA members, staff in the Education Directorate and in other Council departments, as well as representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on the aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 126 schools. The response rate was 73 per cent.
3. The inspection sought to establish the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 11 primary schools, five secondary schools and one all-age special school, as well as interviews with staff at one other secondary school and the pupil referral unit. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's school improvement strategy. The visits also considered whether the support 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. Sefton Council serves a diverse area. One-third of Sefton is significantly disadvantaged; other areas exhibit considerable affluence. Schools throughout the Borough are successful. Standards in primary schools are above those found nationally and secondary school pupils achieve in line with, or above national standards on all measures of attainment. Overall, standards in both primary and secondary schools are continuing to rise, but, unsurprisingly, at a slightly slower rate than found nationally. The vast majority of schools, over 80 per cent of both primary and secondary, were judged by OFSTED to be good or very good. The Council, LEA and schools share a clear and continuing commitment to raising standards. It is no mean achievement that no primary or secondary school has been either placed in special measures or judged to have serious weaknesses.
5. The LEA has nurtured a strong partnership with schools which is characterised by mutual trust, openness, accountability and 'challenge without threat'. The advisory service is well regarded by schools and has provided effective support. The LEA has adopted a family learning initiative that has successfully raised levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy for early years children and those at Key Stage 1. LEA support for school management is good, in particular, the recent training on school self-evaluation. Good support has been provided for the two special schools that have required special measures. With the exception of headteacher appraisal, the LEA meets its statutory duties.
6. The LEA is one of the highest-delegating authorities, with 85 per cent of its budget delegated to schools. The Council consistently spends above its standard spending assessment, thus demonstrating its commitment to education. The targeting of resources towards the schools in the most deprived areas contributes to the relatively high standards which these schools achieve. In addition, the Council has been successful in procuring additional funding from which schools have benefited.
7. The Council has failed, on occasions, to give sufficient leadership and direction to education. In particular, members have been unwilling to close schools despite persuasive evidence from officers. This issue and others, related to a review of sixth form provision, need urgent and considered action involving all relevant partners. There is no corporate strategy for information and communication technology, and the Council has been slow to embrace developments in this area. This tardiness has inhibited the management of a number of education services.
8. The LEA has successfully monitored its schools for some years. Nevertheless, it has, in some ways, been slow to embrace the spirit of the code of practice on LEA-school relations. In particular, not all schools require the degree of monitoring they receive and there is no clear strategy for a phased reduction in support as schools become more autonomous. A significant proportion of the Advisory Service budget is delegated to schools which provides unlimited access to the advisory service through an open-ended service level agreement.

Although all schools choose to buy into this, it represents poor value for money for some.

9. Schools are not provided with services that are differentiated to meet their needs. A lack of transparency in costs means that schools are unable to judge the value for money of services. In addition, the protocol for schools causing concern is imprecise, lacking, as it does, clear criteria for determining concern and apportioning appropriate support.
10. There are serious issues relating to the management of the pupil referral unit which require urgent resolution. These relate, most immediately, to the allocation and utilisation of support from the education welfare and the educational psychology services. There is uncertainty about staffing levels which is frustrating strategic planning for the next academic year. Moreover, some pupils who are educated otherwise than at school receive insufficient provision and, despite efforts to recruit additional educational psychologists, some schools and pupils receive insufficient support.
11. The following functions covered in the inspection were judged to be effective:
 - provision of information, advice and support on school management
 - support for improving the quality of teaching, including support for newly qualified teachers
 - support for literacy
 - support for numeracy
 - support for schools in special measures
 - budget monitoring and control
 - access to external grants
 - personnel advice and support
 - advice on the appointment of staff
 - provision of music support
 - support for early years and family learning.
12. The following functions are performed inadequately:
 - strategic management of information and communications technology
 - service planning and performance management
 - the rationalisation of school places
 - support for the Pupil Referral Unit
 - support for children in public care
 - support for minority ethnic pupils, including curriculum support for multicultural education.

Overall strengths outweigh weaknesses

13. The LEA has been successful at supporting its schools. It now needs to take the lead in ensuring schools receive effective and efficient services that meet their individual needs. Support for minority groups of pupils must be improved. The LEA is aware of the weaknesses identified above and in all cases has

made some progress towards improvement. This work must now be prioritised. Moreover, a stronger lead is required from elected members on strategic and corporate issues.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

14. The Metropolitan Borough of Sefton serves a diverse community. It encompasses six main centres of population, extending from Southport in the north to Bootle in the south and Maghull in the east. Approximately one-third of the Borough suffers from substantial economic and social disadvantage, ranking the local authority as the 54th most deprived nationally¹. Some areas, such as Formby, are generally affluent; others, like Bootle, are not. The number of people in Sefton is comparatively stable at around 288,900. However, the Borough has a mobile population with, for example, 13 primary schools having at least a 50 per cent turnover of pupils between Reception and Year 6. The level of unemployment has fallen more slowly than the national rate and remains at 7.2 per cent; this is considerably higher than the national average of 4.9 per cent. Of the adult population, 12 per cent have a higher educational qualification, compared with 13.5 per cent nationally.
15. In January 2000, there were 48,376 pupils in Sefton's schools. Pupils' entitlement to free school meals is slightly above the national average in both primary and secondary schools. Distribution across Sefton is variable, however, with over 35 per cent of pupils in one-third of Sefton schools entitled to a free school meal. The proportions of stated pupils in both primary and secondary schools are in line with national averages. Only 1.1 per cent of the school population is of ethnic minority origin, compared with 11.7 per cent nationally. In 1999, a high proportion of pupils (70 per cent) stayed on into full-time education post-16, with a further 17.4 per cent entering employment or training.
16. Sefton maintains 124 schools, comprising four nursery schools, seven infant schools, six junior schools, 79 primary schools, 22 secondary schools (of which 12 provide for pupils aged 11-18) and six special schools. There is one secondary pupil referral unit (PRU). Fifty-five per cent of primary schools are denominational; of the 12 secondary schools with sixth form provision, half are Roman Catholic. Nine primary schools and three secondary schools are resourced to support pupils with particular special educational needs. Although surplus places in primary schools have reduced in recent years to 11.4 per cent (January 2000), 14 of the 92 primary schools and three secondary schools² have 25 per cent or more surplus places. A number of the secondary schools are very small. Three have fewer than 520 pupils, and a further three each have less than 100 pupils in the sixth form. Two large Further Education Colleges at each end of the Borough and a Sixth Form College in Southport cater for most of post-16 provision. Nursery places are available in 47 of the LEA's 92 primary and infant schools. Currently, 98 per cent of four year olds and 69 per cent of three year olds receive at least part-time nursery provision.

¹ Out of a total of 354 areas

² One of these three secondary schools has 24.6 per cent surplus places, the number has been rounded and the school included in this analysis

17. The LEA is a net beneficiary of inter-authority pupil movement. A significant proportion of pupils from outside the LEA (4.4 per cent of the total Year 7 cohort) attend a secondary school in Sefton. Three per cent of Year 6 pupils leave the maintained sector at the end of Key Stage 2 to enter private education. Eight independent schools in the borough account for six per cent of secondary school places.

Performance

18. A detailed analysis of the performance of schools was supplied to the LEA in an OFSTED profile. It highlights the following features of performance.
- OFSTED inspectors judged the attainment on entry to primary school to be poor in 39 per cent of schools. This is slightly greater than found nationally.
 - Pupils in primary schools are, on average, achieving higher levels of attainment than found nationally. For example, at Key Stage 1, a higher percentage of pupils than nationally reach level 2 in all the tests. At Key Stage 2, attainment in English is above the national mean. In mathematics, attainment is well above that found nationally.
 - In the secondary schools, pupils do comparatively well. For example, at Key Stage 3, a higher percentage of pupils achieve level 5 in English than is found nationally. Moreover, at Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils achieving more than five A*-G grades is above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades is in line with the national average.
 - When compared to QCA benchmark data³, Sefton schools are excelling. For example, at Key Stage 2, only 7 per cent of schools appear in the lower quartile⁴ for both English and mathematics. Secondary school results are even more impressive; at Key Stage 3, no school achieves below the median for their benchmark group in mathematics and, at GCSE, no schools are in the lower quartile on the 5 A*-G or average point score measures.
 - Rates of improvement between 1997 and 1999 at Key Stage 1 have exceeded those achieved nationally in reading and writing, although a slower rate of improvement has been made in mathematics. At Key Stage 2, improvements are being made in all subjects but, unsurprisingly, considering the relatively high levels of attainment, at a slower rate than found nationally. At Key Stage 3, rates of improvement in English are less than found nationally but in mathematics improvement is taking place at a similar rate to that achieved nationally. However, at Key Stage 4 rates of improvement have exceeded those found nationally in all measures.
 - A level/Advanced GNVQ results are in line with national averages.

³ Schools are compared with all similar schools, as defined by the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.

⁴ Bottom 25 per cent nationally.

- OFSTED inspection data show that both primary and secondary schools are performing better overall than is found nationally. Eighty three per cent of primary schools and 86 per cent of secondary schools were judged to be good or very good, and no mainstream schools required significant improvement.
- Since OFSTED inspections began in 1993, only two schools (both special schools) have required special measures. One was successfully removed from special measures after 20 months; the other has only recently been so categorised.
- Beacon status has been awarded to one primary school and one secondary school.
- Attendance levels in primary and secondary schools are in line with the national mean, with lower than average levels of unauthorised absence. From a low level, the proportion of pupils permanently excluded from primary schools trebled in 1998/1999 to exceed that found both nationally and within similar LEAs. However, primary exclusions have now reduced to their previously low level of six per year. In the same period, permanent exclusions from secondary schools declined slightly although, overall, rates remain in line with the national mean.

Funding

19. The LEA is funded slightly below the mean for metropolitan authorities⁵. In recent years, the Council has consistently spent well above its standard spending assessment (SSA) allocation - a sign of its commitment to education. Moreover, headteachers are appreciative of the Council's efforts to protect their school budgets.

YEAR	SSA (£M)	BUDGET (£M)	VARIANCE (%)
1996/1997	106.9	113.3	+6.0
1997/1998	106.7	111.4	+4.5
1998/1999	116.5	119.0	+2.2
1999/2000	122.2	126.5	+3.5
2000/2001*	128.2	132.4	+3.3

* planned at the time of the inspection

20. Sefton delegates a high proportion of the local schools budget (LSB) to schools. Provisional figures for 2000/2001 indicate that more than 85 per cent of the LSB is delegated, which would rank Sefton as one of the highest delegating authorities.
21. Within the overall education budget, allocation to the phases varies in relation to SSA. Spending on children under five is 25 per cent higher than the SSA, whereas the funding for primary pupils is in line with SSA. Secondary aged pupils are funded at a rate around five per cent above SSA.

⁵ Sefton's SSA allocation ranks it 19th out of the 35 metropolitan authorities

22. There have been two recent significant changes to the pattern of delegation. First, increasing demands on the centrally held SEN budget meant that in 1999 this was £176 per pupil compared to the metropolitan average of £142. The introduction of a matrix funding mechanism has, however, resulted in the delegation of £3.3m of this money to schools. Secondly, 'real' growth, further delegation of services and adjustments to the free meals factor, have enabled increases in the amount delegated to schools. This has led to an increase in the average budget share per primary pupil of 16 per cent, compared with an increase in that for secondary pupils of around nine per cent. This is consistent with the LEA's stated aim of reducing the significant primary/secondary funding differential as resources become available and without detriment to secondary schools.
23. The effect on school budgets can be seen in Table 2 which shows the average funding levels over the last two years and the considerable differential between funding for primary and secondary pupils. In 1999/2000, secondary pupils were funded at 48.9 per cent more than primary pupils; this differential has now been reduced to 27.5 per cent.

	National 1999/2000	Metropolitan 1999/2000	Sefton 1999/2000	Sefton 2000/2001*
Primary	£1773	£1640	£1646	£1913
Secondary	£2433	£2310	£2451	£2666

* 2000/2001 comparisons were not available at the time of inspection

24. The Council has been successful in accessing considerable funds, around £1m for education last year, from various external grants. These are being used to good effect. The LEA has developed effective exit strategies in preparation for the cessation of funding; for example, where projects have successful evaluations, such as the family and schools together (FAST) project, elected members have built the continuation of the costs into the base budget.
25. Budgetary monitoring and control are strengths in Sefton and confirm headteachers' views that the LEA is not profligate. In relation to other metropolitan boroughs, the LEA retains less centrally for strategic management and special needs but more for school improvement. As a proportion of overall spending, the amount retained centrally is less in 2000/2001 than in 1999/2000.
26. The education department has been successful in securing significant supplementary credit approvals during recent financial years. Housing is the key council priority for capital development and after top slicing the capital allocation, education is the next largest beneficiary.

Council structure

27. Sefton Council consists of 25 Liberal Democrat, 22 Labour and 19 Conservative elected members. As has been the case for the last 14 years, no party has overall control although the majority party changed from Labour to

Liberal Democrat at the last election in May 2000. The Council adopted a Cabinet structure for a trial period from May 1999 in response to Modernising Local Government. The Cabinet comprises the Leader, eight members, each with a specific portfolio, and the chairs of the planning and licensing committees. It meets fortnightly. In addition there is one scrutiny and review committee comprising 11 non-cabinet voting members. There is a three-member ratification committee for each portfolio which comprises the cabinet member and two non-executive members, one from each remaining party. The Council is organised into four strategic directorates, one of which is for education and leisure.

28. In response to the modernisation agenda, the Council has also set up area committees, each comprising ward councillors and a cabinet member, to act as a focus for consultation with the community on local plans. No powers or funding have yet been delegated to area committees. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the work of these committees. However, they are seen as a potential body from which nominations for school governors could be made and are of interest to schools in providing first-hand evidence of local democracy in action.

The education development plan

29. The LEA has defined its purpose as “to help children, young people and adults to realise their full potential”. The education development plan, whilst focusing on school improvement, complements an earlier publication, Good Schools. This document articulated the quality outcomes and effective management indicators to which the LEA expected its schools to aspire. Whilst the framework was simplistic and the outcomes unquantifiable, it provided the only foundation for the formulation of the education development plan in the absence of a corporate strategy.
30. The education development plan, operative from April 1999, was approved by the Secretary of State for three years. Overall, it reflects national priorities and, as a result, is generally approved of by headteachers. However, although most schools are aware that their school development plans should be cross-referenced to priorities in the education development plan, this is not yet common practice. Headteachers have been insufficiently involved in the determination of activities, discussion of relative costs, the monitoring of progress and evaluation of the plan’s effectiveness in supporting school improvement. The plan does not have a sufficiently high profile in guiding the LEA’s work with schools. A recent consultation exercise on the priorities for 2000/2001 elicited a very low response, particularly from secondary schools.
31. The education development plan has eight priorities relating to the raising of standards:
 - to improve numeracy;
 - to improve literacy;
 - to support schools through the development of more effective self-evaluation and monitoring processes;

- to improve transition arrangements into Key Stage 1, between each Key Stage, and in preparation for post-16 learning;
 - to improve attendance and behaviour;
 - to improve provision and extend opportunities for specific groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs;
 - to support schools in the initial and continued professional development of teachers and headteachers;
 - to use ICT effectively.
32. In total, 45 activities support the delivery of the eight priorities. The priorities and activities were identified as a result of a thorough audit and consultation exercise. However, although the LEA rightly identifies the dip in performance at Key Stage 4 as being a concern, it has failed to target action and support to schools to tackle this issue. There is an appropriate emphasis on the dissemination of good practice, which ten per cent of headteachers responding to the school survey identified as an area for development. The education development plan does not contain any performance targets for minority ethnic pupils, although the 2000/2001 update includes an activity to establish baseline performance data. Targets set for children in public care are not robust. Moreover, the activities identified to support children in public care are unlikely to be sufficient to achieve the improvement in standards envisaged.
33. Nevertheless, the education development plan is satisfactory. It is realistic and achievable, although somewhat lacking in vision and imagination. For example, the action plan to improve levels of attendance is little more than the articulation of the everyday work of officers. In contrast, the activities identified to support more able pupils are likely to be successful in both raising awareness and initiating action to raise levels of attainment in targeted schools. Overall, the activities identified in the plan are sensible, sound and, in the main, time-limited. Although the activities are generally aimed at appropriate groups, there is insufficient targeting of actions towards specific groups of underachievers. The responsibility for the delivery of each action is clear. However, the success criteria lack precision and do not relate sufficiently to quantifiable targets related to raising achievement.
34. Performance targets, agreed with the LEA, are not consistently challenging to all schools. In 1999, 53 per cent of primary schools exceeded their year 2000 Key Stage 2 literacy target and 64 per cent exceeded their corresponding numeracy target. Moreover, 27 primary schools have literacy targets which assume either no improvement or worse results in 2001 than were achieved in 1998; ten schools are expected, similarly, to fail to raise levels of attainment in mathematics by 2001. However, the LEA has responded to the progress schools have made by raising the literacy target for 2001 by one percentage point to 83 per cent. At GCSE, the LEA's year 2000 target of 48.5 per cent for 5 or more A*-C passes was slightly less than the aggregated mean for all schools; moreover, schools reached this target in 1999. The year 2002 target for 5 or more A*-C passes is too low, at 51 per cent, and is not sufficiently challenging. Four secondary schools have a 2000 target which is less than they achieved either in 1997 or 1998. At the time of the inspection, the LEA had just received notification that the schools in the south of the Borough could be

included in the Excellence in Cities initiative from September. This additional funding is designed to raise levels of attainment which future targets will need to reflect.

35. The LEA has commissioned the Centre for Education and Employment Research at the University of Liverpool to carry out an evaluation of the LEA's own monitoring of the implementation of the education development plan. The first, detailed and helpful, interim evaluation was completed in July 1999; annual reports are to be made at the end of each subsequent year of the plan. Although progress on implementing the plan is satisfactory, there is no evaluation of the impact that the various activities are having because the success criteria do not consistently relate to improvements in standards.

The allocation of resources to priorities

36. Sefton is effective at directing financial resources to its priorities. School improvement has been the key priority in recent years, and the education development plan is generously resourced. Within the plan, information and communication technology (ICT) is a key priority and considerable extra funds have been directed to this area. Historically, funding for SEN has been high in Sefton, but the recent review and resulting matrix funding approach have brought a much sharper focus on how best to use the resources.
37. The local management of schools (LMS) formula successfully targets funds to those schools with the greatest need. Officers are sensitive to the effects of the formula and keep it under review. For example, a cushioning system has been introduced to help schools adjust to reduced income from the free meals factor as employment levels improve. However, the LMS scheme is out of date and there is no standing consultative group dedicated to planning and modelling formula changes and exploring their consequences. Nevertheless, there is an open mechanism for identifying funding priorities which involves officers, headteachers and elected members. Once potential growth items are costed, these are subjected to scrutiny by headteacher consultative groups before returning to members for final approval once the available budget for growth has been approved. This last stage has caused quite serious delays in providing schools with final budgets. Although the introduction of the Cabinet system seems to have improved the position slightly, schools still only received their final budget shares around the 24th March this year. The lateness of the final notification of the budget continues to be a concern to headteachers and governors.
38. Schools have benefited from the work of the external funding team which has become very successful at accessing external grant funds. These funds have made a substantial contribution to Sefton's improvement and regeneration strategy.

Performance management and Best Value

39. The quality of service planning is poor. This aspect of performance management is significantly underdeveloped and will need substantially to

improve to meet Best Value requirements. Many services have not yet paid sufficient attention to developing plans that link to the LEA's priorities for development, or to having clearly stated activities and measurable success criteria. Plans, where they exist, are sketchy in detail. There is no benchmark data to assist schools in making cost effective purchasing decisions. Neither is there any formal opportunity for the purchasers of services to evaluate their effectiveness. Nevertheless, the LEA has carried out ad hoc service reviews and has also used the Audit Commission's school survey instrument to gauge schools' opinions of its services. A guide to services has been produced this year with improved service level agreements that are more precise and focused on customers' needs, although the guide omits agreements for the advisory service. Nevertheless, some agreements are still insufficiently differentiated to meet schools' varying needs, they require a three year purchasing commitment and they omit any formal mechanisms to evaluate performance. Evidence from school visits suggested that headteachers and governing bodies are looking to the LEA quickly to tackle these issues.

40. Sefton's Best Value performance plan is well set out and meets statutory requirements. Education services are appropriately timetabled within the five year scheme and good plans are in place for carrying out Best Value performance reviews. This year, the Council is including social inclusion as its theme for Best Value reviews, hence reviews of the youth service, education welfare service and SEN provision are scheduled to be carried out. Budgets in the education directorate have been identified, with strategic directors having oversight of the mechanism and the responsibility for providing challenge. However, there is much work to be done by education service managers in order to comply with Best Value requirements. Although these shortcomings have been identified by senior officers, moves to remedy them have been too slow. The recent draft performance management strategy document does not have a sufficiently sharp enough focus on roles, responsibilities and timescales for it to be a useful tool.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the strategic management of resources:

- establish an appropriately representative standing consultative group to review the LMS scheme and other related issues;
- make procedures for approving the budget by a much earlier specified date.

In order to improve service management and meet Best Value requirements:

- develop detailed service plans, linked to a performance management system, in consultation with governors and headteachers;
- review service level agreements to ensure that they are tailored to the needs of schools, have differential pricing, are renewed annually, and enable schools to contribute to the systematic evaluation of performance.

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- ensure that targets set for all schools are sufficiently challenging and have due regard to improvements in attainment anticipated as a result of the Excellence in Cities initiative. Set targets for minority ethnic pupils;
- specify clearly in the education development plan the improvements in school performance that particular activities are designed to facilitate;
- engage all headteachers fully in the delivery of the education development plan. In particular, fully involve headteachers in
 - the determination of activities that will contribute to school improvement,
 - the allocation of funding and relative costs of different priorities,
 - the evaluation of the effectiveness of the education development plan.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

41. The LEA and schools share a strong commitment to raising standards and, overall, the support for school improvement is very effective. Standards in primary schools are above those found nationally, and secondary pupils achieve in line with, or above the average on all measures of attainment. Standards are continuing to rise slowly. Effective targeting of resources to schools in the areas of greatest need contributes to the relatively high standards their pupils achieve. Cost effective management services, in particular, personnel and finance, contribute positively to school improvement.
42. In some services there are weaknesses that reduce the effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for school improvement. Firstly, the lack of a coherent strategy for ICT has impeded both the LEA's and the schools' progress in adopting ICT solutions to resolve a range of management and administrative issues. Secondly, there is an inadequate level of support from educational psychologists for pupils in some schools. Thirdly, support for the PRU is poor, and the provision for some pupils without a school place is insufficient. Fourthly, the planning of post-sixteen places is poor, resulting in an inefficient use of resources to support very small sixth forms of questionable viability. Finally, the LEA's support for schools in meeting the needs of pupils from minority ethnic groups has been slow to develop and is currently unsatisfactory.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

43. The respective roles and responsibilities of the LEA and schools in relation to monitoring, challenge, support and intervention are well established. Over a number of years, the advisory service has successfully built up a strong and constructive working relationship with schools based on mutual trust and accountability. The LEA's protocol on schools causing concern was established in January 1999, but there is still some uncertainty about its implementation. The mechanisms for monitoring and support operate effectively, largely through the link advisers, whose work is highly regarded by schools. To date, there have been few instances in which the LEA has had to intervene in schools but, when necessary, it has demonstrated the ability and determination so to do. However, there is some inconsistency in the way in which schools are challenged, both in the target setting process and in some aspects of management.
44. The advisory service has a long established and effective process for monitoring schools. All schools receive an allocation of three days per year for visits by the link adviser. For secondary schools, this process includes a half-day annual review visit by the principal secondary adviser and the link adviser. The review draws on a wide range of key, summary data developed by the research and statistics unit for each school. For primary schools, focused visits take place on a three year cycle and involve a minimum of two advisers focussing on an agreed theme with associated lesson observations. Written

reports of both types of visit and related action points are provided for headteachers and governing bodies. A scrutiny of a sample of these reports indicates that the quality of judgements has improved and that there is a clearer focus on school improvement. However, whilst many headteachers value what they see as an external moderation process, not all schools require this degree of monitoring by the LEA, nor is it the most effective use of resources.

45. Schools have not been encouraged to identify carefully the support they require from the Advisory Service. A large proportion, amounting to £759,000, of the advisory service budget is delegated to schools on the basis of a lump sum plus an additional amount, weighted according to pupil numbers. Budget allocations can range from £1,600 in a small primary school to £25,000 in the largest secondary school. Currently, all schools use their funding to buy into the service level agreement for the advisory service. This is a blanket agreement. It entitles all schools to training for staff and governors and potentially unlimited advice and support, and includes the monitoring role undertaken by the link adviser. The very high level of buy-back indicates the high level of confidence that schools have in the service, as was confirmed by interviews and visits to schools.
46. Whilst all schools receive an allocation of link adviser visits, there can be considerable variation in the level of service schools get over and above their basic allocation. Some headteachers were unclear about the level of support their school receives. Much depends on the demands made by a school, whether of the advisory service staff or of the training programme. It is questionable, therefore, whether some schools are receiving value for money from their service level agreement. Furthermore, the demands made on individual advisers, all of whom carry multiple responsibilities, can be excessive. There is an expectation that the LEA can meet all identified needs. This it does, in many instances. However, this, in turn, creates an over-reliance on the LEA by some schools that runs counter to the authority's expressed commitment to develop self-managing schools.
47. On a day-to-day basis, the advisory service is soundly managed by the two principal advisers for primary and secondary education. The work of the service is closely aligned to the priorities in the education development plan and is now presented in a clear annual service development plan. Annual reports on the performance of schools, and progress reports on the education development plan's programmes of activity, are presented to elected members. All advisers have personal action plans and associated targets which are monitored on a regular basis by line managers. However, as yet there is no clear strategy for differentiating levels of support to schools, nor any phased reduction in support as self-review improvement strategies begin to take effect and more schools become more autonomous.
48. The support provided by the advisory service is of good quality and has been effective in securing school improvement, for example, in literacy, numeracy and with the under fives. Nevertheless, the overall costs of the service are high although this is partially off-set by the one hundred per cent buy-back by schools into the service level agreement. Despite the fact that support is

provided on request rather than according to need, the advisory service, as a whole, provides good value for money.

Collection and analysis of data

49. Although the provision of data to schools has improved in the last two years and is rated by primary schools as good and by secondary schools as very good, it does not yet include comprehensive value-added data or analysis. A small, experienced central team is responsive to schools' requests, producing benchmarked data by cluster groups as well as school profiles. The data provided is sufficient to enable schools to identify trends and set targets for individual pupils and groups of pupils. Last year, a primary school profile, which includes several years of past data, was introduced. Although most schools find this useful, little more was offered than has been issued to schools nationally. Moreover, the profile does not include comparative data on groups of similar schools within the LEA, an omission appropriately highlighted by several of the headteachers interviewed. Secondary schools receive a summary data book that enables heads and governing bodies to compare their schools in detail with others in the LEA. The transfer of data between primary and secondary schools is still largely paper-based, although the LEA is in the process of introducing a new management information system that will facilitate the electronic transfer of data.
50. There is a clear procedure, well understood by schools, for using data to set targets. Guidance and training on target setting have been given which, for example, governors found useful. Most schools find target-setting a challenging process and it was clear that schools have developed quite sophisticated procedures on which to base their aggregated targets. Data on the attainment of children in public care in GCSE has been collected and shared with Social Services. However, the exchange of data between Social Services and education is impeded by the use of incompatible databases and will remain so until the Social Services system is upgraded in 2002.

Support for literacy

51. Overall, support for literacy is good and standards are rising. In 1999, at the end of Key Stage 2, 77 per cent of pupils achieved level 4 or above, which was above the national average. The rate of improvement, at four per cent, between 1998 and 1999, was slightly below the national rate. Schools receiving intensive support averaged more than 10 percentage points better improvement than the Sefton average. With just over half of the primary schools achieving their 2000 literacy targets in 1999, the LEA has, rightly, revised its 2001 target upwards to 83 per cent. The LEA appears to be in a sound position to achieve its 2002 target of 86 per cent. However, as the 2001 targets for 27 primary schools are equal to, or less than the results achieved in 1998, it is imperative to ensure that all schools set appropriately challenging targets.
52. The LEA strategy for implementing the National Literacy Strategy is clearly set out within the education development plan and is underpinned by the

successful development over a number of years of a family literacy programme supported by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA)⁶ and external grant funding.

53. The literacy strategy is well organised and effectively managed. The Literacy team is highly regarded by schools, and consultants have been adept in handling the diverse needs of staff in sometimes sensitive and demanding circumstances. The wide ranging literacy training programme has been heavily oversubscribed and courses have been repeated where necessary. Usefully, cross-curricular training on literacy has been provided in six other subject areas. Dissemination of good practice has been developed through demonstration literacy hours, a regular newsletter, and the establishment of a literacy centre within the borough. This year, the LEA has also offered ten brief secondment opportunities to primary teachers for dissemination activities. Schools across all phases rate the LEA's support for literacy highly. Of the 11 primary schools visited, all but three showed a significant improvement in their Key Stage 2 results.
54. Support for literacy developments at Key Stage 3 is well regarded by secondary schools. There has been an appropriate and clear focus on transition issues, the development of whole-school literacy awareness and support for literacy summer schools, five of which were held last year and a further eight of which are planned for this summer. Several secondary schools are currently trialling literacy units with Year 7 classes.

Support for numeracy

55. Overall, good progress has been made in raising pupils' attainment in mathematics. In 1998, 66.5 per cent of pupils achieved level 4 and above. This rose to 77.6 per cent in 1999, a rate of improvement which slightly exceeded that achieved nationally. The LEA appears to be in a strong position to meet, or indeed comfortably exceed, its target of 82 per cent by 2002. Despite this, 10 primary schools have a Year 2001 target which is either equal to or less than that achieved in 1998. This is unsatisfactory, and suggests that some schools are not sufficiently challenged to raise standards of attainment.
56. The LEA has a rightly deserved reputation for providing good support in mathematics. For example, the LEA has received funding from the Basic Skills Agency to run family numeracy projects for the parents of pupils in reception classes of 37 schools. This has led to a marked improvement in baseline assessment scores for the participating pupils. In addition, Sefton operates a maths recovery programme at Key Stage 1 which targets underachievers before they fall too far behind. In 1999, these initiatives have successfully contributed to over 90 per cent of Key Stage 1 pupils achieving at least level 2, compared with 87.2 per cent nationally.
57. The LEA's work in preparing for the introduction and implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) has been well received. The LEA's two

⁶ Twelve primary schools have been awarded the BSA Quality Mark which incorporates work on basic skills in literacy and numeracy. A further twenty are working towards this award.

numeracy consultants are highly regarded and have shown themselves to be flexible in meeting the needs of schools, for example, in demonstrating lessons on topics with which teachers feel insecure. Training is of good quality and has been supplemented by the LEA advisory staff providing complementary courses to meet the specific needs of teachers. In addition, ICT advisers have provided training on the application of ICT in the teaching of numeracy. The LEA has guaranteed that two teachers from each primary school should have the opportunity to observe a leading mathematics teacher. This generous commitment, taken up by a considerable number of schools, has been well managed. Three-quarters of the primary schools responding to the school survey judged the support for the teaching of numeracy to be good or better. Of the 11 primary schools visited, all but two showed a significant improvement in their Key Stage 2 results. Most primary schools have produced a numeracy action plan, but only those submitted by intensive support schools have been systematically reviewed by the numeracy consultants. One school visited as part of the inspection did not have a numeracy action plan, despite link advisers having responsibility for reviewing schools' plans.

58. Training on the implementation of the NNS in Key Stage 3 has been well received by representatives of secondary school mathematics departments. Moreover, the LEA is investigating the feasibility of fast tracking able Year 10 GCSE pupils to enable them to commence A/S level mathematics in Year 11.

Support for information and communications technology

59. The LEA has been too slow to provide the leadership, vision and strategy that schools need in the authority-wide development of ICT. There is no dedicated senior officer to champion, coordinate and spearhead ICT developments. Moreover, the lack of a corporate strategy has impeded the development of at least two services. Many schools complained about the lack of electronic information exchange between schools and the LEA. Not before time, a draft LEA strategy for ICT was circulated to schools for comment in November and has recently been accepted by members. The strategy places an appropriate emphasis on teaching and learning but does not provide a sufficiently clear vision of ICT development for schools. This has frustrated schools' attempts to adopt ICT solutions to data transfer and other management and administrative issues. Since the appointment of an ICT adviser and an ICT advisory teacher, support has improved. However, these staff are overstretched and unable to meet the needs of many schools.
60. Some other notable improvements, acknowledged by schools, have occurred. A recently established ICT professional development centre provides a much welcomed base for up-to-date, high quality training. For example, basic skills courses are run to ensure teachers have acquired the necessary skills before embarking on the curriculum-related new opportunities fund (NOF) training. Participants are provided with excellent training materials produced by the LEA. Courses are also available to support teachers in using ICT to develop skills in numeracy and literacy and, increasingly, in other subject areas. Some schools are also making good use of a drop-in facility run by the advisory teacher on two afternoons a week.

61. Many schools are rightly dissatisfied with the implementation of the national grid for learning (NGfL) initiative. Complaints included poor communication and a slowness surrounding implementation arrangements, poor support once equipment was installed, and poor management of the overall process. Some schools currently waiting for equipment do not know what they are to receive or the implications of this initiative for their school budgets. Although 25 primary schools were rightly prioritised to receive NGfL funding as a result of critical OFSTED reports on ICT provision, the LEA has given insufficient attention to some schools' individual needs. For example, one school visited had been heavily criticised by OFSTED for inadequate ICT provision, but is still in the last tranche to receive NGfL funding. Additionally, although an audit of weaknesses identified through Section 10 inspections has been rigorously undertaken and schools reminded of their statutory responsibility, the LEA has not been able to ensure that all Key Stage 4 pupils receive their ICT curriculum entitlement. Schools have not received advice on the selection of NOF trainers although this is planned, somewhat belatedly, for June.
62. Although ICT administrative systems are relatively basic, schools rated the support they received as satisfactory or better. Training is good. Schools are already returning some data, such as the school census, electronically but a key development is the introduction of the metropolitan area network (MAN) which will greatly enhance the electronic flow of data around the LEA. However, much preparatory work is needed for this to become a reality. Not all headteachers are sufficiently aware of the opportunities, both curricular and administrative, that the MAN will provide. Members' decision to delegate £200,000 this year to enable schools to purchase ICT technical support and advice is much welcomed.
63. The LEA lacks a coherent vision, shared with its schools, of the future of ICT within Sefton, and how a coordinated approach to curriculum, management and administrative functions is to be achieved. This is of particular concern in view of the considerable investment to be made in ICT through the Excellence in Cities initiative.

Support for schools causing concern

64. No primary or secondary school in Sefton has been found to have serious weaknesses or required special measures. This is no mean achievement. For a number of years, the LEA has given effective support to schools causing concern on grounds of standards, finance or management. One special school was, however, placed in special measures in 1998, despite monitoring by the LEA. The school was removed from special measures after 20 months, following intervention and support from the LEA. A second special school has recently been identified as requiring special measures and is receiving effective support.
65. In January 1999, the LEA issued a protocol to schools which defined four broad categories into which schools would be placed. The categorisation of schools is insufficiently rigorous. Moreover, although the LEA has, at present, an

adequate budget of £170,000 to support the small number of schools causing concern, the protocol does not systematically identify the support schools can expect to receive at each level. Schools are placed in the first category of concern, level 1, where routine monitoring by advisers or officers prompts concern in respect of any of a number of subjective and objective criteria, including schools receiving intensive support for either literacy or numeracy or both. For example, of the twenty-two schools at level 1, twelve are placed there solely because they are receiving either intensive numeracy or literacy support. At least one headteacher expressed considerable reservations about this policy, pointing out that the need for intensive support did not necessarily imply the school was a cause for concern. Moreover, teachers in two of the schools visited found intensive support for both literacy and numeracy too burdensome.

66. There is also some inconsistency in the way headteachers and governors are informed about the categorisation of their schools. For example, in at least one of the schools visited, the headteacher was left to inform the chair of governors of the LEA's concern about the school. On another occasion a school had been insensitively informed that it was causing concern.
67. Although schools categorised as causing concern value the support provided by the LEA, there is inconsistency in the application of the protocol. Furthermore, the additional support attracted by categories 1 to 3 is not clearly distinguished from other support provided by the advisory service. Understandably, in view of the low incidence of serious concerns, there has been limited opportunity to evaluate cost effectiveness of the support measures provided.

Support for school management

68. Support for school management and school self-review is good overall and highly regarded by schools. Evidence from school inspections indicates that the quality of leadership and management of Sefton's schools is a strength, but that the need to establish systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluation is widespread. The development of more effective self-evaluation and monitoring processes has rightly been identified as a priority within the education development plan.
69. Guidance produced by the LEA on school self-evaluation is good and has been well received by headteachers. This is complemented by a successful rolling programme of OFSTED/DfEE approved training for senior managers on self-evaluation, for which the LEA is accredited. Many more senior managers are consequently monitoring the quality of teaching, although there was no such arrangement in a minority of schools visited. There is a strong focus on developing school self-review through the monitoring role of the link adviser and the effective use of data. In all but three of the schools visited, link advisers were providing satisfactory support for management; in over one-third, the support was judged to be good.

70. The LEA provides a comprehensive training programme for teachers based on development priorities identified within the education development plan, including management training linked to the teacher training agency framework for professional standards. The LEA has worked collaboratively with external providers and higher education to develop accreditation for much of the training programme on offer, including a course for continuing professional development co-ordinators. Costs of training are included in the service level agreement with schools and the take-up of courses is high. Evidence from the school survey and school visits indicates that generally there is a high level of satisfaction with the training.
71. Support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) is a major strength within the authority. Highly regarded support includes a planned programme of continuing professional development, NQT mentor training and monitoring by the school's link adviser. Newly appointed headteachers are also well supported by an induction programme and the allocation of a mentor for the first year. An appropriate range of other senior management training includes support for involvement in the national professional qualification for headship and the leadership programme for serving headteachers. The LEA is also an accredited provider of Headlamp, the training programme for newly appointed headteachers. Regular support networks exist for senior and middle managers and the annual conferences for senior managers are well regarded by schools. The LEA has enhanced professional development for teachers by the effective use of short-term secondments, for example to support the development of literacy. However, there is no programme of headteacher appraisal in place. The LEA is awaiting developments in the national proposals and the LEA is not presently fulfilling its statutory duties in this respect. Developments are well in hand, nevertheless, to implement the national proposals from September 2000.
72. All subject areas are supported by the advisory service. Support is of good quality with few exceptions. Support to improve the quality of teaching has been particularly effective in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Although many subject advisers hold regular meetings for heads of department or subject coordinators, this is not consistently the case. Curriculum support for multicultural education is inadequate, as is training on equal opportunities issues.
73. Provision for more able pupils is generally good, particularly in primary schools. This includes summer schools and a resource bank at the LEA's professional development centre. It is envisaged that the recent appointment of an Advisory Teacher and the establishment of the Excellence in Cities initiative within the South Sefton schools will further enhance support for able pupils and complement the activities identified within the education development plan.
74. The music support service is well organised and the range and quality of provision is highly regarded by schools.

Support for governors

75. Support for governors, provided by a very small administrative team, is good. The team offers a prompt, friendly and accessible service that is highly regarded both by schools and governors. In particular, governors welcome the informative termly newsletter and the swift response to queries directed through the governor helpline. A very good range of training opportunities is provided in different locations and at times to meet varying needs; some training is now offered on a school or cluster basis. In addition, modules of the programme now attract external accreditation. Governors receive good support on senior staff appointments from the advisory service and examples were given of timely and effective advice on financial and staffing issues. The administrative team has shown itself to be responsive to needs by introducing, at the request of governors, a clerking service for those governing bodies wishing to purchase the service level agreement. Twenty schools currently buy into this service which, at £125 a meeting, is considered to be quite expensive, but invaluable. There is a low level of LEA governor vacancies and arrangements for appointing LEA governors have just been reviewed and appropriately broadened to encourage greater public involvement.
76. However, governors were critical of the LEA's provision of information and consultation arrangements. Some governors found the information provided by the LEA inaccessible to them; others complained that information, for example on school budgets and service level agreements, arrived very late, making it difficult for them to make timely and informed financial decisions. In addition, some chairs of governors did not appear to be aware of their school's categorisation on the protocol for schools causing concern. A significant number of governors interviewed did not feel that the LEA made sufficient effort to consult them. There is currently no governors' forum, although one is planned, and no opportunity for governors to meet regularly with the director of education.
77. At present there is no method of evaluating the effectiveness of governing bodies. The LEA does not receive the minutes of all termly meetings, and no training needs analysis has been undertaken. Nevertheless, this small service provides satisfactory value for money.

Support for early years

78. Provision of early years education and the FAST service are strengths of Sefton LEA. OFSTED inspection evidence shows that under-fives make above average progress. The early years child care and development plan priorities were very well researched and have been thoroughly reviewed in the current year. Good progress is being made towards agreed targets. The early years partnership benefits from strong independent chairmanship and officers who are well versed in project management and bidding for resources. The early years adviser has, with the three specialist support teachers, been effective in establishing good practice in many early years settings. Good curriculum guidance has been published.

79. The Sefton FAST Project has been extremely successful. It was created as part of the city challenge programme in 1993 and provided twelve parents' rooms in schools, a resource centre and outreach workers. The LEA has evaluated the results and, to its credit, integrated the cost of the project into its base budget whilst committing itself to spreading the work across the borough, transforming the project into a service. There is clear evidence of improvement in pupils' reading ages at the end of Key Stage 1 in the schools receiving FAST support. Schools visited regard the service as a significant factor in the prevention of failure in the education of disadvantaged pupils. The LEA works closely with the BSA and is accredited to assess the Quality Mark, as well as a local advanced award. It is expertly led and managed and has a steering group with strong parental representation. In the current academic year, 530 parents have received accreditation of their work with their child's school through the Merseyside open college network and 59 teachers have been trained to deliver parental education courses. Cooperation with the two local FE Colleges is a key factor in this. Sixty-two schools, including two high schools, two nursery schools and two special schools are involved in the parental education programme.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:

- Develop a clear strategy for a phased reduction in the level of monitoring and support to reflect the spirit of the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations and the LEA's expressed commitment to develop self-managing schools.
- Revise the service level agreement for the advisory service to provide a range of differentiated services with a clear service specification to enable schools to evaluate the effectiveness of provision and achieve best value for money.

In order to improve the management and governance of schools:

- introduce arrangements to improve consultation with governors;
- develop strategies to enable governors to evaluate the effectiveness of their work and provide any necessary support;
- in consultation with headteachers and governors, review the arrangements and procedures surrounding the protocol for schools causing concern and, in particular,
 - ensure the criteria for each category are clear, unambiguous and consistent,
 - detail clearly the resources and support that schools can expect to receive at each level of concern,
 - ensure effective procedures are in place to keep governors informed, on an annual basis, of the categorisation of their schools.

In order to improve the effectiveness of the implementation of the LEA's ICT strategy:

- appoint a senior officer with appropriate ICT experience and knowledge to lead ICT developments within the education service, including MAN;
- develop a coordinated approach to schools' curriculum, managerial and administrative ICT needs, including technical support.

SECTION 3

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

80. The Council does not have a comprehensive corporate plan. Nevertheless, the Council's priorities were articulated in its 1994 Sefton Agenda and reviewed in 1997. The review crystallised the Council's priorities into four strategic issues: regeneration; management of organisational change; environmental matters; service and performance review. Little emphasis was then given to education. Subsequently, however, the Council has joined with local organisations to create the Sefton Borough Partnership which, in its draft 'Vision for Sefton 2000-2003', identifies seven priorities, including creating a learning community. The key objectives outlined are sensible, placing an appropriate emphasis on raising standards, but the targets set are much too general and do not relate to those already detailed in the LEA's education development plan.
81. Over the last seven years, the Council has been successful in obtaining significant sums of money, nearly £100m, from the Government and Europe to support urban regeneration and local developments. For example, schools in south Sefton have benefited from City Challenge money, as well as from European funding, to establish ICT learning centres for parents' use in schools. The Council has been successful in obtaining money in three rounds of bidding for the single regeneration budget (SRB) which has supported developments within the Merseyside conurbation as well as in central Southport.
82. In parallel with the modernisation of its political structures, the Council recognised that it needed to develop its strategic capacity. Following a review of the senior management structure, posts for four strategic directors were created to be directly responsible to the chief executive. Each of the strategic directors has supervisory responsibility for two or more departments, cross-cutting corporate responsibilities, service responsibilities for two Area Committees and an external challenge function in Best Value performance reviews.
83. Lines of responsibility between the strategic director for education and community services and the director of education, as the statutory chief officer, are clear. With regard to education, the strategic director has three main responsibilities. These are: to line manage the director of education; to act as the advocate for education with the cabinet and chief executive; and to provide 'added value' to the education function by ensuring that the work of the education department complements the council's corporate agenda. To date, the role of strategic director for education and community services has had too little impact on the strategic management of the education service. Draft objectives for the directorate have recently been drawn up. Although the service delivery plan 1999/2000 for the directorate of education and community services usefully details service objectives for each of the leisure services departments it does not, disappointingly, include service objectives for the

education departments. Consequently, the establishment of effective systems of departmental target setting and performance management have not yet been developed. Overall, the job title for the strategic director of education and community services does not appropriately reflect the broader, cross-cutting role undertaken.

84. Despite having three directors of education within the last three years, the directorate still maintains a clear and strong commitment to raising standards which is well understood by schools. The current leadership is open, approachable and prepared to tackle difficult issues such as the review of special education provision and sixth form places.
85. The new cabinet structure is taking time to bed down as members adjust to their new roles on, for example, the ratification committee. The frequency of ratification committee meetings, held fortnightly, means much time is expended by officers on the production of papers with up to four meetings being serviced at any one time. This places too heavy a burden on senior officers and detracts from their other responsibilities.
86. Although members receive clear, timely advice, decisions are often late on, for example, the budget. This results in schools receiving last minute financial information that impedes their strategic planning. This was a major concern of headteachers and governors, highlighted in the school survey and strongly expressed during school visits. In addition, last year members failed to act upon the advice of officers on the removal of some primary surplus places and this has had a detrimental effect on the schools concerned. The fact that no party has overall control of the Council, was often cited as the reason for a lack of a clear strategic direction from members and decisions not being made.

Partnership

87. The LEA has established effective partnerships with police, health, employers and, in respect to lifelong learning, the wider community. There is effective collaboration with the police at a strategic level, especially on youth issues. Joint protocols have been written on handling issues of local concern, including drugs, truancy and young people in the streets. In recent years, liaison with Social Services has improved and is now generally good at a strategic level. However, a significant minority of schools complained about poor communication and a slow response, if any, from Social Services' staff at an operational level. The Sefton education business partnership achieves substantial involvement of employers in a range of work-related initiatives. Staff from the LEA and schools have taken full advantage of multi-agency professional development courses, funded by SRB and provided by the Merseyside inter agency development programme (IADP), on social inclusion issues, such as children in public care, challenging racism, behaviour and disaffection.
88. Regrettably, there are no regular timetabled consultation meetings with representatives of the diocesan authorities, despite the fact that half of the schools are denominational. Relationships are generally good, although the

LEA was remiss not to include the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in early discussions on the position paper drawn up about the provision of places in school sixth forms.

89. Although consultation mechanisms with headteachers are well understood, the school survey indicated disquiet on the part of a significant number of headteachers that consultation was often rushed and could, in some instances, be a partial process, with some headteachers having little opportunity to influence policy. The LEA has set up three key groups through which it consults schools: primary and secondary headteachers' groups and a special education needs advisory group. Although representatives on these groups are well regarded and trusted by non-members, this approach limits the breadth of consultation. Some headteachers interviewed were unclear about the role of these groups and how membership of working parties was determined. Consequently, primary headteachers welcomed the recent move of the director to meet them all together on a termly basis. Nevertheless, the LEA appropriately holds meetings to consult headteachers on specific issues. For example, proposals arising from the review of the education welfare service and the implications of the introduction of a service level agreement were discussed at a recent consultation meeting.
90. Despite some concerns about consultation arrangements, evidence from interviews and school visits confirm the view that partnership working between schools and officers is effective and a major contributory factor in forging the very good relationships that exist throughout the LEA.

Management services

91. School managers are well supported by a range of services that are modestly priced and staffed by skilled, customer-focused officers. Headteachers hold these services in high regard and purchase them because they feel they give good value for money; however, they are not provided with evidence to support this.
92. The personnel section provides a high quality service ranging from routine administration to complex casework. Headteachers are rightly appreciative of the service and were able to cite examples of the sensitive but determined approach to helping them solve difficult issues such as competency, redundancy and long-term sickness. There are sound plans for the further development of this service. For example, the section is becoming more involved with the financial and advisory services so as jointly to help schools face the consequences staff reductions and reorganisation.
93. The work of the school financial and budget services section is very effective. School budgets are well managed, balances are reasonable and there are minimal deficits (two this year, both with planned recovery strategies). Support for longer-term planning, especially in schools with projected budget overspends, is particularly valued. There is a comprehensive service level agreement that is purchased by all schools, even though it provides much more support than some schools want or need. For example, all schools are entitled

to 20 visits per year from a finance officer, including a monthly visit. Some of these should not be necessary, but occur because the Council's central finance system does not link to the education system and consequently requires time consuming paper-based reconciliation on a monthly basis. This is unsatisfactory and limits the time available for the finance officers, who are well regarded by headteachers, to develop services for schools such as, for example, financial benchmarking.

94. The Council's finance department also offers schools a range of traded and statutory financial services, including payroll and audit, all of which are well regarded by schools and offer good value for money.

Recommendations

In order to improve levels of service management:

- expand information management systems within the LEA to provide more efficient and effective services to schools, and, as a matter of urgency, introduce automatic budget reconciliation software and thereby reduce the allocation of finance officer time to schools.

In order to improve consultation with schools:

- review the consultation arrangements with headteachers to ensure maximum opportunity for participation.

SECTION 4

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

95. Appropriately, the LEA has recently undertaken a review of all aspects of special educational needs (SEN) provision and has produced a two year action plan. A key feature of this review has been the recent amalgamation of the SEN support service and the educational psychology service to create the Sefton teaching and educational psychology service (STEPS) which aims to provide a more coordinated and flexible response to pupils' needs. Another feature of the review has been the revision of the LEA's SEN policy in consultation with representative headteachers and governors. The policy, in draft form, provides a clear strategy for the development of SEN provision and includes a clear commitment to inclusion through increasing the provision for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. However, as the policy is draft, not all schools are yet fully aware of the policy and its implications.
96. Separately, a timely review of special school provision is taking place to better align places with demand, reducing over capacity in some areas and expanding provision elsewhere. The LEA is committed to adopt separate phase special schools and better provide for post-16 pupils. Extensive formal consultation on these proposals is about to commence.
97. The LEA has been successful in its bid to the DfEE for a grant to provide specialist accommodation at two special schools, the facilities in one being severely criticised in its OFSTED report. Two further schools are being funded to provide an additional 12 places to cater for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and autism, as well as to improve facilities for early years children.
98. The current cost of educating pupils with SEN at independent special schools is very high, averaging £66 per pupil compared with a mean for metropolitan authorities of £32 per pupil. Some progress is being made in reducing the number, and hence the cost, of educating pupils with SEN outside the LEA. The number of places available in some special schools has been increased and the number of schools with resourced provision has been expanded. Currently, nine primary schools and three secondary schools have resourced provision and this is to be increased further. However, the introduction of resourced provision has not been consistently supported by sufficient planning, involvement and inservice training of the staff of the host schools. Despite this, the strategy has been generally successful.
99. In a further effort to rationalise places, the LEA is involved in a pilot project for planning SEN provision for minority needs throughout the Merseyside region. This will consider, for example, provision for those with Asperger's syndrome and the placement of girls with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

100. In order to ensure a fair system for funding SEN provision in mainstream schools, the LEA has sensibly adopted a new approach. A matrix system of funding schools has been introduced, based on the award of points following an analysis of pupils' individual needs measured against agreed criteria. This restructuring of funding, introduced from April 2000, is aimed to provide for earlier intervention for pupils at Stage 3. Although consultation with schools on the funding arrangements has been on-going over a period of almost one year, some schools still felt, in the end, consultation had been rushed. Nevertheless, the LEA has adopted appropriate and effective transitional funding mechanisms to protect potential losers under the new arrangements.

Statutory obligations

101. The LEA is taking reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations to provide for pupils with SEN. There has been a significant improvement in the timeliness with which pupils have their special educational needs assessed and, as appropriate, a statement issued. The appointment of two additional statementing officers has enabled the LEA to meet the recommended target for issuing statements within eighteen weeks. In 1999/2000, the LEA was able to complete this in 92.5 per cent of cases. Failure to complete within the target period occurred where there was a need to seek additional advice, often from a medical perspective, which accounted for half of the exceptions. Nevertheless, some schools find the statementing process subject to delay, particularly where the arrangements to cover schools in which the assigned educational psychologist post was vacant, were inadequate. The LEA has been successful in reducing the number of appeals to the SEN Tribunal.

102. The quality of statements issued by the LEA is satisfactory. Schools are able to translate these into effective individual education plans.

Improvement

103. In over one-third of the schools visited, SEN provision overall was judged as satisfactory and it was judged as good in a further half. Strengths included high quality learning support from STEPS and very good advice from the SEN Adviser. Other planned benefits of the new STEPS are not yet evident in schools.

104. Provision for SEN was judged to be unsatisfactory in the remaining schools visited, primarily due to an insufficient level of support from educational psychologists. This is largely due to an understaffed service. Despite recent decisions to improve the conditions of service of educational psychologists, only two of the current four vacant posts have been filled. Schools are not aware of the basis for allocating educational psychologist time to schools, which, until recently, was based on a formula. Schools receiving an insufficient quota of educational psychologist time were experiencing delays to the assessment of some pupils with SEN and not receiving advice and support as to how best to meet pupils' needs.

105. The LEA has introduced helpful criteria to assist schools in placing pupils on the appropriate stage of the SEN register. As the points system has been recently introduced, there has only been limited moderation by LEA officers and SEN coordinators of the use of the criteria in schools. Rightly, schools are anxious that a rigorous moderation process is undertaken to ensure a consistency of approach in the award of points based on the matrix criteria, particularly as points attract funding.
106. The LEA has provided effective training for SEN coordinators on, for example, writing individual education plans. There are also regular meetings for SEN coordinators to share good practice and concerns. Some schools with resourced provision have received ICT equipment to assist them with writing individual education plans. This was found to be helpful. The work of the SEN Adviser is held in very high regard by schools, although some concern was expressed at the wide range of responsibilities attached to the post.
107. The LEA is placing, very appropriately and successfully, an increasing emphasis on work with parents of SEN pupils. A good effort was made to respond to the results of a survey distributed 15 months ago. This sought parents' views on the effectiveness and efficiency of the service provided. For example, some parents felt disenfranchised from the annual review process; schools are now encouraged to reconsider how they involve parents in the process. A working party of parents and officers has been set up to oversee the provision of regular training opportunities for parents on, for example, behaviour management and dyslexia. Most recently, the LEA has held a one day parents' conference, which was oversubscribed, yet attended by 180 parents. This provided valuable opportunities for parents to attend a good range of workshop sessions as well as to meet LEA staff to discuss the needs and concerns of individual children. Parents' evaluation of this conference was most positive.

Value for money

108. The LEA is taking effective steps to ensure the future sufficiency of appropriate places for SEN pupils along a continuum of provision. Good efforts are being made to ensure provision is inclusive and flexible. However, much still remains to be done to reduce the substantial cost of fees for independent school places. Nevertheless, good progress has been made towards maximising the delegation of resources to schools through the new matrix funding mechanism. This has resulted in central expenditure on the funding of SEN statements reducing to only £17 per pupil, compared with a mean of £41 per pupil in metropolitan authorities. The current provision, therefore, reflects satisfactory and improving value for money.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of special educational provision:

- adopt the revised strategy and policy for SEN and ensure that it is effectively communicated to, and implemented by all schools;

- ensure consistency in the allocation of resources by establishing effective systems for moderating the allocation of points by schools to pupils on the SEN register;
- review the deployment of educational psychologist time to schools to reflect need.

SECTION 5

ACCESS

Supply of school places

109. Overall, the planning and provision of school places in Sefton is satisfactory. However, there are some significant problems that, although difficult to resolve, require urgent attention.

TABLE 3: Surplus places in Sefton for 1999 (2000 figures for Sefton in brackets)

	Primary		Secondary	
	Overall surplus	Schools with over 25% surplus places	Overall surplus	Schools with over 25% surplus places
Sefton	12% (11%)	19% (14%)	8% (7%)	14% (9%)
National*	9%	11%	8%	13%

*national figures for 2000 are not yet available

110. Table 3 shows that aggregate surplus places in the borough are only just above the national average and have reduced slightly this year. However, there are pockets of significant over-provision, particularly in the primary sector where rolls are falling and in the secondary sector where three schools have less than 520 pupils. These issues are clearly set out in both the well-written school organisation plan and numerous reports to committee. Whilst officers have devised a range of strategies to utilise some spare capacity, there remains a compelling case for some school closures. Unfortunately, elected members have failed to provide the robust support required by officers in relation to school closures when provided with sound evidence and advice. This lack of decisive action is having a detrimental effect on the schools whose rolls continue to fall.
111. The planning of post sixteen provision in Sefton is poor; currently one quarter⁷ of sixth forms have under 100 pupils. A working group of heads and officers has recently produced a position statement that has been presented to elected members. The covering paper identifies key issues but offers little by way of definite proposals. The paper rightly acknowledges the lack of consultation with the diocesan authorities as a current weakness. Overall, however, there is currently considerable inefficiency in the use of resources in supporting sixth forms of questionable viability.

Admissions

112. Admissions are handled efficiently and cost effectively. All but two per cent of parents get their first choice in the LEA's community schools. Information for parents is clear and has improved recently. Admissions timings are coordinated and the numbers of appeals are low; these are efficiently resolved,

⁷ Three out of the 12 schools with sixth forms

usually by the end of June. The legal department provides written guidance for appeals panels and is to offer training for panel members.

Property management

113. Overall, the school building stock in Sefton is in reasonable condition. However, 13 per cent of schools complained about the quality of service provided in relation to building maintenance. Concerns related to poor advice and poor liaison between the LEA's and the Council's technical services departments, resulting in an inefficient and ineffective service to schools. However, there are signs of recent improvements. Further delegation, service level agreements, and the introduction of a modern approach to planning, project management and customer care are all beginning to have a positive effect.
114. Good progress is being made in compiling the asset management plan, which builds on good data already held by the Council. Headteachers were unaware of this base data and therefore felt that some of the condition surveys were rather cursory. Usefully, however, they have all had the opportunity of checking and modifying the data. Evidence of good practice includes the involvement of headteachers in moderating the prioritisation of need. Plans for the suitability and sufficiency surveys are sound. Technical services are currently negotiating a service level agreement with the education service to carry out annual updates of the condition data.
115. One particularly successful innovation has been the development of a scheme to combat vandalism, into which all schools contribute a modest annual sum. This is already having a positive effect. Appropriate action in one primary school, for example, saved almost £20,000 in repair bills in the first year.

Attendance

116. The level of attendance at secondary schools in Sefton is satisfactory. Overall, attendance is in line with the national mean, and has risen from 89.7 per cent in 1995 to 91.4 per cent in 1999, at a rate slightly greater than achieved nationally. Primary school attendance has remained constant over the last five years at around 94 per cent, whereas nationally a slight improvement in attendance has occurred. Nevertheless, rates of unauthorised absence in both the primary and secondary sectors are low. Despite this, in 1999, five secondary schools and one primary school had attendance levels of less than 90 per cent. Although schools consider they receive good support from the education welfare service in promoting high levels of attendance, the support is insufficiently targeted at those who need it most.
117. The LEA has rightly acknowledged the need to continue to improve overall levels of attendance by identifying the development and implementation of strategies to improve attendance as an activity within its education development plan. However, the vast majority of the proposed actions in the Plan are nothing other than the activities normally expected of an education welfare service. Moreover, a 90 per cent attendance target is insufficiently

challenging for primary schools. The detailed actions are unlikely to lead to any radical improvement in overall attendance levels.

118. Action to implement the very sensible recommendations made as a result of a recent review of the education welfare service has been much too slow. The LEA has placed insufficient emphasis on responding to the review because of concerns about damaging its relationship with headteachers. The service is still deployed on an historic, rather than a needs-led basis in primary schools, with service level agreements introduced as a pilot for secondary schools from April 2000. This means that some primary schools receive insufficient education welfare officer support. For example, a primary school visited with one of the lowest attendance rates only receives a visit once a fortnight. In addition, there has been insufficient differentiation in support to secondary schools under the new arrangement, with, for example, the high school with the highest attendance record still receiving a weekly two hour visit. The steady improvement in secondary school attendance is largely attributed to work undertaken as a result of externally funded initiatives. As yet, schools have not been required by the LEA to set targets for increasing attendance and reducing unauthorised absence.
119. The service is well staffed and jointly managed by two principal officers. The cost of the service at £12 per pupil is the same as the mean of all metropolitan authorities. Secondary schools have recently been issued with a service handbook. This articulates the aims and objectives of the service and helpfully clarifies the referral process by identifying clearly the respective roles of schools and education welfare officers. Some headteachers of schools visited expressed concern that the service was refocusing its role onto attendance and away from what was described as 'its invaluable social work'. The service is right to do this. The Council has been slow to support the computerisation of the service that would lead to more efficient and effective working practices. In common with other services, there is no formal performance management system and the short-term action plan is simplistic. Nevertheless, the majority of schools receive a service that contributes to improvements in attendance. Overall, it provides satisfactory value for money.

Behaviour support

120. Support for behaviour, both in schools and with excluded pupils, has improved in the last two years; it is now broadly satisfactory and it is good in some primary schools. Three secondary schools expressed concern about inadequate support for behaviour, particularly in the development of strategies to avoid the exclusion of pupils. The 1998 behaviour support plan (BSP) identified the key issues for the LEA and schools to tackle. The BSP was, however, rudimentary, and has been superseded by the education development plan. Despite the relatively good standards of behaviour in schools reported by OFSTED, the LEA is right to make improvements in behaviour a priority. There are planned actions to reduce exclusions, establish full-time provision for excluded pupils and reintroduce, under the management of STEPS, the behaviour support team (BST), which was abolished to save money several years ago.

121. The LEA has made good progress in reducing the number of excluded pupils. From a high in 1998/1999 when 83 pupils were permanently excluded, only 44 exclusions have occurred in the current academic year up to May. The LEA is well placed to meet its 2001/2002 target of 42 pupils. Despite this, there is no clear protocol between schools to manage the transfer and reintegration of permanently excluded pupils.
122. In order to accelerate progress on behavioural priorities, the Head of the LEA's successful special school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties has been seconded to lead a working party on strategies to avoid exclusion and review other aspects of behaviour support. The LEA strategy includes the creation of three pre-exclusion units in primary schools. One of these units was visited during the inspection; it was judged to be effective and was receiving good, on-going support from the LEA. In one high school, a successful joint project between the education welfare service and youth services has been established to support pupils at risk of exclusion. In addition, plans are being drawn up to introduce seven learning support units located at the high schools in the Excellence in Cities initiative.
123. Satisfactory progress has been made on training for teachers and learning support assistants on behaviour management. The reintroduction of the BST 12 months ago has been welcomed by schools. Although staffed at a lower level than planned owing to reduced finance from the standards fund, it has quickly gained credibility with schools, both to train staff and to provide support for pupils.

Provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school

124. The Sefton educational referral service is the umbrella service which has responsibility for the secondary PRU, home tuition and distance learning.
125. The LEA has failed to give sufficient and appropriate support to the secondary PRU. Following its reorganisation there are some serious, unresolved issues associated with the management of the PRU. In January, the separate Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 PRUs were brought together onto one site. The PRU is located in the centre of the Borough, but is not easily accessible to the majority of pupils who come from the south. However, all 36 Key Stage 3 pupils and 14 Key Stage 4 pupils are transported to school by taxi, reducing the impact of location. Moreover, as all secondary schools in the south establish learning support units as part of the Excellence in Cities initiative, exclusions from these schools should reduce. Currently, a large number of pupils, around 140, are on roll at the PRU. Up to 20 of these pupils are catered for through placements with the national association for the care and resettlement of offenders (NACRO). Other pupils have been placed on the register as possible referrals but have never attended the PRU, such as those who have been permanently excluded from a school but whose exclusion has been subsequently overturned by governors. Attendance is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 but unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4, although pupils attend on a more regular basis than they did at their mainstream school. However, registers are not

adequately maintained and support from a dedicated education welfare officer has not continued, following cessation of funding.

126. Full-time education is being provided for Key Stage 3 pupils and is to be introduced for Key Stage 4 pupils from September, ahead of the national target date. Key Stage 4 pupils currently receive varying levels of provision, ranging from three sessions a week to full-time. For too many, this provision is inadequate. Moreover, staffing levels for the introduction of full-time education have not yet been agreed between the PRU management committee and the LEA. This has inhibited strategic planning for the new academic year. A review of the staffing provision for Sefton educational referral service, including the PRU, has been carried out, but no decisions on future staffing have yet been made.
127. Aspects of good practice identified by OFSTED in 1998, particularly related to work-related training, have faced some uncertainty. Concerns were expressed about a lack of assurance from the LEA that funds to buy training placements for Key Stage 4 pupils with outside providers would be available in September. This is blighting the PRU's ability to plan for next year. Furthermore, the reintegration work of the PRU is not effectively supported at LEA level. There is no senior officer to take responsibility for negotiating with schools to admit permanently excluded pupils, or any protocol agreed by schools so to do. It is not acceptable that this responsibility lies with a member of the PRU staff. As a result, the LEA's commitment to reintegrate pupils after two terms cannot be honoured. Only 12 pupils were successfully reintegrated back into a mainstream school during the current academic year and some pupils are reported to have attended the PRU for several years.
128. There are also concerns about education psychology service provision. Requests to initiate formal assessment for nine pupils on stage 3 of the code of practice have not been met. There is no clear route for referring pupils to the education psychologist and no clarity about the nature of the support that the PRU can expect to receive. In the light of the serious emotional and behavioural needs of these pupils this is unacceptable.
129. The home tuition service currently caters for 49 pupils, including young mothers, and, when necessary, those in the regional spinal injuries hospital. Pupils receive between five and ten hours tuition per week which for some is inadequate. However, a number of pupils are benefiting from a successful distance learning project, partly supported by European social fund money, which has enabled multimedia PCs to be placed in the homes of pupils who receive home tuition, thus considerably enhancing their educational opportunities. This effective provision, which includes a 24 hour helpline, prepares pupils for entry into a number of GCSE and other examinations, including qualifications in literacy, numeracy and information technology. Nevertheless, recent additional referrals mean that, without additional funding, some of the existing provision may have to be reduced. The LEA carries out regular monitoring visits to pupils whose parents choose to educate them at home.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

130. The LEA meets its statutory responsibilities with regard to health and safety. After a critical Health and Safety Executive report in 1997, a health and safety adviser was appointed and a programme of visits, training and policy developments has been established. The school survey and visits showed that the programme is effective.
131. Guidance and training on child protection issues are good and confirmed the findings of the school survey. Statutory duties are met; the LEA has a complete list of all schools' designated child protection teachers. A training group determines the context of the training which designated teachers attend on a regular basis.

Children in public care

132. From a low base, support for Sefton's 245 children in public care on school rolls is improving. Historically, elected members have not given the role of corporate parent a suitably high priority. Schools have been informed about their children in public care. Usefully, Social Services and Education have recently jointly appointed an education social worker at a managerial level to coordinate the work of four staff based in children's homes and enhance liaison with schools. However, records of the attainment of children in public care are incomplete, although the installation of new software in the next few months is planned to tackle this. The targets in the education development plan for the attainment of children at age 16 are based on a thin amount of extrapolated data and are not robust. Schools are being encouraged to set targets for children in public care in each Key Stage, but the data are not yet collected by the LEA.
133. Members have shown their commitment to this group of young people by approving in principle a proposal for a two year pilot scheme which will offer employment for two years to children in public care upon leaving school.
134. Several of the schools visited drew attention to the needs of many pupils who, whilst not officially in public care, do not go to the same home each night and are cared for by a range of relatives.

Minority Ethnic children

135. There are significant weaknesses in the LEA's strategy for supporting pupils from minority ethnic groups. There was no reference within the education development plan to ethnicity, ethnic minority attainment or the setting of targets for the small numbers of minority ethnic pupils within the Borough. These weaknesses are also reflected in the LEA's submission for the Ethnic Minority and Travellers' achievement grant. Visits to schools and the school survey also confirm that support to schools for meeting the needs of pupils from ethnic minority groups is unsatisfactory.

136. Recent changes in personnel, funding and strategy demonstrate the authority's commitment to addressing these weaknesses. Revisions to the education development plan for 2000/2001 include an appropriate programme of activities designed to establish baseline data and targets for monitoring and enhancing the attainment of minority ethnic pupils. Although some staff have attended IADP courses on challenging racism, the training needs of the majority of staff within the department, as well as within schools, have yet to be addressed.
137. Support for Traveller education is quite good. Two part-time staff, a support teacher and education welfare officer currently support just over thirty pupils in three primary schools. This support includes advice to schools, additional teaching support, the production of distance learning packs and visits to families on site. Funding is currently being sought to set up a resource base on the Travellers' site for work with pre-school aged children.

Measures to combat racism

138. To date, the LEA has been slow to respond to the recommendations from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (MacPherson Report). However, this work is now being coordinated at strategic directorate level and all departments have responded to a recent survey of practice across the Council. A summary document on departmental responses is soon to be presented to the Cabinet.
139. Within the education department some progress is being made. For a number of years, the LEA has monitored racial incidents in schools and, where appropriate, a multi-agency response has been made. Following a successful conference for schools in autumn 1999 on the implications of the MacPherson Report, the authority's equal opportunities policy is being revised and a departmental working group on race has been established. Future training needs are being identified and it is proposed to revise the existing procedures for the monitoring of racial incidents.

Recommendations

In order to maximise the allocation of resources and value for money:

- in consultation with all relevant bodies, including the appropriate diocesan authority, take action to identify and close schools that are no longer viable;
- draw up, in consultation with all relevant bodies, clear proposals for the rationalisation of sixth form provision, in advance of any learning and skills council intervention.

In order to promote further inclusion:

- by January 2001, implement the recommendations of the recent review of the education welfare service to improve the overall management of the service and target resources more effectively and in proportion to need;
- improve support for the pupil referral unit (PRU) by

- providing adequate education welfare officer support
- agreeing and implementing arrangements for providing adequate and timely educational psychology support
- agreeing staffing levels for September and thereafter in order that provision can be strategically managed
- in discussion with headteachers, implementing a protocol during 2000 on the reintegration of pupils from the PRU back into schools within two terms;
- collect attainment targets for children in public care and put in place a strategy to raise their levels of achievement;
- identify and implement a training programme for LEA and school staff which will ensure the effective implementation of measures to support minority ethnic pupils.

APPENDIX

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the strategic management of resources:

- establish an appropriately representative standing consultative group to review the LMS scheme and other related issues;
- make procedures for approving the budget by a much earlier specified date.

In order to improve service management and meet Best Value requirements:

- develop detailed service plans, linked to a performance management system, in consultation with governors and headteachers;
- review service level agreements to ensure that they are tailored to the needs of schools, have differential pricing, are renewed annually, and enable schools to contribute to the systematic evaluation of performance;

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- ensure that targets set for all schools are sufficiently challenging and have due regard to improvements in attainment anticipated as a result of the Excellence in Cities initiative. Set targets for minority ethnic pupils;
- specify clearly in the education development plan the improvements in school performance that particular activities are designed to facilitate;
- engage all headteachers fully in the delivery of the education development plan. In particular, fully involve headteachers in
 - the determination of activities that will contribute to school improvement,
 - the allocation of funding and relative costs of different priorities,
 - the evaluation of the effectiveness of the education development plan.

In order to improve the effectiveness of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:

- Develop a clear strategy for a phased reduction in the level of monitoring and support to reflect the spirit of the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations and the LEA's expressed commitment to develop self-managing schools.
- Revise the service level agreement for the advisory service to provide a range of differentiated services with a clear service specification to enable schools to evaluate the effectiveness of provision and achieve best value for money.

In order to improve the management and governance of schools:

- introduce arrangements to improve consultation with governors;
- develop strategies to enable governors to evaluate the effectiveness of their work and provide any necessary support;
- in consultation with headteachers and governors, review the arrangements and procedures surrounding the protocol for schools causing concern and, in particular,
 - ensure the criteria for each category are clear, unambiguous and consistent,
 - detail clearly the resources and support that schools can expect to receive at each level of concern,
 - ensure effective procedures are in place to keep governors informed, on an annual basis, of the categorisation of their schools.

In order to improve the effectiveness of the implementation of the LEA's ICT strategy:

- appoint a senior officer with appropriate ICT experience and knowledge to lead ICT developments within the education service, including MAN;
- develop a coordinated approach to schools' curriculum, managerial and administrative ICT needs, including technical support.

In order to improve levels of service management:

- expand information management systems within the LEA to provide more efficient and effective services to schools, and, as a matter of urgency, introduce automatic budget reconciliation software and thereby reduce the allocation of finance officer time to schools.

In order to improve consultation with schools:

- review the consultation arrangements with headteachers to ensure maximum opportunity for participation.

In order to improve the effectiveness of special educational provision:

- adopt the revised strategy and policy for SEN and ensure that it is effectively communicated to, and implemented by all schools;
- ensure consistency in the allocation of resources by establishing effective systems for moderating the allocation of points by schools to pupils on the SEN register;
- review the deployment of educational psychologist time to schools to reflect need.

In order to maximise the allocation of resources and value for money:

- in consultation with all relevant bodies, including the appropriate diocesan authority, take action to identify and close schools that are no longer viable;
- draw up, in consultation with all relevant bodies, clear proposals for the rationalisation of sixth form provision, in advance of any Learning and Skills Council intervention.

In order to promote further inclusion:

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 - providing adequate education welfare officer support
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 - agreeing staffing levels for September and thereafter in order that provision can be strategically managed
 - in discussion with headteachers, implementing a protocol during 2000 on the reintegration of pupils from the PRU back into schools within two terms;
- collect attainment targets for children in public care and put in place a strategy to raise their levels of achievement;
- identify and implement a training programme for LEA and school staff which will ensure the effective implementation of measures to support minority ethnic pupils.

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

Tel: 0207 421 6800

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Sefton Local Education Authority
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L20 7AE

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