



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF  
PLYMOUTH  
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

**February 2000**

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

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## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

## INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of the local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and in other Council departments, and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 110 schools. The response rate was 76 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 10 primary, six secondary, and three special schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

## COMMENTARY

4. Plymouth is a young LEA which was formed in April 1998 following Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The Authority serves an urban population and has many of the problems of unemployment and deprivation associated with large cities, although there are some advantaged communities.

5. Attainment at Key Stage 1 and 2 is below national standards and is not improving fast enough. This is in contrast to the secondary schools where standards at Key Stage 3 are in line with those nationally; at Key Stage 4 they are above national levels. At present, the LEA is not effectively promoting high standards in schools. This is due to some extent to problems in the recruitment of key staff. It is also due to the lack of progress that has been made on gathering and analysing data on its schools. The LEA is not in a position to target support sufficiently precisely at groups of pupils, or at those schools where there is underachievement. This deficiency has been recognised, and in September 1999 an Annual Review Cycle was introduced as a means of monitoring, challenging and supporting all schools. In the short term this is justified as an exercise to gather information but in the longer term, the LEA recognised that all schools should not receive the same amount of monitoring and support irrespective of need.

6. In some respects the LEA has begun well and there are a number of areas where it has been effective. The senior management of the Education Directorate has a notably open and responsive style and relationships with schools are good. Services, by and large, are well established and cost less than similar services in other unitary authorities. Other examples include:

- the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) have been well introduced;
- schools identified by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses and needing special measures have been effectively supported;
- support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), support for ethnic minorities and for travellers' children, support for improving attendance and support for improving behaviour are all good;
- governing bodies are very well supported;
- liaison with partners has been good and has informed the successful Education Action Zone (EAZ) bid which is operating in the City;
- personnel and finance advice provided to schools is good;
- asset management planning and school place planning is effective.

7. There are, however, significant weaknesses, which because they particularly affect school improvement, outweigh the strengths. Systems for monitoring and evaluation are under-developed, and the LEA is only now interpreting the Local Authority vision in the context of the work of the Education Department. The decision, taken within a year of vesting, to merge the Education Department with that of Heritage and Leisure has impeded progress. Other weaknesses include:

- inadequate provision of data;
- inadequate challenge, especially in relation to target setting;

- inadequate planning and support for information and communications technology (ICT), both in the curriculum and for administration;
- inadequate medium and long term planning;
- ineffective support for managers in schools.

8. Most of the LEA services are economic and efficient but not all are carried out effectively. Therefore, it cannot be said that the LEA currently gives good value for money. But, given stability, its team of officers is well able to implement the necessary changes to effect improvement. The agenda is a formidable one, and demands urgent action.

## SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

### Context

9. Plymouth City Council formally became the LEA on 1 April 1998. The City's education provision was previously the responsibility of Devon County Council.

10. The current population of the City is 255,028 and is forecast to fall slightly. Some residents are still feeling the effects of the economic downturn brought about by the demise of the naval industry that once dominated the City. Unemployment at 6.3 per cent is above the national average, and there are significantly fewer households with high social class members than is true nationally.

11. In January 1999 there were 20,981 pupils in Plymouth primary schools; 18,254 in maintained secondary/Grant Maintained schools, and 797 in special schools. From April 1998, there has been a full-time place for all 4-year olds whose parents require it. Of the total pupil population in the Authority's schools, only 0.6 per cent had English as a second language and 1.2 per cent come from minority ethnic backgrounds. This was considerably less than similar LEAs and national averages. In total, 22.5 per cent of primary pupils and 17.8 per cent of secondary pupils were eligible for free school meals. This is broadly in line with similar LEAs and national norms in the primary sector and below that in the secondary phase. In January 1998, 20.6 per cent of the pupil population were identified through the Code of Practice as having some special educational need. Overall, 1.6 per cent of pupils had a Statement of Special Educational Need; this was below the average for similar LEA's and nationally.

12. The organisation of schools is set out below:

Type of School	Number
Nursery	2
Infant	11
Junior	11
Infant and Junior	58
11-16 Comprehensive	2
11-18 Comprehensive	13
11-18 Grammar	3
Special	8
Pupil Referral Unit	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>

13. In 1998, the LEA had 16.1 per cent of surplus places in primary schools and 8.3 per cent in secondary. These figures are high in the primary sector compared to national norms, and are significant for a City where the population is projected to decline.

### **The Performance of Pupils in Maintained Schools**

The data in this section is illustrative not comprehensive.

14. The LEA and schools have adopted the Devon LEA accredited baseline assessment scheme. However, the LEA understands that the data is not standardised nationally to enable comparisons to be made. Judgements by OFSTED inspectors about pupils' attainment on entry to 74 Plymouth primary schools inspected in the period 1993-1997, indicate attainment on entry is lower than average. In the same period, judgements made about pupils on entry to 15 of Plymouth's secondary schools indicate that general levels of attainment on entry were higher than average.

15. There is a gradual improvement through the key stages. However, rates of improvement - which between 1997 and 1998 at Key Stages 1 and 2 were at a faster rate than in similar authorities and nationally - have not been sustained in 1999. Meanwhile, a marked improvement at Key Stage 4 in 1999 has not been matched at Key Stage 3.

16. Comparing results in Plymouth's schools with the results for the nation and for statistical neighbours in 1999:

- At Key Stage 1, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 or above in reading and writing was well below national figures and well below in mathematics.
- At Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above was broadly in line with national figures in English and science, and below in mathematics.
- At Key Stage 3, results in English, mathematics and science were broadly in line with national figures.
- At Key Stage 4, the numbers of pupils achieving 5+ grades A\*-C at GCSE improved four percentage points compared with 1998 to 49 per cent; and those achieving 1+ grades A\*-G improved marginally from 96.8 per cent in 1998 to 97.5 per cent in 1999. Both sets of results were above national averages.
- At age 18, Advanced Level results were in line with national averages, whilst attainment in vocational qualifications was much better.

Apart from writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1, all other results were broadly in line with, or better than, the results of statistical neighbours.

17. Attendance rates in primary schools in 1998 at 94.0 per cent were marginally above those in similar authorities and the national figures, and have remained much the same since 1995. At 92.0 per cent in secondary schools, the figures are better than similar authorities and nationally, and have remained static since 1995. There



has been a consistent improvement in the proportion of permanently excluded pupils between 1995 and 1999, particularly in secondary schools.

18. OFSTED inspection evidence indicates that, compared to similar LEAs, Plymouth's primary and secondary schools do well. Overall the quality of teaching in Plymouth's primary schools was broadly in line with national standards: in secondary schools it was better.

19. A primary school was placed in special measures in September 1997 whilst in Devon LEA. It has been well supported and was considered to have made enough progress for it to be removed from special measures in April 1999. Three primary schools and a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) have been identified since September 1997 as having serious weaknesses. The three primary schools are making satisfactory progress against the key issues in the action plan.

## **Funding**

20. In each of its two years as an LEA, Plymouth City Council has set the education budget at the figure indicated in the SSA for the authority. The City Council has substantial commitments in relation to capital expenditure prior to LGR that are greater than is indicated by its overall SSA, so the decision to fund the education service at Education SSA demonstrates a high level of commitment to education. Overall, schools have gained funding and this is appreciated.

21. The 1998-99 Education budget was set with a significant sum set aside for contingencies. During the year, delays in appointing staff and other factors led to a sizeable underspend. Once this was confirmed, it was passed on to schools as additional funding. Budget planning is now firmly based and the LEA is working to produce a forward budget plan for the next three years.

22. Plymouth delegates 82.6 per cent of the local schools' budget (LSB) compared with a unitary authority average of 81.9 per cent. It has a total LSB of £2586 per pupil, of which £2138 is delegated and is broadly in line with other authorities. The balance of expenditure between primary education and secondary is broadly in line with other unitary authorities. Of the centrally retained expenditure, central administration and strategic management together cost £93 compared with a unitary average of £108. SEN provision costs £161, compared with £146. The amount allocated for school improvement is equivalent to £15 per pupil, which is low compared to the unitary authority average of £23.

23. In 1999/2000 a total recharge of £2.375 million was incurred by Education for services provided by central departments, an increase of £0.171 million (7.8 per cent) on the previous year. Recharges are made for services to schools purchased from their delegated budgets and to the Education Department and include overhead costs such as telephone, mail, computers, financial, personnel, building and legal services. It has not been the policy of the City Council to prepare service level agreements between different departments and little work has been done on

the disaggregation of corporate costs. It is, therefore, impossible for the Education Department to verify that these services provide value for money.

### **Council Structure**

24. At LGR the City Council was organised into six directorates of which Education was one. Before the end of the first year the decision was made to effect integration by reducing the number of directorates to three. With effect from 18 August 1999, the Education Department merged with the Heritage and Leisure Department. The Director of Education was appointed to take over the combined Department which became known as the Directorate of Lifelong Learning.

25. The Education Committee is supported in its work by two sub-committees. Modernisation of Local Government has meant that the arrangements for the delegation of powers are in a state of transition, and the Council is likely to opt for the model of a cabinet plus scrutiny committees.

26. The Director, the Head of Learner Support and Head of Resources, Head of Management Support, and the Principal Education Adviser are responsible for reviewing the overall direction of the Education Service. A Senior Management Team, known as *Group 8* and comprising the Director, the two Heads of Education, the Principal Adviser and the four Heads of Division, meets weekly to co-ordinate the education policies of the new Directorate. The structure of *Group 8* is appropriate for managing the LEA and the current group of officers well able to implement the necessary changes to effect improvements.

27. Whilst three of the four most senior officers were in post prior to LGR, the Principal Adviser's vacancy was not filled until September 1998. The Authority's lack of success in recruiting to the post of Principal Education Adviser and some adviser vacancies, and the time taken between the decision to reduce the number of Directorates and its implementation, are all factors which have impeded progress in a number of key areas, particularly school improvement.

### **Education Development Plan (EDP)**

28. Plymouth LEA had to undertake planning prior to vesting day. It is, therefore, no surprise to find that the plan submitted to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and approved for three years largely reflects the national agenda and that the limitations of the audit of local needs reflects the time pressures in which it was undertaken. Nevertheless, there was extensive consultation on the plan and discussions with headteachers, governors and other stakeholders confirm that the LEA has largely selected appropriate priorities for the City's development.

29. Plymouth was awarded an EAZ in the first tranche of bidding. The establishment of this, along with the EDP and other plans, have taken a considerable amount of the energy of this small LEA. It is only now interpreting the Local Authority vision in the context of the work of the Education Department.

Shortly to go out for consultation, this draft strategic framework for 1999-2002 contains an outline of the key objectives and service level performance indicators by which the Committee and Directorate will review and evaluate performance, and an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the service.

30. The new Authority achieved a seamless transfer of responsibilities from Devon but combined with a central government agenda for education this has led to a short term emphasis to much of the LEA's planning. This is apparent in the EDP where activities are not defined in detail over a period of time or targeted sufficiently precisely at groups of schools or pupils.

31. The priorities defined within the EDP are:

- raising literacy standards at each key stage;
- raising numeracy standards at each key stage;
- developing the quality of teaching and leadership of schools;
- raising the achievement of pupils with individual educational needs;
- support for school self-review and evaluation;
- supporting and challenging schools causing concern; and
- enhancing ICT skills and the use of ICT in teaching.

32. Proposals for monitoring the plan are generally sound. The Senior Management Team and the Joint Executive Team (comprised of officers with representative headteachers and governors) both have specified roles in the evaluation of progress. A recent and worthwhile innovation is the Education Standards and Performance Group, which has met twice a year and includes elected Members. It takes a view on educational standards, provision and progress in schools/colleges, and on progress towards meeting the EDP targets.

33. *A First Report on Progress against the Priorities set out in the EDP* Committee Paper for Members acknowledges that there have been slippages, for example in the management of performance data and in headteacher appraisal developments. Mechanisms for evaluating whether its plan is having an impact on standards in schools needs further development. For example, data is poorly collected and used, monitoring is underdeveloped and, moreover, the EDP fails to define precisely enough the targets to be met.

34. Visits to schools and interviews with headteachers indicate that there is widespread awareness and approval for the LEA's priorities in the EDP. Special schools, however, express concern over a lack of clarity about the LEA's plans for inclusion. Development programmes in the schools visited generally reflect the main priorities of the EDP, although schools will need a greater degree of sequencing over the three years of the EDP if they are to develop the priorities fully. Nevertheless, a large number of the schools visited were intending to use the EDP to inform their next cycle of development planning.

35. Target setting procedures are clear and the strategy for agreeing them with schools was sound in principle, but the LEA did not initially have the necessary data

to judge what schools could achieve and was unable to give schools sufficient guidance or to challenge them. Whilst the resulting rates of progress from 1998 to 1999 suggest that the LEA will meet its targets at Key Stage 2, those for Key Stage 4/General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) were passed in 1999 and may have been set too low. The LEA has now begun to collate the additional data necessary to determine more precisely the capability of each school.

### **The Allocation of Resources to Priorities**

36. Resources are allocated to the pattern of needs and actions identified in the EDP although the costs associated with the annual review cycle are common to all schools and are not specific to a pattern of needs. The LEA does not have systems in place to evaluate the cost effectiveness of service provision.

37. The LEA is undertaking a fundamental review of the formula used to allocate delegated funds to schools in the City in order to better meet their need. The proposals, which at the time of the inspection were out for consultation, recommend a relative increase in funding for key stages 1 and 2. This is warmly welcomed by the primary schools and is accepted as necessary by those secondary schools that discussed the issue during the school visits. Overall, the formula review proposals will lead to a relative gain of funding by primary schools across the City, but will not provide significant additional benefits to secondary schools serving children with the greatest level of need, and therefore require further review to better meet the expressed priorities for social inclusion.

38. Preparations for Best Value are at an early stage but good progress has been made recently. A lead officer has been appointed and an officer working party has been established to advise chief officers on the preparation of the performance plan. It is intended that this plan be centred around the Pathfinder regeneration plan.

### **Recommendations:**

**39. In order to improve the strategy for school improvement, steps should be taken to:**

- better meet the requirements of schools serving children with the greatest levels of socio-economic need in the current review of schools' funding formula;
- more clearly sequence the activities in the EDP with a view to speeding up progress towards achieving the goals specified;
- define more precisely the procedures for evaluating the impact of the implementation of the EDP;
- determine whether the Education Department's services are providing value for money in preparation for the implementation of Best Value legislation.

## **SECTION TWO : LEA SUPPORT FOR RAISING STANDARDS**

### **Implications for other functions**

40. The EDP sets out a strategy for raising standards in schools which provides an appropriate basis for planned support for school improvement. It is analysed in paragraphs 28-35. It is suitably reflected in the corporate planning of the Council and has the full commitment of the City's schools. The overall responsibility for the monitoring of EDP outcomes within the Education Service is vested with the Director, the two Heads of Education, or the Principal Education Adviser for all priorities, except continuing professional development. It is an oversight that the monitoring of the professional development priority is not the specific remit of a member of the Education Directorate (*Group 8*). Although an infrastructure is in place, the LEA has been slow to implement a number of the activities within the EDP.

41. Management services to support schools are appropriate; for example, support for personnel, finance, and legal issues are all well established. Support for pupils with SEN is generally sound and contribute to raising standards. Provision of school places and arrangements for admissions are good. Schools are well supported for attendance and behaviour and for matters concerning looked-after children, ethnic minorities and travellers.

### **Monitoring, Challenge, Support and Intervention**

42. The Plymouth Advisory and Support Service (PASS) has the major responsibility for ensuring that the priorities within the EDP are delivered. PASS is led by the Principal Education Adviser. The original allocation of advisers to PASS was ten but a lack of suitable applicants has resulted in the need to re-advertise and the full team has only been in place since September 1999. In addition to carrying a responsibility for subject specialisms, advisers carry out a monitoring role for the LEA. This includes the negotiation of targets for schools and providing information on benchmarking. Each adviser has up to 12 schools to which they are linked and all have responsibilities in both phases.

43. Visits to schools suggest that link advisers are beginning to establish themselves well with their schools. Examples where the service has been effective are support provided to literacy, numeracy and to schools identified by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures.

44. An annual review cycle was introduced by the LEA in September 1999, with the agreement of schools. This cycle provides a mechanism for bringing together the LEA strategy for target setting; support for management; support for teaching; monitoring and intervention. Six half-day reviews/meetings to be conducted in the first year are a mechanism for providing this. The intention is to introduce a differentiated model after the cycle has run for one year, but, at present, the full cycle is inappropriate for those schools successfully managing self-improvement,

and represents a failure to target resources appropriately.

45. The service is at an early stage of development. At present, there is no guarantee that support is targeted at those schools which need it most. This is mainly because the LEA does not know its schools well enough and has not gathered enough information on them to allow support to be appropriately targeted. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the targets agreed with schools in 1998 for 2000 often bear little relation to the interim 1999 results.

### **The Collection and Analysis of Data**

46. In the school survey, the LEA's provision of data on pupil performance and guidance on its use, were rated by schools as unsatisfactory overall and lower than in all LEAs surveyed so far. Secondary schools were considerably more critical than primary schools.

47. The LEA holds data on the performance in all subjects in Plymouth secondary schools, and pays for all schools bar two to carry out tests in year 7. Although the results of these tests are collected, neither they, nor comparative subject information, are used by the LEA. Nor are they published for the benefit of schools. In the four secondary schools visited, data was generally well used to target underachieving pupils and to set group and individual pupil targets. However, the LEA had made little contribution to this work. The LEA is not making use of the expertise within the schools to inform practice across the Authority.

48. In the ten primary schools visited the analysis and use of data varied considerably. In half the schools it was well used, but in the other half considerable guidance was needed. Data provided to primary schools by the LEA in 1998 was of limited use. However, the LEA has made some progress this year and has recently circulated booklets to schools designed to help them begin their own analysis of data to set targets. In addition, the LEA has used previous school performance, Qualifications and Curriculum Agency information and free school meals, to inform a more rigorous debate on the targets schools will set for the Year 2001. On advice from the LEA, the two special schools visited are now setting targets for development through personal and social education, literacy and numeracy.

49. There have been some complications with the transfer of information about pupil achievement between primary and secondary schools. It was intended to do this electronically in 1999, but systems were not able to meet the demands made of them by the LEA and it was necessary to go back to a manual system during the course of the process. In order to obtain data on National Curriculum tests, secondary schools have had to approach primary schools directly. This would benefit from better co-ordination by the LEA.

## **Support for Literacy**

50. Support for literacy is satisfactory. The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has been well introduced. However, despite improvements, National Curriculum test results in both Key Stage 1 and 2 are below the national average, and the 1999 provisional results indicate that the gap has widened. Government targets for Level 4 and above in literacy in Plymouth are set at 80 per cent for Key Stage 2 in the Year 2002. In the provisional test results for 1999, 69 per cent of pupils attained Level 4, 6 per cent more than in 1998. Targets set by the LEA for the Year 2000 at 70.4 per cent lack challenge, and many schools have already achieved them. Those being considered for 2001 are more challenging, and, given the continued rate of improvement, should be achievable

51. Activities undertaken to implement the NLS are precise and well sequenced with timelines for implementation. Schools have been appropriately targeted for intensive support. The NLS is well managed. A Literacy Planning Group is in place to oversee the work, link advisers monitor the implementation of the strategy in schools, and links have been made with other LEA initiatives. There has been regular review and evaluation of progress towards meeting the targets in the EDP. The literacy team includes 1.5 full time equivalent consultants, a line manager with responsibility for English who is also a link adviser, and the Principal Adviser who oversees the whole. The consultants are overstretched as they are supporting not only primary schools but also secondary schools as the strategy moves into Key Stage 3.

52. Eighty-three per cent of secondary schools, and 93 per cent of primary schools, judge support to be satisfactory or better. Almost 50 per cent of primary schools judge it to be good or very good.

53. Thirteen primary schools and two special schools were visited where support for literacy was inspected. Overall in these schools standards were improving, particularly in Key Stage 2; teachers' planning and the management of literacy were better than they had been previously. The LEA's support had been satisfactory or better in all the schools bar one. Training had been good and consultants had provided expert advice, although some schools complained that access to help was becoming increasingly difficult. Training for recently appointed learning support assistants had helped them make a better contribution to the literacy hour. Four schools receiving intensive support had benefited, although in one school relationships between the staff and the consultant had broken down and this had affected progress.

54. The Literacy Centre, and the School Library Service, have provided schools with useful resources and exemplar materials to support their work.

55. Support for secondary schools has recently been introduced in line with the priority within the EDP to extend the NLS into Key Stage 3. A conference took place which was well received by schools, and all secondary schools are developing

initiatives as a result. Eight Summer Schools ran this year.

## **Support for Numeracy**

56. Plymouth primary schools have performed less well in the 1999 Key Stage 1 and 2 National Curriculum tests in mathematics than the national average with the gap widening in 1999 over 1998. In contrast, at the end of Key Stage 3, test results are higher than the national average in mathematics and showing improvement on the 1998 performance. Government targets for numeracy in Plymouth are set at 75 per cent of pupils attaining Level 4 for Key Stage 2 in the Year 2002. In the provisional test results for 1999, 66 per cent of pupils attained a Level 4 or above, 8 per cent more than in 1998. Targets set by the LEA for the Year 2000 at 65.1 per cent lack challenge, and many schools have already achieved them. Targets being considered for 2001 are more challenging, and, given the continued rate of improvement, should be achievable.

57. The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) is being well introduced. Effective leadership and efficient management are provided for the support of mathematics in schools by the Principal Adviser and the adviser for mathematics. Priority is currently being given to a programme of training, support and monitoring to implement the NNS. In addition, a numeracy centre and summer schools for secondary pupils and those in Year 6 in primaries have been introduced.

58. Planning for numeracy has been thorough and is firmly based on the needs, strengths and weaknesses of schools. The involvement of the area Academic Councils (primary schools with their local area secondary) has provided a means for the dissemination of good practice. A start has been made in identifying appropriate areas for development in numeracy and mathematics in all phases in longer term planning.

59. Schools consider the numeracy support provided to be appropriate and of good quality, and value the training provided for the Numeracy Strategy. They also greatly value the work of the numeracy consultants, and the easy access to advisers and officers and their responsiveness to schools' individual needs. This work is beginning to have a strong impact on the quality of teaching, the promotion of good practice and raising standards of attainment. There is need to provide additional training for teachers in coping with the special problems involved in mixed-age teaching in numeracy and to give guidance on methodology.

## **Support for ICT**

### ***ICT in the Curriculum***

60. OFSTED inspection evidence indicates that progress in ICT at Key Stage 1 is in line with standards achieved nationally whilst at Key Stage 2 it is significantly better. In secondary schools, progress at Key Stage 3 and 4 is slower than nationally.



61. In the school survey, the development and implementation of an ICT strategy; the use of ICT in the curriculum; and the introduction of National Grid for Learning (NGfL) were rated as poor and the lowest of all LEAs surveyed so far.

62. Focused visits for ICT were made to two secondary and three primary schools. Four of the schools considered the LEA's support for ICT to be unsatisfactory and one, satisfactory. The primary school where LEA support was deemed satisfactory enjoyed very good levels of curriculum and equipment support from the secondary institution in its Academic Council area of schools. The Council had been successful in its bid for first tranche NGfL monies. The LEA had provided help with the school's action plan following an OFSTED inspection and had given advice with regard to the NGfL bid.

63. One of the schools with serious weaknesses visited had ICT as a key issue in its Section 10 Report. This school was making only limited progress in improving pupils' attainment in ICT despite some support from a hard-pressed LEA advisory teacher. The remaining three schools were making progress but largely independently of the LEA.

64. The LEA's strategy for curriculum ICT is inadequate. There is insufficient guidance for schools on how to improve standards, quality or management in ICT. It is a matter of urgency that strategies are put in place to ensure a minimum entitlement to experience in ICT in all schools.

### ***ICT in School Administration***

65. Plymouth has a joint arrangement with Devon County Council to provide support to schools for ICT used for administrative purposes. In the survey, schools indicated that the ICT support for administration was barely satisfactory. The quality of the service provided has been variable over the past 18 months. However, a recent review by the three authorities involved (Devon, Plymouth and Torbay) has led to some improvement. The levels of service and subscription costs are set out in the Prospectus of Services for Schools. Every Plymouth school renewed its subscription to the service for 1999-2000. Training on various administrative applications is also offered through the Central Personnel Department, and training, together with advice on systems purchase, is available from the Council's Information Systems Department (ISD).

66. The ICT support to the Education Department is provided by the ISD. The LEA does not have a clear strategy for the development and enhancement of ICT and electronic communications systems.

67. The October 1999 draft of an ICT Strategy Plan outlines an ambitious vision of a future in which all written communication among schools and between the LEA and schools takes place electronically. Five working groups are identified as having a part to play in taking the plan forward, but none of them has the task of preparing a coherent strategy which will involve all relevant partners.

## **Support for Schools Causing Concern**

68. Support for schools in special measures and those with serious weaknesses is satisfactory overall. The LEA has successfully supported the schools who were in these categories at the time Plymouth became a unitary authority. A primary school was placed in special measures in September 1997 whilst in Devon LEA and was considered to have made enough progress to be removed in April 1999. In addition, three primary schools with serious weaknesses at the time of LGR have been satisfactorily supported and all are making sound progress against the key issues in their action plan. A PRU inspected prior to LGR and found to have serious weaknesses is not yet making sound progress.

69. Although the LEA has a mechanism to identify schools causing concern and a strategy for intervention and support, the lack of comprehensive performance data is preventing the LEA from identifying those schools which are weakest. Some schools identified as causing concern have disputed the LEA's interpretation of local criteria and how it applies to their school. In two of the schools visited, a course of action had been triggered by a set of criteria devised by the LEA which was not understood by senior managers.

70. Individual packages of support had been determined in liaison with each of five schools currently causing concern to the LEA, or previously in this category, which were visited. The provision had been suitably differentiated according to need. The cost of some of this additional help has been met by schools, although a proportion had come from central funds. The LEA has not carried out a detailed audit of the cost of this work, nor has it disseminated information regarding the type of support schools causing concern might expect. Monitoring arrangements where there are concerns are appropriate and comprehensive. A group comprising senior officers and the school's link adviser, headteacher and Chair of Governing Body meets half termly to consider progress made against the schools' action plan and to assess further needs to aid improvement.

71. In the school survey, the composite view of primary and secondary schools was that the LEA was good at supporting schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses and that it showed a more than satisfactory capacity to provide support if things went wrong in a school. Secondary schools were marginally more satisfied than primaries.

72. Visits were made to all the schools that had been in special measures or with serious weaknesses since the establishment of the LEA. All the four primary schools had improved, one quite spectacularly. The support of the school's link adviser was a key factor in the improvements made. These schools had benefited from the literacy and numeracy support and, in particular, from additional in-service training. In the PRU, while support had been sufficient, it has been more variable in effect.

## **Support for Governors**

73. Support for governors is generally good. The LEA has clear mechanisms for communicating with governing bodies and provides a well regarded training programme. Overall support provides value for money.

74. A range of appropriate information is used to identify the needs of governors. The Governor Support Team work in close collaboration with the PASS Division to provide training, advice and guidance on aspects of governance.

75. The survey of schools, interviews with representatives of governing bodies and visits to eight schools, all confirm that support to governors is good. There are strengths in training and provision of information; governing bodies have been able to use LEA guidance to help them effectively meet their statutory responsibilities. Consultation with governors has been good. Link advisers have provided good support and advice where appropriate.

## **Support for Management**

76. The LEA's support for management in schools has been limited. Two EDP priorities focus on management and leadership. The first relates to improving the quality of leadership and its impact on the teaching of subjects; the second to improving schools' capacity for self review and evaluation. There is some overlap between the two. The first focuses on continuing professional development and appraisal. The second focuses on data analysis, target setting and school development planning; it is closely related to the annual review cycle.

77. Training for senior managers and teachers within schools has been poorly targeted. The LEA has recognised this, and has begun discussions with schools to improve its analysis of needs; to identify a register of LEA providers; and to develop a brokerage role. Guidance on school development planning is being re-drafted and the role of the link adviser has been related to the annual review cycle which began in schools in September. Training for school self evaluation is planned for the Summer Term. The National Professional Qualification for Headship is jointly run with Devon and Torbay LEAs.

78. In the school survey, secondary schools were considerably more critical of support for managers than primary schools. In general primary schools rated support for senior managers, and for school self evaluation, planning and target setting better than satisfactory. Secondary schools rated support poorly overall.

79. Visits to schools confirmed that although schools welcome the LEA's proposals, there has been little support for managers since LGR. Improvements were largely due to the schools themselves, although in two primary schools where management had been weak the LEA's support had led to improvements. The most effective support had been provided by link advisers, through monitoring and evaluating schools' progress in implementing school development plans, although in

a number of schools, link advisers were new in post. Support was not always well targeted, for example one primary school had no school development plan; this had not been recognised by the LEA despite being a weakness identified in the 1996 Section 10 Inspection report. Schools were complimentary of the LEA's support and training for the induction of newly qualified teachers, and Academic Councils provide groups of schools with valuable opportunities to share good practice.

80. Systems for individual performance management and appraisal are in abeyance across the authority although proposals for schemes have very recently been made.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **81. In order to promote school improvement, steps should be taken to:**

- Decide, in continued discussion with the schools, as soon as practicable, the individual level of future monitoring and support that each school requires;
- carry out the EDP target to analyse in detail the available data as soon as possible, and use it more effectively to target support to schools, to determine more precisely the capability of each school, and to inform the LEA's strategic planning;
- analyse in detail and publish the data available in secondary schools;
- identify the best practice in secondary schools in data analysis and target setting and use it to inform the LEA's work;
- ensure that the additional training for teachers in coping with the special problems involved in mixed-age teaching in numeracy is delivered as a matter of urgency;
- urgently develop a curricular strategy for ICT which addresses the raising of achievement and the provision of a minimum entitlement experience;
- prepare a clear, costed strategy for all aspects of ICT; secure the agreement of partners to the strategy and to the role and responsibility of each partner in taking the strategy forward; identify resources to carry it through; and monitor progress towards agreed outcomes;
- prepare and implement a coherent strategy for the electronic transfer of information within the Education Service;
- define more precisely the support to different categories of schools causing concern.

## **SECTION THREE : STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

### **Corporate Planning**

82. In preparation for unitary status, Plymouth City Council prepared its *Corporate Strategy* in 1997. Within the Council's stated mission, the 12 objectives for education have formed the basis for a series of policy decisions and related documents and have been an appropriate influence in the production of the EDP and the plans for the EAZ. The corporate strategy is currently being reviewed as part of the process of preparing for Best Value.

83. A service plan was written for the Education Department and this provided the Education Committee with its basis for establishing a new Education Service from 1 April 1998. The priority in its first year of operation was to ensure a seamless transfer of responsibilities from Devon to the new LEA and in this it has been largely successful. Policies, procedures and systems that existed for education at the time were, where possible, transferred and have subsequently been appropriately developed where necessary or desirable. Procedures for implementing corporate plans are satisfactory although the monitoring and evaluation of them is inconsistent.

84. In the first year of unitary status, working groups were established on budget preparation and monitoring; review of SEN; capital planning; review of Lifelong Learning; and Early Years provision. A Service Scrutiny and Development Panel including Members has recently been established and this is beginning to provide the means for establishing service review mechanisms. Members are well informed about education matters by their professional officers.

85. The decision to delay the implementation of a performance management strategy within the Education Directorate was a deliberate one so as to enable the new service to respond to on-going LGR issues and the government's educational agenda. The need to react to the requirements of the DfEE in the production of a wide range of planning documents has been an influence upon the prioritisation of the Education Committee and the Education Directorate alike. The Directorate readily admits that, to date, planning documents and the associated processes and targets have had to be the way of assessing and evaluating performance. It has also represented the key means by which the Education Committee has been able to hold senior officers to account.

86. To assist the Education Department in its work a number of corporate strategies need to be developed and/or implemented. These include a strategy for performance management, for Best Value, for re-charges between Departments, and for service level agreements.

87. With effect from August 1999, the Director of Education became the Director for Lifelong Learning and took on additional responsibilities following a reduction in the number of Directorates. The decision to place an additional burden of directorial responsibility upon the Director of Education only 15 months into LGR is difficult to

comprehend. It flies in the face of the decision to delay the implementation of a performance management strategy so as to enable the Education Director with his Department to respond to the demands commensurate with being a new Education Authority.

88. The Director is credited with playing a leading role in helping to shape regeneration policy and strategy across the Authority. Good working relationships have been established between those in charge of education and the key personnel in each of the EAZ, the Employment Zone and the Health Action Zone in the City. Effective use is being made of the EAZ as a testbed for strategies which are designed to ultimately benefit the rest of the City. Included amongst these are support for attendance, for music in schools, for behaviour in the setting up of tuition centres and for early years in collaboration with Health Visitors. The establishment of good working relationships with outside bodies including the Dioceses, commercial and industrial companies, and various agencies is a strength of the LEA.

### **Management Services**

89. Support services to schools are provided by both the Education Department and some of the Council's Central Departments. The 'Prospectus of Services to Schools' describes clearly the range of support services offered to schools by the Education Directorate and other departments of the City Council. In the period immediately following LGR there were difficulties in providing satisfactory finance services. A task force was set up to review the situation. This recommended changes, most of which have been implemented. As a result, matters are much improved. However, there are few service level agreements (SLAs) between Central Departments and the Education Department: as a result there is little accountability or information on which to judge whether they offer value for money. At present some SLAs with schools do not sufficiently differentiate between the needs of users.

90. The Management Support Team (MST) within the Education Department provides support and advice on financial, personnel, governors and school administration issues. All of these services are very well regarded by schools. Schools pay a single flat rate subscription which entitles them to use all of the MST services. Whilst the practice does not accord with the intentions of Fair Funding to give each school a genuine choice of supplier and of service level, the schools visited took the view that over a period of time they make use of all of the services and that the subscription does represent value for money.

### **Finance**

91. School Finance Officers within the MST visit schools to provide budgetary advice and support to school administrative staff. They also monitor expenditure against budget for the LEA. There is an establishment of four officers, three of whom have been absent from work for considerable periods. The team has recruited temporary cover from among school based finance staff and continued to provide a good level of service in spite of the difficulties.

92. Some financial functions, payroll, income and creditors, were taken on by the respective sections of the Central Finance Department following LGR. There were grave problems in reconciling the computer systems of schools with those of the City Council and ensuring that staff responded to requests in the way that schools expected. In autumn 1998, a task force drawn from the Finance and Education Departments reviewed the situation and came up with a series of recommendations. Schools now report the service to be satisfactory.

93. The Central Finance Department currently provides financial services to the Education Department. The exact configuration and accountability of these services may change following the reorganisation of council departments that is currently taking place. The cost of these services is recharged to the Education Department. There is no formal SLA between the Finance and Education Departments and so little basis upon which the quality and effectiveness of services can be evaluated against expectations.

### ***Personnel***

94. Personnel Officers from the MST provide good quality personnel advice to schools. The school survey indicates that schools regard this service as satisfactory to good. Schools visited spoke about sensitive and timely advice being provided in a variety of situations including teacher competency procedures, early retirement, school merger and the revision of job descriptions.

95. The corporate Personnel Department provides a satisfactory personnel administration service to the Education Department. The central recharge from Personnel to the Education Department has risen without a clear service level agreement against which to evaluate the service.

### ***Building Services***

96. Schools receive an inconsistent level of service. The bulk of the money for the maintenance of school buildings has now been delegated to schools under the requirements of Fair Funding. The great majority of primary schools and most secondary schools have opted to buy back the service from the LEA. Information about the buy-back scheme arrived relatively late, and the schools decided that it would be less risk to continue than to seek an alternative provider.

97. In the survey, schools indicate that they are broadly satisfied with the service provided, although schools visited reported a variety of experience. The subscription paid by schools entitles them to have unplanned emergency work done on an insurance basis, should it prove necessary, and regular maintenance of plant and machinery. The balance of the allocation is then available for planned maintenance work. The department wrote to schools in September indicating how their subscription had been spent and recommending that the balance be spent on specified high priority planned work within the schools. The Council will need to

ensure that, in the operation of the scheme, schools are fully consulted about their priorities.

### ***Cleaning, Catering, and Grounds Maintenance***

98. At LGR, it was decided not to invest heavily in client officers within the Education Department for contracted services. Contracts for cleaning and catering that were with Devon Direct Services were transferred to the Plymouth City Contract Services Group. The City Council had already won contracts for grounds maintenance in the City. Current arrangements are working satisfactorily. When the present contracts expire, schools will be able to make their own arrangements. The school survey indicates that these services are satisfactory and this was borne out during discussions on school visits.

### **Recommendation:**

99. **In order to improve strategic management, steps should be taken to:**

- introduce - in the interests of transparency and value for money - simple, but clearly priced, SLAs between departments which specify services to be provided, how service levels and requirements are determined, and how service levels might be varied.



## SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

100. At the outset the LEA adopted a good policy for SEN through an effective review of provision and consultation with schools. Central to the policy are greater levels of inclusion and improved multi-agency work, both of which are being strongly promoted by the LEA.

101. The EDP sets ambitious targets for the first year of operation which focus on: appropriately improving provision for SEN, early identification and assessment of needs, raising attainment through improving the curriculum, behaviour management and teaching skills, together with an enhanced role for parents and carers. The early work undertaken by the LEA on SEN has been effective in building a good local partnership.

102. The principles and intentions within the SEN Policy on Inclusive Education are clear in the EDP and have been well received by schools. Senior officers recognise the need to develop the strategy further but as yet it is unclear how the detail of the policy will be implemented, how and where levels of inclusion will increase, and the nature of the provision that will be needed. A review of the SEN formula is planned but it is not clear how this review of funding, and the proposals within the LEA's planning, link together. It is therefore unsurprising to find that the schools visited are concerned about the resource implications of greater inclusion and changes to provision which appear not to be informed by a whole City plan.

103. The LEA has made some progress through the funding of small pilot projects to explore inclusion strategies between mainstream and special schools, and data has been collected which will usefully inform future planning. Nevertheless, these initiatives and the proposals recently produced in *Putting Words into Action* need to be brought together to form a coherent and detailed plan which can be shared with schools.

104. The LEA takes effective action to fulfil its statutory responsibilities to pupils with special educational needs. The procedures for pupil assessment and the production of statements are well managed and supported by the LEA. The quality of statements is satisfactory. The LEA fails to meet the statutory requirement to complete all statements within 18 weeks but has taken reasonable steps to do so in the future. The LEA is represented at annual statement reviews and appropriate changes are made to reflect the needs of pupils. In the main, the LEA statementing panel successfully secures provision to meet these needs. Targets set for pupils both in statements and individual education plans are variable in their focus and detail. The best examples set clear, time limited and quantifiable targets that can be effectively evaluated. Recent LEA training on target setting for pupils with SEN has been valuable for schools and will be further supported by school adviser visits.

105. Services to schools to support SEN are good and cover a wide range of learning, behavioural and specific needs. This is confirmed in the school survey, which indicates that primary and secondary schools have a high regard for all

aspects of the LEA's support work. Staff in these services offer an increasingly flexible package for individual pupils, teachers, classes and the whole school. The SEN adviser gives valuable support, and the training for SENCOs and learning support assistants is effective and improving. Mainstream schools visited where SEN was discussed in detail were able to demonstrate how the services are helping to improve the education and self esteem of pupils with special educational needs.

106. The LEA has established and funded a Parent-partnership Forum which is in its early days of operation. Governors are encouraged to take a close interest in SEN and to report annually to parents. The Looked-after Children Project is based on a corporate strategy with Social Services and has a good focus on curriculum provision and personal education plans.

107. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of SEN provision and the improvements for pupils are not fully in place. Officers are clear about how the procedures will be developed, but at present the process lacks detailed qualitative and quantitative indicators for success. The cost of SEN funding and services to schools when compared with other unitary authorities, is slightly above average. There is some way to go before the LEA can make secure judgements about value for money in the provision for SEN pupils.

108. Overall, the LEA has a clear policy for SEN which is well supported by its schools. The services provided by the LEA are good. School visits and inspections indicate that the provision for pupils with SEN is good in most primary, secondary and special schools. In the absence of a detailed strategic plan, limited monitoring and evaluation of provision, and with slightly above average expenditure on SEN, the LEA is giving satisfactory value for money.

**Recommendation:**

**109. In order to improve support for children with SEN, steps should be taken to:**

- develop a strategy for SEN which: uses the findings of the review and the pilot work in schools to clarify future provision; is reflected in the outcomes of the review of the formula for SEN; and includes procedures for monitoring and evaluation that have a sharp focus on quality and value for money.

## **SECTION 5: ACCESS**

Overall, the LEA meets its statutory responsibilities in this area.

### **Admissions**

110. Admission procedures are well handled by the LEA, and documentation and advice to parents is clear. The Plymouth area Admissions Forum has only had one difficult issue to deal with concerning procedures for admission to a boys' selective school. The LEA eventually took this issue to the adjudicator, who endorsed the LEA view. In the 1999 admission year, there were 71 appeals, of which 37 were upheld. At the conclusion of the process, only three secondary schools had places remaining unfilled.

111. In the school survey and in discussion during the inspection, schools indicated satisfaction with the way in which the LEA manages the admissions process and any subsequent appeals.

### **School Organisation and Planning of Places**

112. The LEA is making satisfactory progress towards meeting the Government target to reduce infant class sizes. When the spring 1999 DfEE audit was carried out, it showed that there were still 35 classes with over thirty pupils, but the situation was resolved by September.

113. The planning of school places in Plymouth was the subject of a recent review by District Audit. This review acknowledged that although progress has been made by the LEA, surplus places in primary schools are still a major problem for Plymouth. During its first year, Plymouth LEA removed 875 surplus places in primary schools and a further 350 in secondary schools. Bids for capital funding to remove a further 2,963 primary school places have been prepared and submitted. The School Organisation Plan (SOP) was agreed by the School Organisation Committee in September 1999 following a period of consultation. The SOP addresses the issue of surplus places.

114. In preparation for the Asset Management Plan, the Capital Planning Team of the Education Department has undertaken a comprehensive audit of accommodation in all the schools that the LEA supports. The capacity of each school has been assessed and agreed with the headteacher and governors. This has allowed for a more accurate assessment of the number of surplus places at each school. Where necessary, admission numbers have been adjusted to take account of these changes.

115. The information gathered from these audits has enabled the LEA to make successful bids for capital funds to remove surplus places under both the annual capital bidding round and the New Deal for Schools initiative.

116. The Asset Management Plan will shortly be completed by including information from the building survey, which is currently taking place. The systematic approach to capital planning is welcomed by schools. Those visited expressed confidence in the outcome of the audit. The school survey indicates satisfaction with both the planning of school places and the conduct of building surveys. The LEA has established very good systems for asset management and school place planning.

117. However, once capital funding has been allocated to a school, progress to completion of a project is not always straightforward. Two schools were visited during the course of this inspection that were going through the process of finalising plans for major building works. The support they had received from the architects assigned to the job by the City Technical Consultancy was judged by them to be unsatisfactory. Active support from the Capital Planning Team had been required to ensure that acceptable plans were produced. The LEA has made a large bid to the DfEE for capital funding for the next financial year. If the bid is successful, more schools will need the service of an architect. The service will need to improve if the school expectations are to be met.

### **Attendance**

118. Although attendance in Plymouth schools is broadly satisfactory, there is a wide range of variation between schools. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) are a highly effective and well regarded team. The EWS team works in partnership with other groups and agencies, including the Behaviour Support Team (BST) and social services, to promote good attendance and follow-up attendance problems promptly. Education Welfare Officers aid schools in developing effective strategies and provide support for pupils at risk of developing serious attendance problems. The cost of the service is about average for LEAs nationally.

119. A particularly successful project partly funded by the EAZ and partly by the LEA and operating in the Tamarside Academic Council area is 'MEMO' (Miss Education, Miss Out). This was originally a Standards Fund project and involves electronic registration, first day calling, family counselling and rewards schemes. Significant gains have been recorded in some schools with moderate gains overall.

### **Behaviour Support**

120. The Behaviour Support Plan is closely linked to all work concerning exclusions, attendance, and education otherwise than at school (EOTAS). It sets out an approach which is proactive in addressing pupils' behaviour problems at an early stage in school, with the aim of preventing them becoming poor attenders, or through increasing behaviour problems, being excluded from school. The multi-disciplinary Behaviour Support Team maintains close working contacts with other groups and agencies, including the police, social services and

health. Schools report that support from the LEA for behaviour problems is good. The schools generally praised the accessibility of the Team and officers and their helpful, prompt responses to need.

121. The Behaviour Support Plan itself is concise, stating principles and a structure but not including detail. The practice has now developed much further than described, and the Plan requires updating. Current costs are below the average.

### **Provision for Education Otherwise than at School**

122. The LEA has three PRUs, one appropriately for pupils in Key Stage 3 and the other for pupils in Key Stage 4. They, along with the BST, the Hospital Service and the EOTAS Home Tutor Service, provide education for pupils otherwise than at school. The service sets out to provide a broad and balanced curriculum delivered by a team of specialist staff. In the school survey, provision for excluded pupils (all from secondary schools) was judged to be broadly satisfactory, but for pupils out of school for reasons other than exclusion it was judged better. Last year 68 pupils received an average of 11 hours per week tuition, the minimum being five hours.

123. The EOTAS team contributes to in-school support in primary schools. The team works flexibly in conjunction with the multi-disciplinary BST and makes a significant contribution to its effective work.

### **Health, Welfare, Safety and Child Protection**

124. The LEA's provision for health and safety, welfare and child protection is well organised, comprehensive and of satisfactory quality. The policy for this work is clear and effectively communicated. Child protection procedures are fully set out, an appropriate care structure is in place, including the necessary links with other bodies and agencies, and good quality training is provided for school staff with responsibilities in this area. Statutory requirements are met fully.

### **Looked-after Children**

125. Arrangements to meet the needs of looked-after children are based on a strong partnership with social services. However, whilst there are good partnership arrangements in many parts of the City, some schools in disadvantaged areas reported inconsistencies at operational level in their relationship with Social Services area offices. A three year plan has been produced which characterises and defines the 'corporate parent' role. This plan includes appropriate personal and educational targets and is administered by a steering group comprising senior managers from education, health, social services and schools, and a foster carer.

126. The EDP includes an action plan to raise the attainment of looked-after

children, with precise and appropriate targets set. The key roles of parents and carers in helping to raise attainment are recognised, and the LEA's 'corporate parent' role is further developed in relation to support for carers. There is evidence of good liaison between schools and children's homes. Much of the provision appears effective and purposeful but requires more specific monitoring arrangements to guarantee good quality. A Standards Fund grant for the current year has been used to establish a support team of two advisory teachers, an educational psychologist and a research assistant.

### **Ethnic Minority Children**

127. Plymouth has a small proportion of ethnic minority pupils in its schools (1.2 per cent), but 70 per cent of schools have at least one pupil. Although numbers are small, 46 mother tongues are spoken. Support for ethnic minority children is an expanding area of work within the LEA. The support service is now represented on the Equal Opportunities Advisory Group and other appropriate bodies. Appropriate training on ethnic minority issues is now provided for school governors. There is a need to consolidate the longer-term view of the future development of the service in order to further clarify strategic planning. Spending on this effective service is below the average for LEAs.

128. Much of the work of the service is concerned with support for pupils with English as an additional language. Support teachers were included in the primary training for the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Schools are able to borrow attractive reading books in a wide range of languages from the School Library Service.

### **Recommendations:**

129. **In order to improve access, steps should be taken to:**

- clarify strategic planning for ethnic minority children through the consolidation of the longer term view of the future development of the support service;
- remove surplus places as soon as is practicable.

## **APPENDIX**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**In order to improve the strategy for school improvement, steps should be taken to:**

- better meet the requirements of schools serving children with the greatest levels of socio-economic need in the current review of schools' funding formula;
- more clearly sequence the activities in the EDP with a view to speeding up progress towards achieving the goals specified;
- define more precisely the procedures for evaluating the impact of the implementation of the EDP;
- determine whether the Education Department's services are providing value for money in preparation for the implementation of Best Value legislation.

**In order to promote school improvement, steps should be taken to:**

- Decide, in continued discussion with the schools, as soon as practicable, the individual level of future monitoring and support that each school requires;
- carry out the EDP target to analyse in detail the available data as soon as possible, and use it more effectively to target support to schools, to determine more precisely the capability of each school, and to inform the LEA's strategic planning;
- analyse in detail and publish the data available in secondary schools;
- identify the best practice in secondary schools in data analysis and target setting and use it to inform the LEA's work;
- ensure that the additional training for teachers in coping with the special problems involved in mixed-age teaching in numeracy is delivered as a matter of urgency;
- urgently develop a curricular strategy for ICT which addresses the raising of achievement and the provision of a minimum entitlement experience;
- prepare a clear, costed strategy for all aspects of ICT; secure the agreement of partners to the strategy and to the role and responsibility of each partner in taking the strategy forward; identify resources to carry it through; and monitor progress towards agreed outcomes;
- prepare and implement a coherent strategy for the electronic transfer of information within the Education Service;
- define more precisely the support to different categories of schools causing concern.

**In order to improve strategic management, steps should be taken to:**

- Introduce - in the interests of transparency and value for money - simple, but clearly priced, SLAs between departments which specify services to be provided, how service levels and requirements are determined, and how service levels might be varied.

**In order to improve support for children with SEN, steps should be taken to:**

- develop a strategy for SEN which: uses the findings of the review and the pilot work in schools to clarify future provision; is reflected in the outcomes of the review of the formula for SEN; and includes procedures for monitoring and evaluation that have a sharp focus on quality and value for money.

**In order to improve access, steps should be taken to:**

- clarify strategic planning for ethnic minority children through the consolidation of the longer term view of the future development of the support service;
- remove surplus places as soon as is practicable.



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