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IN EDUCATION**

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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

## INTRODUCTION

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

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, Council staff, headteachers, governors, and representatives of the dioceses and other partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 85 schools or units. The overall response rate was 85 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one pupil referral unit, two special schools, two first schools, six primary schools, two middle schools, and five secondary schools. These 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 to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the schools and provides value for money. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools in the LEA was also considered.

## COMMENTARY

4. North Tyneside is an area with great socio-economic diversity. It includes prosperous coastal towns, highly disadvantaged urban localities and some rural communities. Its economic infrastructure has changed radically in recent times as traditional ship-building and mining industries have declined and electronics-based businesses have emerged.

5. There are more good and very good schools in North Tyneside than are found nationally, and fewer than usual requiring improvement. Only one institution has required special measures and only one school has had serious weaknesses. Pupils make good progress in the early key stages. Standards at Key Stage 2 are generally above national averages and are continuing to improve at the national rate. At Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils' progress is slower. GCSE results are in line with the national figure and improving less quickly than nationally. The authority exceeded its Key Stage 2 targets but did not meet some of its GCSE targets.

6. The council has reviewed the structure of school provision in order to reduce surplus places and to promote high standards. This is resulting in the replacement of a three-tier system with a two-tier system in three out of five pyramids of schools reviewed. The council has a strongly corporate approach to management and has an executive directorate where most authorities have a chief executive and departmental directors or chief officers. Last year the authority was awarded Beacon council status for its work in school improvement.

7. This LEA carries out the large majority of its functions satisfactorily or better, and has only a few significant weaknesses, although these are in important areas. Its work in promoting school improvement is good in many respects, and its strategies to increase educational inclusion are emerging, although more rapidly in some aspects than others. It has a good partnership with schools, in which support and challenge are appropriately balanced. However, the authority has not made much progress in developing a market approach to services, in which its provision would have to be tested against alternative providers. Its work would benefit from an improved approach to monitoring and evaluation across the range of its plans.

8. The authority exercises the following functions particularly effectively:

- the leadership provided by senior officers;
- work with partners;
- the targeting of resources to meet needs in school improvement;
- strategy, management, deployment and effectiveness of school improvement work;
- support for schools causing concern;
- support for literacy;
- support for numeracy;
- support for governors;
- support for school management;
- support for the use of performance data; and
- support for early years.

9. However, the following functions are not currently carried out adequately:

- support for the use of information and communication technology (ICT);
- the strategic planning for special educational needs (SEN);
- monitoring of the effectiveness of SEN provision;
- some aspects of property services; and
- provision for pupils who have no school place;

10. Much of the strength of this LEA derives from recent changes, resulting from policy development by elected members, and from very high quality leadership by officers. Change had become very necessary, as surplus places had accumulated to a damaging level, school budget deficits had grown excessively, and strategic decisions about post-16 and SEN provision were urgently needed. A turning point seems to have come about three or four years ago, coinciding with the arrival of a new chief education officer and a determination by the council to tackle the outstanding issues. Expert advice from officers, past and present, along with advice on key issues from independent consultants engaged by the council, has produced significant improvement. The process of corporate working, and an active involvement in partnership work, have helped this movement. However, this report shows that much remains to be done, in consolidating the changes already made, in implementing the commitment to the culture of Best Value, in measuring the impact of changes, and in raising standards at Key Stage 3 and GCSE.

11. The recent track record of the LEA is good. It recognises its current weaknesses, and is now focusing its resources to tackle the key issues. Its capacity to make further improvement is good.

## **SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Context**

12. North Tyneside is a metropolitan borough in the Tyne and Wear region. It encompasses great socio-economic diversity, including disadvantaged urban localities, prosperous coastal towns and some rural areas. The borough has suffered from the decline of the traditional ship-building and coal mining industries, although the recent expansion of electronics-based industries brought new employment opportunities.

13. The proportion of primary pupils eligible for free school meals (25.5 per cent) is slightly above the national average (20.5 per cent), as is the secondary figure (21.6 per cent compared with 18.1 per cent). However, the contrast between schools in different parts of the local education authority (LEA) is huge. Four wards are particularly disadvantaged, with high levels of child poverty. Only 1.4 per cent of school children are from minority ethnic groups, fewer than the national average.

14. The council provides nursery places for 85 per cent of 3 year-olds, and all 4 year-olds. The current statutory school age population numbers 25,322 but this age group is forecast to reduce in size over the next ten years. There are currently two nursery schools, 17 first schools, 39 primary schools, nine middle schools, and 11 secondary schools. Eight of the secondary schools have a sixth form. There are five special schools and two pupil referral units. More than half of the borough's statutory age pupils attend schools in a two-tier system of primary and secondary schools. The remainder are in a three-tier system of first, middle and high schools. The different systems operate in distinct geographical areas. The council is in the process of reorganising most local pyramids of schools from three-tier to two-tier. After the current round of reorganisation the three-tier system will remain in only one area.

15. In January 2000 there were 4994 surplus places in schools, mainly concentrated in the disadvantaged parts of the borough. Thirteen primary and six secondary schools then had more than 25 per cent surplus places. The council is removing a significant number of places through the programme of school reorganisation and expects that by 2004 no schools will have more than 25 per cent surplus places. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need (SEN) in the primary phase (3.2 per cent) is above the national average (2.6 per cent) but the secondary figure (3.7 per cent) is in line with the average (3.9 per cent). The proportion of primary age pupils in special schools (2 per cent) is well above the national figure (1 per cent) and that for secondary schools (1.9 per cent) is above the national figure (1.5 per cent).

16. North Tyneside is a Phase 2 authority in the Excellence in Cities initiative. The EiC core partners comprise the LEA and all eleven secondary schools. There is also joint working with other partnerships in the region.

## Performance

17. OFSTED school inspections judge attainment on entry to primary schools to be well below the national average: pupils in two-thirds of schools have poor levels of attainment, twice that found nationally. However, a considerably higher percentage of pupils under five then make good progress in school when compared with the national average and that of statistical neighbours. Furthermore, the progress made by pupils between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is also above average. Progress at Key Stages 3 and 4, however, is broadly in line with the average.

18. In 2000, the percentage of pupils achieving level 2 and above in each of the Key Stage 1 tests was well above the national and statistical neighbours' average. The percentages for those gaining level 3 and above were, overall, above national and neighbours' figures.

19. At Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils achieving level 4 and above in the English and mathematics tests was above the national averages and that of statistical neighbours. Science results were broadly in line with the national average but above that of statistical neighbours.

20. At Key Stage 3, the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 and above in English was broadly in line with the national average but above that of statistical neighbours. In mathematics and science, results were broadly in line with national and statistical neighbour averages.

21. At Key Stage 4, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grades or one or more A\*-G grades was broadly in line with national and statistical neighbour averages. The average GCSE point score was broadly in line with the national average but above that of similar authorities.

22. At age 18, the average A-level points score was broadly in line with national figures but below statistical neighbours' average.

23. Over the last four years, rates of improvement in key stage tests have been almost all either in line with or above national trends and that for similar authorities. Improvement in GCSE higher grades, however, has fallen below the national trend although it remains in line with that of statistical neighbours. The improvement in average point score is broadly in line with the national and statistical neighbours' trend. Improvement in students' average point score at A level is above the national trend but below that of statistical neighbours.

24. The relative performance of girls and boys is overall similar to the national picture across the Key Stages.

25. In 2000, the authority exceeded its targets for English and mathematics at Key Stage 2. However, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more higher grades at GCSE (45.2 per cent) was below the target figure (48 per cent). The average GCSE point score achieved (38.1) was also below the target (38.4). The LEA



exceeded its target of 35 per cent of children leaving public care having gained at least one GCSE or GNVQ qualification by 11 per cent.

26. The proportion of good and very good primary schools (92 per cent) is considerably higher than the national figure (70 per cent) and that for statistical neighbours (66 per cent). The proportion of good and very good secondary schools (79 per cent) is higher than the national figure (66 per cent) and that for statistical neighbours (65 per cent). Only one institution in the authority has ever been found to require special measures and this was subsequently closed. Only one school has been found since 1997 to have serious weaknesses and these weaknesses have now been resolved. There are seven Beacon schools in the authority, a commendably high figure.

27. In 2000, the rate of permanent exclusions was well above the national figure for primary schools and in line with that for secondary schools. Attendance figures for primary and secondary aged pupils were above the national average. The level of unauthorised absence was below national figures.

## Funding

28. North Tyneside LEA plans to spend £84.4m on education in this financial year (2000-01). This is 3.7 per cent above the Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) of £81.4m. The LEA's planned expenditure in 1999/2000 was 3.2 per cent and its actual expenditure 4.4 per cent above SSA. North Tyneside's SSA per pupil (£2,659) is in the lowest quartile for LEAs in England. In the current year, the LEA plans to delegate 82 per cent of the Local Schools Budget through the Individual Schools Budget (ISB). This compares with a reported 79 per cent for the same figure in the 1999/00 out-turns.

29. The LEA's average funding per pupil delegated to schools through the ISB and Standards Fund in 2000/01 is consistently lower than that for comparable authorities.

2000-01	Primary ISB per pupil	Secondary ISB per pupil	Special ISB per pupil	Standards Fund per pupil (Devolved)
North Tyneside	£1,679	£2,330	£7,119	£44
Statistical Neighbours	£1,773	£2,398	£8,833	£55
All LEAs in England	£1,890	£2,559	£9,256	£64

30. On a per pupil basis, North Tyneside's total expenditure within the LSB is slightly above that of its statistical neighbours and marginally below that of Metropolitan LEAs on average (£2617: £2607: £2644). However, LEA activities within the Local Schools Budget (LSB), cost more in North Tyneside than in those two other groups on average, £503 compared to £418 in statistical neighbours and

£427 in metropolitan LEAs, as would be expected from the low percentage delegated.

31. In 2000-01, provision per pupil in central budgets for pupils with statements of Special Educational Need (£64) is larger than in statistical neighbours (£34) or nationally (£44). Centrally retained school meals costs per pupil (£84) are four times higher than the statistical neighbours (£19) and national costs (£22). The EDP costs more per pupil (£32) than statistical neighbours (£25) and the national average (£26). Existing early retirement costs, insurance and inclusion support costs are also comparatively high. However, educational psychology and statutory assessment costs (£14) are lower than statistical neighbours (£18) or the national average (£21). Similarly, home/school transport costs (£26) are lower than statistical neighbours (£45) and the national average (£69). Other central costs in North Tyneside are broadly similar to those in comparable LEAs.

32. In 1999/00, the additional educational needs element in the delegated funding formula was on average £182 per primary school pupil, variably distributed between schools according to their pupils' entitlements to free school meals. The comparable figure for statistical neighbours was £19 and for metropolitan authorities was £43. There was a similar pattern in secondary funding. There is some evidence that this policy, targeting resources significantly towards areas of need, might be contributing beneficially to pupils' attainment in disadvantaged schools but the evidence is not complete or conclusive. The consequence for the budgets of schools with relatively low levels of free school meals is demanding but not critical.

33. North Tyneside has been successful in recent years in attracting additional funds. Only three LEAs secured higher per pupil funding from the latest round of the DfEE New Deal for Schools scheme. Capital expenditure in 2000/01 (£21 million) is planned to be about three times the level of recent years, mainly as a result of the strategic review of school provision and the removal of surplus places which will in total generate £75m of capital investment. A range of partnership schemes, some attributable to the council's bidding unit, is bringing resources into schools for a variety of initiatives. The relatively new and developing sense of partnership between the LEA and its schools is contributing to these successes.

### **Council structure**

34. The council has 34 Labour members, 17 Conservatives, and 9 Liberal Democrats. Representatives of the churches attend council meetings. The council's cabinet comprises the leader, the deputy leader, and eight councillors who lead on particular policy areas, of which lifelong learning is one. Each lead member is supported by a small reference group of members from the majority party. The structure has led to some frustration by minority parties as, although systems are in place to support them, they have in the past felt somewhat under-informed about emerging policies. The recent re-institution of briefings for minority parties by the executive director (lifelong learning) has been welcomed.

35. Schools understand the council structure. They are generally clear about the respective roles of councillors and officers, and welcome the present openness of

the council's arrangements. The council has a monitoring officer who is able to deal with issues concerning ethical standards.

36. The select committee for lifelong learning is responsible for scrutiny of the council's work in education but it has tended to focus on details and has not as yet been able to take a strategic role in evaluating emerging policy. The committee receives reports from officers on progress made on the Best Value Performance Plan and the Education Development Plan, and also undertakes its own investigations.

37. The corporate system is successful in ensuring that new educational policies draw on resources across the council. There is no chief executive, but a board of five executive directors who take joint responsibility for enacting the council's overall policies, whilst each retaining lead responsibility for certain policy areas. One executive director has particular responsibility for lifelong learning, and fulfils the statutory role of chief education officer. However, major initiatives in education, such as the recent strategic review of school provision are subject to joint development by the executive directorate. This system works satisfactorily. The directorate prepares a medium term financial plan in order to develop a strategic view of spending needs and this has allowed useful co-operative thinking on some key educational developments.

38. The second tier of the council structure comprises eleven functions, such as schools services, children's services, and community services, each of which each have a budget and a performance plan. The functions are charged with implementing the council's policies. Schools services has most involvement with school provision but the executive director (lifelong learning) and the lead member (lifelong learning) have frequent meetings with a core group of function heads who also support schools significantly, such as community services, children's services, information technology and others. This framework ensures appropriate coherence across the work of the various functions.

39. The schools services function has recently been reorganised. A good start has been made in implementing the new structure, which emphasises school improvement as the fundamental work of the function.

### **The Education Development Plan**

40. The Education Development Plan (EDP) is good overall, although there are weaknesses in some of its evaluation criteria. It is prefaced by a useful statement of principles, highlighting the raising of standards, social inclusion and partnership working. It includes a reliable audit of need that draws on a range of appropriate evidence.

41. The EDP priorities were agreed after good consultation. The priorities first agreed were:

- improve standards of literacy and numeracy;
- tackle under-performance and disaffection of groups of pupils to promote social inclusion;

- support and challenge for schools through a framework for school performance review;
- improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- improve the quality of leadership, management and school governance;
- raise standards for pupils with special educational needs; and
- develop the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning.

42. The LEA updated the EDP appropriately after the first year of implementation and sensibly added a further priority:

Implement the Excellence in Cities (EiC) strategy.

43. This new element complements the priorities on social inclusion and on ICT. It reinforces the authority's commitment to target resources to points of need. EiC also relates helpfully to current post-16 developments as these two initiatives use the same school clusters and there is some similarity of approach between them.

44. When the EDP was updated a useful refocus was given to some priorities to take account of national changes, such as the new emphasis on citizenship in the curriculum. Also, changes were made as a result of the authority's own evaluation. For instance, a broader system of school monitoring has been developed as the basis for identifying schools causing concern. A children's university is being introduced to extend opportunities for out-of-school learning.

45. The activities described in the EDP are relevant to their purpose and, together, cover the main school improvement issues facing the LEA. They are well focused on national priorities; for instance, the priority on teaching and learning gives specific attention to gifted and talented pupils and to Key Stage 3 developments. Schools have a very clear understanding of the EDP and regard it as relevant to their needs. They have a good grasp of how the LEA targets EDP activities according to schools' needs. The machinery for implementing the activities has been planned clearly and the authority has kept its commitments well. Appropriate target groups have been identified, such as children in public care, and reasonable deadlines have been set and met. The LEA has been instrumental in the satisfactory progress made by the EiC partnership in a short space of time.

46. The EDP relates appropriately to the council's other plans, such as the behaviour support plan and the quality protects action plan. EDP activities include action to remedy specific weaknesses in those plans, such as in behaviour support and data analysis.

47. Officers undertake regular monitoring of the implementation of the EDP. The summary after the first year demonstrates a clear knowledge of what work was undertaken. However, many of the success criteria in the plan are too general, making it difficult for the authority to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in raising standards.

48. The LEA had intended that a broad range of stakeholders, such as elected members and partners would evaluate overall progress on the EDP, and that an

independent evaluation would be provided by another LEA. This was a well-conceived system but it has not been achieved, in both cases due to staff changes at very senior level.

49. There is a small shortfall between the aggregation of all primary schools' performance targets and the LEA's own overall targets. However, progress in the first year of the EDP shows that the activities already planned in the EDP are likely to support schools in exceeding their targets. The situation at secondary level gives less cause for optimism as the LEA fell some distance below some of its GCSE targets in 2000. However, work now in hand should strengthen the authority's support for secondary schools. The authority is currently reinforcing its provision at Key Stage 3, and is making a good contribution to the work of the EIC partnership. Nevertheless, the LEA will not be able to gauge whether more radical strengthening of the secondary aspects of the EDP are needed unless it first improves its evaluation process.

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

50. In general, the council now targets its resources satisfactorily in line with policy on the education service and the priorities identified in the EDP. Its reviews of the LMS funding formula and of school provision are resulting in an improved match between, on the one hand, the LEA's educational aims and objectives and the size and distribution of the ISB. In the current year, the LEA plans to delegate 82 per cent of the Local Schools Budget through the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) and it intends to extend this to 87 per cent in 2001-02 and 90 per cent in the year after that. This is in line with government guidance. However, until about three years ago the Council had neglected school budget deficits, and this led to an overall deficit on the ISB which had a negative impact on the council budget.

51. The LEA has made a clear commitment to services supporting school improvement and has directed funding into them. It uses its funding formula to support its policy of providing additional resourcing for schools in areas of relative social disadvantage. However, only in the past two to three years has it consulted effectively with its schools on the implications of that policy, leading to amendments to the formula, notably to assist small schools with relatively high premises cost.

52. The council's approach to school balances was, for too long, inadequate but the present officers and members have now sensibly tackled deficits which had been damagingly neglected in the past. In 1999-2000 there were gross surpluses of £1.7 million and gross deficits of £1.8 million on the ISB resulting in a net deficit. One in five primary and one in four secondary schools had a deficit at the end of 1999-2000. Nine per cent of primary schools and 22 per cent of secondary schools had a deficit of more than 2.5 per cent of their budget. Additionally, 34 per cent of primary schools and 26 per cent of secondary schools had surpluses in excess of 5 per cent of their budgets. The LEA is tackling the larger deficits through its strategic review of school provision, which should ensure, amongst other aims, that every school is financially viable. The LEA is committed to using corporate debt provision to write off those school deficits that it defines as 'structural' within five years of the reorganisation of the school, in the reasonable belief that the reorganisation, or the establishment of more steady intake figures, will have ensured that these deficits

which were attributable mainly to shortcomings in the planning of school places will not recur. Inevitably, however, this is a diversion of resources from the council's main priorities. Deficits and surpluses are being dealt with sensibly in "budget clinics" attended by the head teacher, chair of governors, executive director (lifelong learning) and executive director (finance). The authority has also wisely identified large school surpluses as a priority for investigation in the near future.

53. The council has structures in place for promoting Best Value. This general view was confirmed in the auditor's opinion of the council's Best Value Performance Plan (June 2000) which concluded, without reservation, that the Plan reflected the council's successful introduction of the Best Value regime and included several areas of good practice. The requirements of effective Best Value Review are well understood by the council officers and elected members interviewed in this inspection. Most, although not all, schools understand the role that they can play in Best Value reviews of the LEA's services and the potential advantages to them.

54. Although structures are in place, the LEA's processes for review had been of inconsistent quality before it acted to improve them markedly. This team inspected the Best Value Review for the payroll service, which is reported in more detail later in this report. Reviews of the education welfare, educational psychology, home to school SEN transport, personnel and statutory assessment services, which had been conducted in 1999 using a Best Value approach, were not inspected. Those reviews aimed to evaluate the review process and to identify areas for improvement; their reports provided useful background for this inspection. It is to the council's credit that it took these early steps to develop a Best Value culture but the reviews were undertaken before full guidance had been issued and seem comparatively lightweight in most aspects except consultation. Overall, the Best Value review of payroll appears to have benefited from the earlier pilots, following which senior officers had briefed middle managers to ensure that the reviews would be more rigorous and to provide examples of more radical service solutions adopted by other councils. Since then, the relevant executive director and lead member have led the review of a function, instead of the head of service, and in the case of payroll this led to a better quality review although the success criteria in the action plan are weak.

55. The Best Value Review of school services including governor services, the school effectiveness and raising standards unit, financial support, statement support, and the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement service was conducted in 2000 but was not inspected because it was not complete at the time of this inspection. Elected members had asked for more work to be done on the review after it was first presented. However, the action points emerging from this review are broadly in line with the conclusions of this inspection.

56. Although, overall, the council uses appropriate data to promote Best Value Review, its auditors have expressed reservations about the accuracy of the data on several groups of pupils targeted by particular services.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to ensure a good level of scrutiny of educational policy:**

- the select committee for lifelong learning should focus on strategic issues.

### **In order to improve evaluation of the LEA's work, and to enable secure targeting of future activities:**

- senior managers in schools services should introduce more quantifiable success criteria into all plans.

### **In order to ensure that schools' budgets remain in acceptable balance, the executive director (lifelong learning) and the executive director (finance) should:**

- continue to make sufficient budget provision to write off those deficits described as 'structural'; and
- implement reviews, at least annually, in any circumstances in which a school budget surplus exceeds 5 per cent, in particular considering whether there are any implications for standards of attainment or for the future construction of the funding formula.

### **In order to improve the quality and impact of Best Value Reviews, the council should:**

- further increase the element of external challenge in reviews;
- ensure that reviews test the competitiveness of services more thoroughly; and
- ensure that consequent action plans are sharply focussed with measurable success criteria.

## **SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Implications of other functions**

57. In recent years the LEA has had a good track record in school improvement, which has earned it the award of Beacon council status. Its approach to school improvement is dealing at least adequately, and sometimes well, with the small number of schools which have developed significant weaknesses in the past.

58. Much of the responsibility for school improvement rests on the inspectorate and advisory team. However, the whole nature of the schools services function is clearly focused on school improvement, and teams such as the behaviour and attendance support team, or the finance team, also contribute significantly. It has taken too long to develop an integrated vision for the future of SEN provision, but this, too, is now on the way. School improvement is often supported well by other council functions, such as building design, or some aspects of children's services.

59. Overall, strategic planning of school improvement work is good. The development of a school contact database is enabling the LEA to be more systematic in evaluating the resources allocated to individual schools. Leadership of school improvement work is very good. The senior managers of the schools services function have a very high level of understanding of the issues facing schools and the LEA, and they have introduced strategies with a strong potential to bring further increases in standards and quality in schools. Individual services are generally well led by officers of high quality. The current robust approach to service planning, consultation and performance management, if maintained, should lead to further improvement.

60. The LEA has invested significantly in its services for school improvement. Overall, they are well regarded by schools and make an effective contribution to school improvement. The authority has been very successful in ensuring that few schools develop major weaknesses. Although EDP costs are relatively high, activities and resources are well targeted and standards in schools are improving in line with expenditure. In the past, EDP activities have tended to concentrate on Key Stages 1 and 2, and it is there that standards have risen most. The LEA is now, rightly, focusing its attention to a greater extent on Key Stages 3 and 4.

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

61. The LEA has established a good system for monitoring schools and determining the amount and type of support they need. There is considerable differentiation in the amount and range of support given to schools. The system is very well understood by schools and is seen by them as appropriate to their needs as self-managing, but accountable, institutions. The procedures have been fine-tuned after discussion with schools.

62. Overall, the system of performance review works well. Each school receives a annual visit from its link inspector to review its performance and to discuss targets. Schools know which areas of performance will be evaluated and are asked to



prepare in advance a self-evaluation, according to published criteria. After discussion of a very good range of evidence an evaluation is agreed and the school placed in one of five groups (A to E). In the large majority of cases the grouping agreed is that which the link inspector had provisionally identified. A large majority of schools regard the LEA's knowledge of the school as at least satisfactory, and a significant number regard it as good or very good. Although a few schools developed significant weaknesses several years ago, the present system is likely to ensure that fewer do so in future.

63. All schools receive two further visits by their link inspector during the year, though these are sometimes very brief if the school is performing well. These entitlement visits are designed to give the authority the opportunity to monitor implementation of national and local strategies and to disseminate good practice. There was evidence from several good schools visited during this inspection that these visits can be helpful in identifying development needs and spreading good practice, but there is a risk of making unnecessary visits. In addition, link inspectors attend most governing bodies' meetings termly, although not always staying for the whole meeting. School managers and governors appreciate this level of routine support, but the LEA does not currently evaluate the impact of the visits in terms of promoting school self-evaluation or improving governors' strategic capacity.

64. Schools in the lower three performance groups (C-E) have an entitlement to more time from link or specialist inspectors, or specialist services, from centrally retained funds. The support provided is appropriate in quantity and quality, as described later in this report.

65. Many schools also choose to purchase two additional link inspector days a year from schools services. This is used for purposes such as preparing for an OFSTED inspection, or reviewing the school development plan. Opportunities exist to extend the trading capacity of this service.

66. Link inspectors frequently challenge their schools, for instance about targets, or spending policies. This is based on the good knowledge some inspectors have built up about their schools, and the willingness of the inspector to set, and the school to accept, high standards. In two of the five secondary schools visited, however, the link inspectors had been unable to command the credibility needed to enable them to fulfil the role of external challenge to the school. In these cases the headteachers tended to by-pass the link inspector when needing expert advice.

67. The LEA has used its formal powers of intervention to appoint additional governors to one school. It has acted with urgency when crises have arisen in schools, as when supplying associate headteachers to two schools with a leadership problem. It has also acted appropriately in taking over responsibility for the budgetary problems of those schools which had a structural deficit arising from the size of the school or the provision of places, thus safeguarding the quality of educational provision. In general, the authority is clearly much more willing now to intervene in schools if it identifies that they are declining than it was several years ago.

68. The LEA's management of its work in school improvement is good. Schools services has recently developed a good system of internal performance management. Service targets and individual targets are well aligned, and line managers ensure a high level of accountability through regular monitoring and review. The induction programme for newly appointed inspectors is very comprehensive and ensures competence. Officers' training needs, in relation to their job tasks, are identified and met well. Senior managers recognise that there has been some variation in the quality of work of link inspectors and this is being addressed. In general, though, there is now evidence of effective expertise within all services. The major issue is the relative lack of secondary expertise, but the authority has good plans to remedy this through commissioning external support.

69. Staff are deployed in line with the demands of the EDP. Concerns raised by schools about over-stretched services have been addressed appropriately by the appointment of additional staffing. A review is underway to ensure that the core expertise maintained by the LEA is based on a robust assessment of need, supplemented by the commissioning of additional expertise where necessary. The LEA has wisely reduced the requirement on the inspectorate to generate income from external inspection and this has enabled it to focus on its core work. The LEA's management of initiatives through the use of secondments from primary and secondary schools is very good.

### **Collection and analysis of data**

70. The LEA's support to schools in the provision and use of performance data is good. Although recently established, the data and information service has made rapid and significant improvements which have greatly assisted target-setting and planning. This centrally funded service is well aligned to EDP priorities and schools regard it as very responsive and effective.

71. As part of the annual performance review of schools, each school receives a data pack that contains a good range of information to support self-evaluation and target-setting. It supplements the national autumn package and includes local benchmarking data, value-added information and projections of pupil performance, as well as data on particular groups of pupils. The information is of great value to primary schools and they use the pack well. They also greatly appreciate the training accompanying the pack, and the support of a data officer. Secondary schools, with considerably high levels of data analysis capability, still generally find this data useful. The LEA has sensibly established a user group that is effective in informing the development of the pack.

72. The LEA provides clear guidance on target-setting, which it rightly sees as a leadership task essential to school improvement. Comprehensive guidance for Key Stage 2 literacy and numeracy target setting enables link inspectors to work with schools on pupil level predictions. They are well trained for this role and there is a good communication with the Data and Information team. Agreement is reached with each school on an appropriate rate of improvement taking into account pupils' previous performance and benchmarking information. Strategies for improvement from the school and the LEA form part of this discussion. This inspection showed that target-setting meetings are generally rigorous, and have resulted in the majority

of schools setting robust targets. However, one secondary school believed it had gained nothing from the meeting.

73. Good training and guidance has been provided to support governors in their target setting responsibilities and this has been well received. From this year, the LEA will give each governing body a documentary analysis of the school's performance summary, including local and national comparisons, and link inspectors will present this useful paper at governing body meetings.

74. The EDP activity to improve target-setting for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has resulted in some helpful guidance to schools. Special schools, and SENCOs in mainstream schools, welcome the authority's introduction of a scheme for individual pupil target setting.

### **Support for Literacy**

75. The LEA gives high priority to raising standards in literacy and provides very good support. In 2000, 77 per cent of pupils achieved Level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 English, thus exceeding the national figure of 75 per cent and surpassing the authority's own target of 75 per cent. Thirty-three out of 41 schools achieved their targets. Over the last three years there has been a 12 per cent improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving this standard, the twentieth highest in the country. The LEA has set a challenging target of 86 per cent for 2002. Given the rate of progress and the very high quality of support offered to schools, it is well on track to achieve this figure. At Key Stage 3, 64 per cent of pupils achieved Level 5 and above in English, close to the national figure of 63 per cent. This is an improvement of 2 per cent over the 1999 results, broadly in line with the national trend.

76. The LEA's management of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) is very good, as is its overall strategy and planning for literacy. NLS activities are clear and well targeted after a thorough audit, based on perceptive use of data, consultations with schools, and the outcomes from link inspectors' visits. Good support is given to pupils for whom English is an additional language through close working with the specialist team supporting pupils from ethnic minority groups. Effective work is undertaken on the inclusion of pupils with SEN through paired training of literacy and SEN co-ordinators. This inspection provided much evidence of the effectiveness of the English team in improving schools' planning and the quality of teaching, raising teachers' expectations, establishing very strong yet challenging partnerships with schools, and supporting co-ordinators in their management role.

77. There is an appropriately differentiated strategy for supporting all schools. The nature and duration of additional support is well tailored to schools' needs, and the LEA monitors and evaluates the effect of the support well. The consultant's visits are well-focused on areas for development. All schools are eligible for consultancy support according to their needs, and have access to a very good range of training. Schools rate the quality of this training as outstanding. Other forms of support are also very effective, such as the literacy centre.

78. Link inspectors are well trained, and monitor and support the NLS in all schools effectively. Communications between link inspectors and the literacy team are good.

79. Support for literacy at Key Stage 3 is good and has been well received. Attention has been given to secondary transfer and a considerable number of secondary teachers have observed literacy teaching in primary schools. A successful group reading project with Year 7 pupils has taken place in 16 middle and high schools. Heads of English departments have received useful information on the Key Stage 3 Framework through good networking meetings. The majority of secondary schools have a Key Stage 3 literacy working party, and cross-curricular literacy initiatives are well developed in four schools.

### **Support for Numeracy**

80. The LEA provides very good support for the implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS). Strategic leadership is very good and activities are well targeted. The NNS steering group manages the programme well.

81. In 2000, the LEA exceeded by 4 per cent its Key Stage 2 target of 70 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 and above in mathematics, and 31 out of 41 schools achieved their individual targets. The LEA's performance, at 74 per cent, was above the national figure of 72 per cent. The 1998-2000 rise of 15 per cent was the twenty-eighth highest in the country. Given this rate of progress, and the very high quality of support from the numeracy team, the LEA's very challenging target for 2002 of 85 per cent is certainly within reach. At Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 increased from 62 per cent to 64 per cent last year. This is close to the national figure of 63 per cent, and the improvement is broadly in line with the national trend.

82. The numeracy team has always been very well informed about the authority's schools and has developed a rigorous and challenging partnership that emphasises continuous improvement. Schools' curricular targets and numeracy action plans are agreed between the numeracy consultant, the headteacher and the school's numeracy co-ordinator. All schools are well supported through very high quality training, opportunities for contact with the consultant, and a considerable amount of well-targeted work in individual schools. Good use is made of data to analyse the performance of individual schools, and those requiring additional support are identified accurately. Schools also receive extra support in response to short term need. Schools rightly rate the quality of the authority's support very highly.

83. The NNS is very strongly managed. The LEA's numeracy consultant has high credibility with teachers and headteachers who are very positive about the very high quality, knowledgeable and practical support given to schools. This has improved the quality of teaching and has greatly helped co-ordinators in their management role. Special schools and SEN co-ordinators in mainstream schools are involved successfully in the strategy. Considerable value is also given by networking meetings, termly meetings for co-ordinators and the work of the numeracy centre.

84. Monitoring of the implementation and impact of the NNS is good. Link inspectors are well trained to observe in classrooms. There is good communication between link inspectors and the numeracy consultant.

85. The strategy at Key Stage 3 is also well directed and has been very well received. Pyramid training for primary and secondary schools, and regular networking meetings for heads of mathematics departments, have led to training sessions on the Key Stage 3 Framework. Some secondary staff have attended training sessions for primary schools. Numeracy bridging units are used in some schools, and secondary schools have access to the LEA's leading mathematics teachers.

### **Support for ICT**

86. Support for information and communication technology (ICT) in the curriculum is unsatisfactory. There is a lack of coherent planning and most schools do not understand the LEA's strategy. The ICT development plan does not provide a clear vision or strategy focused on raising attainment. Schools are also unclear about the existence of a corporate strategy to link curriculum ICT, management, administration, and the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). There are, though, signs of impending improvement in strategic thinking within the recent ICT development plan for lifelong learning, and a new system of inter-linked steering groups has the potential to improve advice to schools. A range of good and innovative activities is in fact taking place but these are not clearly linked to an overall plan.

87. All schools are connected to the NGfL and technical support is sufficient. However, secondary schools report difficulties with network connections. The LEA has usefully supported primary schools in gaining training for the use of ICT but secondary schools were not provided with an overview of approved training providers.

88. Link inspectors have monitored schools' ICT development plans and there has been some discussion with co-ordinators, but a number of schools require further advice and support with their planning.

89. The council maintains an education technology centre (ETC), funded partly from centrally held funds, and partly from service level agreements. This service is not effective in the discharge of its function. Recent staffing difficulties have badly affected provision and effectiveness. The newly created post of ICT education manager, however, is likely to be able to bring improvement because of a clear job description that identifies schools' needs well. In the past, training provided by ETC has been of variable quality.

### **Support for schools causing concern**

90. Only one North Tyneside institution has ever required special measures, a pupil referral unit that was subsequently closed, and only one school has been identified as having serious weaknesses, now remedied. This is a very good record.

91. Since 1993 the LEA has had a programme of identifying and supporting schools with weaknesses. This has now developed into the system of performance review, described above. At the annual review the LEA identifies certain schools as requiring some improvement, causing some concern, or causing serious concern. The analysis of evidence in key areas such as management, standards of attainment, and rates of improvement determine the allocation of schools to these groups. The criteria for entry to each group are published to schools, and are clear and appropriate. The authority draws up an improvement plan for each school receiving additional support, which is agreed with the school. No school is expected to require support at a particular level for more than one year, and there is an overall emphasis on equipping the school to maintain its own recovery. There are currently 18 schools designated as requiring some improvement, eight causing some concern, and three causing serious concern. The latter two groups comprise 13 per cent of the authority's schools and units. The evidence of our school visits showed the accuracy of the LEA's judgements about schools' need for support to be high.

92. The degree and type of support provided for each group of schools is appropriate to their needs. This has enabled schools to improve their curriculum, tackle a budgetary problem, or deal with a difficult personnel issue. Inspectors and consultants, the finance team and the human resources team have provided most support, but additional support has also been given appropriately by other services. The support provided to the school identified by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses was highly effective.

93. Informal and formal monitoring provides the LEA with a good picture of schools' progress. Over the past year there has been a trend upwards, with eight schools leaving one of the lower groups and only two entering. This, coupled with our view of the accuracy of the LEA's judgements, is an indication that the authority's support is having a beneficial effect. The authority assesses the resource costs when initiating a school improvement plan, and the costs incurred are broadly in line with schools' needs. Every three weeks the schools services senior management team review the progress of schools causing concern, and a formal report on each of these schools is considered termly by that team and the executive director. A report is made to the lead member for lifelong learning each term.

94. In broad terms this is a very good system which is working in practice. Nevertheless, there are some issues that need further improvement. The school improvement plans drawn up with the school when additional support is provided tend to lack measurable success criteria, thus making it difficult for the LEA to come to a reliable judgement about the progress made. Governors have not always been informed properly of a school's grouping, and the LEA has not always fulfilled its declared intention of drawing up the improvement plan shortly after notifying the school of its concerns. All schools visited understood the system for providing additional support, but not all were entirely clear that it embodied a potential for LEA intervention if improvement was not rapid.

### **Support for governors**

95. The authority aims to support governing bodies in their strategic work. The governor services team provides very good support to governors and has a clear

focus on equipping them for their strategic role. The authority uses a pool of experienced governors to provide support to new governors and to support schools causing concern. However, there are currently 42 governor vacancies, and certain governing bodies have had difficulties in maintaining full attendance from some members.

96. Many governing bodies buy a range of clerking options from the LEA and this service is well regarded. LEA clerks are regularly and well briefed to provide advice on legal matters and there are termly briefings for school-based clerks. All but two schools have entered into a governor training service level agreement and this has enabled them to keep well abreast of their roles and responsibilities. Governors are offered a comprehensive range of training courses, generally regarded as of very high quality. Training on the role of the governing body in school improvement, performance management and headteacher recruitment and selection has been very well received.

97. An annual education forum standing conference for governors, senior managers, officers and elected members is regarded by governors as an excellent source of information and debate, particularly because it gives them a good opportunity to work with elected members and officers. Area forums are regarded as helpful and provide a regular dialogue with the LEA. Documentation is of a high quality and provides a good level of information, although some governors report that this is sometimes hard to absorb. A regular newsletter to governors is relevant, accessible and informative. Good regard is given to service evaluation and as a result of a recent Best Value Review the service has been expanded to keep up with the demands made on it.

98. Link inspectors' attendance at governing body meetings has been discussed above. This is an expensive provision and is currently insufficiently aligned to different schools' needs.

### **Support for school management**

99. The LEA gives generally good support to school leadership and management. A leadership and management centre has been established and there is a strong commitment to supporting the national leadership programmes. Officers have also undertaken a programme of development for headteachers which has assisted senior managers. A development programme focusing on the psychology of leadership has also been very highly valued. Newly appointed headteachers are mentored by inspectors and experienced headteachers, although this support does not always work as well as intended.

100. Standing conferences for senior managers, focusing on school improvement, are well attended and very well received. Headteachers have good access to generally high quality support across a range of management functions through monthly briefings, an area of provision that they identify as having improved tremendously over the last few years.

101. The LEA gives sound support to school self-review. It has introduced the OFSTED school self evaluation course, which has led some schools to institute

better focused monitoring procedures. The North Tyneside 'Toolkit', developed by a team of headteachers and inspectors, also provides a thorough and comprehensive approach to school self-review which schools find helpful. Very good support is provided to schools for the implementation of the Basic Skills Quality Mark Award, which is increasingly popular with schools.

102. The LEA also has a good programme of support for middle managers. Termly curriculum networking meetings for subject co-ordinators have been of good quality and have improved management capability in primary schools. These also work well in some areas in the secondary phase. Proposals are in hand for supporting less effective secondary school departments, and these will be linked to a new leadership and management programme for middle managers: the LEA is also considering the brokerage of subject expertise at secondary level.

103. Improving the quality of teaching and learning is an EDP priority. The LEA makes good professional development activities available to schools on a traded basis. Most primary schools visited were able to demonstrate the impact of in-service training on improved planning and teaching, and in improved standards in literacy and numeracy. The authority has provided appropriate training for teachers in re-organised schools. A very helpful document is being drafted to support schools in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The LEA recognises that arrangements for professional development need to be more closely aligned to schools' priorities and is consulting schools about their needs.

104. The LEA generally manages its statutory responsibilities for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) well. Mentors are very well trained and are clear about their roles and responsibilities. NQTs receive a helpful handbook; training is well aligned to National Standards and is informed by an analysis of individual career profiles. Evaluations of this training have been positive. Link inspectors monitor school provision for NQTs well. However, it appears that not all NQTs receive their full entitlement of LEA support.

105. The authority has some useful mechanisms for disseminating good practice. These include the work of link inspectors in identifying it, networking meetings, professional development sessions, and the use of effective literacy practitioners and leading mathematics teachers. However, this work is much stronger in the primary than the secondary phase and the overall programme makes insufficient use of the expertise of Beacon schools.

### **Early years**

106. The council's support for early years development is a considerable strength. This reflects a long-term commitment to the development of early years services and of cross-function working. There is a good, coherent early years childcare and development plan with clear aims and well targeted priorities which takes account of the diverse range of early years provision across the maintained, private and voluntary sectors. This links with other council plans, but is not clearly reflected in the EDP. The plan is very strongly focused on improving provision through high quality training and the development of partnership members. A Sure Start project has been established.



107. The plan is effectively implemented, with considerable strategic linkage through the executive board. Consultation with the early years childcare and development partnership is strong. Good regard is given to effective and efficient service provision through monitoring and evaluation.

108. The schools services early years consultant provides a high level of expertise and strongly promotes the working of the partnership in schools. Communication and liaison with schools, link inspectors, and other council services are effective. Very good support is offered to schools through high quality training, some run in conjunction with North Tyneside College, and through good pyramid and networking meetings. The annual early years conference is highly regarded by schools and offers good opportunities for cross-service networking.

## **Recommendations**

**In order to ensure that support is given to schools only where it is needed, the head of school services should:**

- analyse the benefits gained in promoting self-evaluation or in disseminating good practice, of link inspectors' visits to schools and to governing bodies in categories A or B, and should seek to reduce the number and duration of these visits where possible.

**In order to improve support for curricular ICT, schools services should:**

- use the ICT development plan for lifelong learning to inform planning at all levels, and communicate this planning to schools;
- improve the quality of curricular guidance and support provided for schools; and
- ensure that all schools have satisfactory ICT development plans.

**In order to ensure that the system for supporting schools with weaknesses meets its declared aims, the head of schools services should:**

- ensure that governors and headteachers are informed in writing when a school enters category C, D or E in the performance review system; and
- explain to governors and headteachers the implications if a school causing some concern fails to make the progress expected after a period of support.

## **SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

### **Corporate planning**

109. The council's documents do not make its central vision for lifelong learning sufficiently clear. The North Tyneside partnership's consultative document 'A shared plan for North Tyneside' establishes five priorities, of which lifelong learning is one, but it says little of substance about what commitments are being made for education. A lifelong learning partnership board supports the partnership, but this body has yet to produce its strategy, although it has consulted extensively. Nevertheless, despite these weaknesses, schools have confidence in the council's commitment to education because they recognise that it has safeguarded school funding, appointed key personnel, and pursued important policy objectives such as educational inclusion.

110. A detailed list of the council's purposes in education is presented a range of high level plans. These set out general priorities such as support for early years, SEN review, improvement in post-16 provision, and implementation of the EDP. The various plans make appropriate reference to other statutory plans of the council, such as the children's services plan and the Best Value Performance Plan, all of which are in place. There is coherence between them all, though some, such as the behaviour support plan are too unspecific and unclear about expected outcomes. Overall, the planning documents at this level are strong on principles but less useful as guides to action. Nevertheless, the lines of responsibility are outlined satisfactorily. Routine evaluation is carried out at appropriate levels, though its value is inevitably constrained by the generality of many objectives. Schools are unclear about the significance and status of the various corporate plans.

111. Much responsibility for implementation is delegated to the various functions, each of which has its own performance plan. The schools services plan achieves the clarity lacking in the higher level plans. It is readable, accessible and organisationally tight. It lists development needs, and sets clear objectives that then determine lower level service plans. The quality of this plan makes the council's overall aims feasible.

112. The council has undertaken a significant cultural change in recent years and during this time has given satisfactory leadership. Previously, some strategic decisions had been let drift. This had led to the accumulation of surplus places, the growth of school budget deficits, slow recognition by management services of the autonomy of schools, and to uncoordinated provision for post-16 students. Major change began about four years ago, since when the council has been recognising and tackling these issues, often after extensive discussion with stakeholders, and with some use of consultancies. In the past, LEA nominations to school governing bodies were restricted to members of the majority party or others who would support the majority's policies. That has now, usefully, been interpreted more broadly.

113. Much of the strength of the recent developments in education derives from high quality leadership by senior officers over the last three or four years. Major advances have been made in setting a vision for education and in planning and

delivering service provision. The LEA became better informed about schools' needs, and more committed to responding to them. The present schools services senior management team is very highly regarded by schools and provides leadership of real quality. Its guidance to schools is expert and its advice to elected members is clear and purposeful. Schools are pleased that the new executive director has already demonstrated a clear vision and sense of direction.

114. In the recent past, schools felt distant from financial planning and budget decisions. However, within the last three or four years financial decision-making has become increasingly transparent, characterised by a new willingness to consult schools and the wider community and to be accountable to them. The LEA is now dealing with the chronic deficits in some schools' budgets described elsewhere in this report. Briefings to headteachers and communication to schools on budget matters are much improved. Representatives of headteachers are involved in discussions in a number of working parties. The LEA is demonstrably responsive to the points raised by headteachers and governors. The funding formula is taking a shape which schools can understand and operate; it increasingly reflects the shared priorities of the LEA and its schools.

115. However, there is still more to do and some of that is in persuading schools that the changes are fundamental and sustainable. The Audit Commission survey shows a significant proportion of schools, particularly in the secondary sector, remains dissatisfied with the consultation on and rationale behind the LEA's funding formula. Our interviews with headteachers suggest that this may be in part a legacy of previous mistrust and the historical neglect of schools' deficit budgets. In any case, the LEA's new found sense of financial partnership can be welcomed and, if maintained, has the capacity to deal with these outstanding concerns. The council has now completed an area by area review of school provision, the outcomes of which are discussed later in this report. Its consultation during this review was thorough, and it took good account of key issues such as viability, standards, capital development, access to provision, and staff recruitment and retention. However, it failed to persuade some parents and governors in one locality of the need for change in the short term, and the council will have to revisit the matter again in the future. In general, the council's leadership of the review was reasonable and well informed, though it is unfortunate that post-16 provision was tackled separately. The review of SEN has been thorough but the LEA has been too cautious in its time scale for increasing inclusion.

116. The authority's approach to post-16 review has been based on its desire to maintain the present sixth forms but to ensure that they become more viable, as many are small. The LEA hopes to make the full range of courses more accessible to students through the development of cluster arrangements. It has developed a bold strategy for achieving this through collaborative working and the extensive use of information technology. A good start has been made in establishing a local strategic partnership with the schools and local colleges, and appropriate commissioning procedures are in place, but the success of the initiative will depend on the effectiveness of ICT links as yet undeveloped.

117. The council has achieved considerable success in its work with partners, especially recently. This has largely been achieved by direct links rather than

through the lifelong learning partnership board. Links with bodies such as the police authority, the careers organisation and the education business partnership are effective and have led to the enrichment of many activities in schools. Regular discussions take place with the dioceses, leading to a good level of consultation. The most significant achievements, though, are in links with health. Collaboration has taken place at many levels, and the commitment of the LEA has been very strong. This has led to innovative work in sexual health, to the development of multi-professional teams supporting pupils with behavioural difficulties, and to many other valuable initiatives. Some of this work is already benefiting pupils and schools. At a more strategic level, the collaboration is leading to joint involvement in a programme to base multi-agency work in particular schools serving disadvantaged communities.

118. The LEA has played a key role in facilitating the development of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) partnership. Senior officers are represented on the partnership strategy group, and the lead member has been involved in developments. The authority has provided an officer as co-ordinator for the partnership, and at the early stages also temporarily provided co-ordination of two strands of work. This level of involvement was helpful in getting the initiative off the ground.

## **Management services**

### **Summary**

119. The LEA has met the statutory requirements for Fair Funding, delegation and the trading of services. However, service level agreements have not been as clear as they should be and information about delegated budgets has not been provided in good time for schools to make informed choices. Furthermore, the price charged to schools has often been based on a simple formula that assumes that schools will commit the same funds as are delegated. There is no evidence of the LEA encouraging or enabling schools to think actively about the selection and purchase of a service, from whatever source, which best suits their needs. As a result, few schools have developed good purchasing skills and few of the LEA's services have experienced the rigour of an informed market place. However, many, if not most, schools have felt comfortable with this gradual approach though more seem interested now in exercising their options as clients.

120. The LEA has produced, in consultation with schools, a draft version of the service booklet for 2001/02. This will make a helpful contribution to service improvement. Most of the service level agreements (SLAs) in the booklet are more specific and clearer than their predecessors; many offer schools a choice of service level as well as the opportunity to buy on demand. This will go part, but not all, of the way to meeting the often expressed wish of schools to be able to buy packages tailored to their individual need. However, some of the information in the draft version seen by this team is inaccurate, and some inadequate. These shortcomings indicate that the commitment to clarity and service set out by senior managers does not yet permeate to all of the service managers.

## Services

121. The LEA's support for administrative ICT was unsatisfactory in a majority of the schools where this was investigated during this inspection. There was also significant criticism of the provision in a number of the individual responses to the school survey, even though 87 per cent of primary schools and 66 per cent of secondary schools scored it as satisfactory or better. The authority identifies three services that provide ICT support for schools: the corporate ICT team, the SIMS team and the educational technology centre. However, schools are unclear about the difference between these services, and have experienced an unacceptable range of quality from these services. Schools are uncertain what SLAs to buy from which services and to what end.

122. The LEA's day to day financial support for schools is generally good. All schools buy the service and a majority of those visited spoke highly of it, many referring to a recent improvement in quality, and to a cultural change deriving from the new management of the service. In addition, it was frequently rated highly in the school survey, although a third of secondary schools describe support for planning and control of their budgets as well as accuracy of financial information as poor. Previous serious problems regarding deficits and surpluses have been discussed above. This service is increasingly well managed and shows capacity for further improvement.

123. Primary schools generally describe all aspects of personnel services as better than satisfactory, and a majority describes personnel advice, guidance and administration as good or better. The secondary schools' average is also more than satisfactory although around one third describe personnel administration and casework as poor or very poor. Payroll provision is generally well regarded by schools and where there is criticism, it is often based on a lack of clarity about the boundaries between these two services. Headteachers describe a personnel service that in recent years has become far more responsive to their requirements and in particular their need to tackle competency and discipline matters with rigour.

124. The report of the personnel service review conducted as a Best Value pilot in 1999 was provided for this inspection and does not appear to provide a clear analysis or programme from which to create improvement. However, recent management changes in the human resources division, an improved service plan, performance management and a more customer-orientated approach now place this service in a good position to improve further.

125. The Best Value Review of payroll services, which reported in December 2000, appears to have benefited from the council's improved rigour in these reviews. The review group might have benefited from more than two of its ten members being from outside the payroll team. Nevertheless, the purpose and context of the service was explored and described well, enabling the review to report fully and clearly on statutory obligations, process mapping, service profiling and staff involvement in a 'SWOT' (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) exercise. Consultation was very good, widespread and well reported. Questionnaires were sent to all central payroll unit employees, key staff from client functions in the council, all schools and a five percent sample of staff. Questions were well focussed and the

analysis was thorough. The consultation showed a high degree of user satisfaction and with other aspects of the review provides a clear picture of service quality.

126. The Compare and Compete elements of this review were particularly well done. Comparisons were made with local authority providers through the payroll benchmarking club. Additionally, thirteen private or public sector organisations (four of whom replied) were asked if they would be willing to share basic statistics and operating costs. Five private sector providers of payroll services (one of whom replied) were asked to join informal discussion about delivering services for the council. Consideration was given to the advantages of a bureau service, a managed service and a fully managed service. The output from this approach is a valuable assessment of the service's relative efficiency, showing that it compares at least favourably with other local authority services and would not, at this stage and particularly in the context of Fair Funding, benefit obviously from outsourcing.

127. Key findings of the review are well summarised and the action plan has good features. Key targets in the plan include restructuring of the service, reviewing working practices, improving data handling and improved communication with users. The targets are appropriately derived from the review and allocate lead responsibilities in given timescales. The success criteria in the plan are weak and lack the specific features which managers will need to monitor performance. Despite that, there is good evidence that this is a service which has embraced the principles of Best Value and whose review will contribute to its further improvement.

128. The council's approach to its school building stock has been poor but is now improving. As a result of previous under-funding, capital development has been overdue. The LEA's approach to asset management planning, its landlord responsibility, and its building maintenance are all perceived as poor or very poor by half or more secondary schools. Primary schools are less critical but still describe significant weaknesses.

129. Elected members and officers have recognised the need to remedy the situation and significant improvement is now taking place on three fronts. First, the authority has met the requirements for the production of condition and suitability surveys as part of its asset management planning. Schools in general report that the LEA has conducted this work well with only occasional disagreements about particular judgements. Second, the authority has used the strategic review to attract capital investment for structural improvement and new buildings. Its capital expenditure this year, which it plans broadly to repeat in each of the next two years, is greater than the combined total for the previous three years. Some schools are already benefiting from this revival and speak highly of the way the LEA has involved them in the design and completion of their projects. Thirdly, the authority has delegated budgets to schools for property maintenance and provided access to regular technical inspection as well as clear advice to schools on their responsibilities. Schools recognise the potential value of this approach but have reservations about costs exceeding income. The LEA's review of the funding formula has identified premises costs as a significant difficulty for small schools and there will be a consequent amendment to the formula in 2001-02 to ease that pressure. Additionally, the council is committed to drawing its building services into the culture of Best Value and developing a high quality responsiveness which

schools feel it has lacked and about which many remain concerned. This development is at an early stage and the council still needs to show that it has both the ability to improve its own services and the will to help schools to make informed choices about other providers.

130. Primary schools have generally found home/school transport provision as better than satisfactory although three secondary schools report that it is poor or very poor. It is a relatively low cost service but has a chronic overspend which is to be dealt with, officers report, in the 2001-02 budget. Meanwhile, the executive director (finance) has asked the service managers for a medium term financial plan. The pilot review of this service conducted in 1998 was not inspected but scrutiny of the report, compiled before Best Value guidelines were fully available, suggests that it was insubstantial in almost every regard except its sound approach to consultation. Except for the aspirations invested in the SEN review, it is not clear, therefore, how improvement in this service will be achieved.

131. The school meals service is purchased by all of the LEA's schools to which the budget is delegated. Schools generally describe the service as better than satisfactory. At present the central costs are high but further delegation planned for 2001-02 will bring these closer to comparable averages. The LEA currently gives schools insufficient advice about the range of alternative providers.

132. Grounds maintenance, cleaning and caretaking are, on average, described as satisfactory by primary schools but less than satisfactory by secondary schools. Grounds maintenance was reviewed in the council's 'Cleaner Borough' Best Value review which provided some support for schools' views by concluding that the services reviewed needed to be improved because of comparative cost and low levels of public satisfaction. The council needs to act promptly to deal with the concerns raised.

## **Evaluation**

133. Most of the LEA's management services are improving and beginning to address the Best Value requirements of continuous improvement and performance management. Some already provide a good quality of service to schools and those which do not are changing or are planning to change in the near future. In a number of cases the quality of service provision has improved markedly during the past two to three years. However, too many services are starting their development from an unacceptably low position. The approach to some Best Value reviews has been insufficiently rigorous despite the sound framework set by the council. In particular, insufficient attention has been given to challenging services to perform better, and to questioning whether the service could be provided more efficiently by competitors. Senior officers are aware of these shortcomings and express a determination to deal with them.

## **Recommendations**

**In order to ensure that rapid progress is being made in designing and installing an ICT infrastructure to support collaborative post-16 work, the executive directorate should:**

- monitor developments quarterly until they, and schools, are satisfied with the provision.

**In order to further improve financial planning and decision making, schools services should:**

- take steps to ensure that headteachers and governors play an active part in monitoring the impact of policy changes.

**In order to achieve continuous improvement in its services to schools, the executive directorate should:**

- implement the plan for its scheduled Best Value Review of SIMS and data management services to ensure that it encompasses ICT strategy, all the LEA's ICT technical support services and the educational technology centre; and
- in consultation with schools, identify and publish standards for each of the council's services against which a service specification can be defined, performance can be challenged and comparison can be made with other providers.

**In order to achieve continuous improvement in its services to schools the head of schools services should:**

- ensure that schools have access to objective and accurate advice on a range of alternatives, as well as council provision, for management support services.

**In order to ensure that the quality and costs of home to school transport are satisfactorily managed, the council should:**

- make provision in the 2001-02 budget to cover current commitments.



## **SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION**

### **Strategy**

134. The LEA has recently made considerable strides in developing a strategy for special educational needs (SEN). This follows a period when improvements were constrained by the relatively low priority given by the authority to SEN matters and by instability in staffing amongst relevant senior officers. Although the EDP makes specific reference to SEN initiatives, developments that took place in the past were not always coherent. Now, however, under new, clear-sighted leadership, this area of work is being reformed with energy and commitment. Nevertheless, because of the lateness with which the LEA has come to it, the current situation is still unsatisfactory. At present, for instance, the strategy for special education is still under consultation, the proportion of primary pupils in special schools is well above the national average, and the proportion with statements is above average, although secondary figures are in line with the national average.

135. The council has now agreed a general approach to an inclusion strategy that has usefully superseded the weak SEN policy document. The strategy is notable for its honest and open assessment of the LEA's current position and for the boldness of its proposals. It is aligned well to central government guidance, and commits the LEA to a review of the nature and scale of special school provision. Schools and officers strongly support its principles and consultation on these has been very good. The strategy is currently undergoing further consultation prior to an action plan being published. However, until a comprehensive action plan is agreed, the planning for the future pattern of provision remains aspirational and schools are not clear what support they will receive. The timescale of the strategy, ten years in all, means that it poses no immediate threat to the status quo. Discussion with officers and schools indicated that this has been a major factor in its widespread acceptance. This timescale is unambitious, and the LEA and schools should work towards significantly reducing it.

### **Statutory Obligations**

136. Overall, the authority now takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations. Last year it achieved a dramatic improvement in the time taken by its administrative team to complete statements of special education need from a very poor performance in previous years. The speed of completion by the team is now very good. The educational psychology service provides advice on time. Almost four out of ten statements are delayed by the late provision of advice from medical officers, but a new post is being established, jointly funded by the council and the health trust, which is intended to lead to more timely advice. The quality of statements has also improved but further improvement is still needed so that they reflect more fully the individual needs of pupils and thereby provide a better basis for schools' planning.

137. The authority carries out annual reviews of pupils' statements in a timely manner. Officers attend a good proportion of the reviews, prioritising their attendance appropriately. Specialists from several agencies usefully attend some reviews.

138. The LEA is sensibly redrafting its handbook for parents, having recognised that it currently focuses unduly on the steps leading toward assessment for a statement.

### **Improvement and value for money**

139. Officers, SEN support services and the educational psychology service all contribute well to the development of mainstream and special schools' capabilities to meet an increasing range of special educational needs. There has been a rapid improvement recently in the authority's ability to respond to schools and to develop the standard of their provision. In some cases schools are supported by a number of agencies, and the key worker system appears to work effectively. Resource files, with guidance on the support of pupils with various special needs, provided by the learning support services are greatly valued by schools. The educational psychology service is currently not fully staffed, so that the ability of the service to contribute to school improvement is restricted, but the LEA is making a determined attempt to attract good quality applicants for the vacant posts. Accredited courses for schools' special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) are of good quality and are valued by participants. Network meetings for SENCOs, organised by the LEA, provide useful updating and training. Training for SENCOs in the writing of pupils' individual education plans has improved the quality of target setting in these documents, but schools' skills in setting measurable targets in pupils' annual reviews remain variable and sometimes weak.

140. Recent support for resourced provision for pupils with autism in special schools has been especially effective. Some new units for pupils with learning or behaviour difficulties, or sensory impairment, have been established at mainstream schools. A link learning mentor, newly established through the EiC initiative, is intended to facilitate access to mainstream provision for special school pupils.

141. The LEA sensibly involves headteachers and SENCOs in the statementing panel. This heightens schools' perceptions of the issues surrounding the allocation of resources. In general, mainstream schools have a clear understanding of the funding they receive for SEN work, and the authority has encouraged them to plan the use of these funds purposefully.

142. The current review of schools' SEN training needs and the impending rationalisation of their access to the various sources of training from the LEA should further improve the match of provision to schools' needs and provide good support for the more rapid implementation of the LEA's Inclusion Strategy.

143. The overall costs per pupil of the LEA's special schools, educational psychology service, statutory assessments and home to school transport are lower than comparable averages. However, there are other features of spending on SEN that indicate a background of previously unsatisfactory management. The authority recognises that it has too many pupils in out-of-borough provision, notably those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, autism and dyslexia. Provision in central budgets is comparatively expensive and overspends significantly. In 1999/00, the combined budgets for provision and specialist support for pupils with special

educational needs were overspent by £576,000 (29 per cent). There is not yet an agreed strategy for managing the demand for statements and the full implications of further delegation of SEN funding have not been worked out with schools.

144. As important as these particular details of the LEA's budget, is the historical absence of either a cultural or systemic commitment to monitoring and evaluating the impact of financial and other policy decisions. The LEA has procedures to monitor pupils' continuing requirements for the levels of support provided in their statements of special need, but these are not rigorous.

145. The inspection team read reports from the reviews conducted in 1999 on both the educational psychology and statutory assessment services. The action plans which followed those reports were limited by shortcomings in the reviews themselves which had been conducted, creditably, before the council was required to begin its Best Value programme but which appear to have suffered from a lack of sharpness. However, the LEA is now making a significant attempt to provide good value for money in its support for schools' SEN work and officers are aware of the need for greater evaluation. The imminent development of the inclusion action plan, the consideration of further delegation of funding to schools, and the increasing effectiveness of the LEA's officers, all point to the likelihood of good value being achieved in the future.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to establish a more challenging timescale for implementing the new SEN strategy, the executive directorate should:**

- review the emerging inclusion strategy action plan and ensure that it sets more demanding but realistic deadlines.

### **In order to improve budget management and to manage requests for statutory SEN assessments efficiently and fairly:**

- the executive directors for finance and for lifelong learning should produce and implement by September 2001 a medium term plan for the management of demand for SEN statements and for associated budgets;
- the council should ensure that its SEN review reports clearly on the transitional costs of implementing an SEN strategy compatible with its emerging inclusion strategy; and
- the head of school services should, in consultation with schools and other stakeholders, produce revised criteria which will describe more clearly the circumstances in which the LEA will consider whether it should conduct an assessment, and in the meantime should apply the present criteria rigorously.

### **In order to improve budget management and the quality of provision in schools, schools services should:**

- monitor more closely the effectiveness of schools' use of their SEN budgets.

## **SECTION 5: ACCESS**

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

146. The council allowed the development of a damagingly high level of surplus places in both primary and secondary phases until 1996. It then began to tackle this problem purposefully and effectively through its strategic review which addressed each area of the borough in turn. In January 2000 the surplus of places in the primary sector was 13.4 per cent overall, with 36 primary schools holding above 10 per cent spare capacity, and 13 schools having over 25 per cent spare capacity. Secondary surpluses were at 12 per cent overall with 13 schools above 10 per cent surpluses, of which 6 had 25 per cent spare capacity. However, as a result of decisions now made, by 2004 the proportion of surplus primary places will have reduced to 10 per cent and surplus secondary places to 9 per cent. No school will have 25 per cent surplus places. Satisfactory progress is being made overall, although a difficult situation continues to exist in one area.

147. The council wisely focused the review upon the need to support the LEA's overall priorities and particularly to promote school improvement. Current officers and members administered the review reasonably well, even though this action came late in the day, and even though the review did not consider the future role of special schools or the borough-wide pattern of post-16 provision. The authority has provided good leadership, with the reasoned expression of a preference, but not a prejudice, for a two-tier system. Consultation has been thorough and open; independent assessments have been commissioned; and most stakeholders feel appropriately involved. The LEA's decisions are not unanimously endorsed but there is a wide belief that it has listened, considered and responded to points raised. It is no surprise that the supporters of middle schools, which are mostly closing, feel the greatest doubt and regret about these developments.

148. The council has recently changed, or is in process of changing, the organisation of schools from a three-tier system to a two-tier system in five out of its six areas. However, it did not proceed with any of the options on which it consulted for the sixth area, Whitley Bay and Monkseaton, all of which also involved changing from a three-tier to a two-tier system. LEA officers judged that the level of opposition to the published proposals for this area made it impossible for them to recommend a change in the short term, and a majority of the council supported that view.

149. The Whitley Bay and Monkseaton decision leaves the council with a number of complex matters requiring further management action but there is not yet a strategy for dealing with these. There are two first schools whose suitability and condition will need improvement in the short term. The continuation of a mixed economy across the borough has the potential for creating professional isolation in the few remaining middle schools. The authority has to continue to organise its own services to support both a large two-tier and a small three-tier system without creating inefficiency. It has to manage an over-complex pattern of school transfer. Surplus places appear likely to grow in some first schools in Whitley Bay and Monkseaton.

150. The LEA is managing its infant class size plan well, its school organisation plan is clear and the school organisation committee operates effectively.

### **Admissions**

151. The LEA manages admissions well and 96 per cent of pupils transfer to the school of their first choice. The LEA's admissions criteria are clear, fair and objective. Last year saw a large increase in the number of appeals lodged, and in appeals going to committee. Appeals are completed in the summer term and in good time for all children to be inducted into their new schools. LEA officers attribute the increase in appeals to parental concerns arising from the strategic review. The large majority of appeals are unsuccessful.

### **Provision of education otherwise than at school**

152. Arrangements for the teaching of pupils who are educated otherwise than at school have a number of strengths. However, they are unsatisfactory overall because of certain crucial weaknesses. The LEA recognises this and is taking action to improve the quality of provision.

153. The LEA successfully reintegrates about three-quarters of excluded pupils into some form of mainstream or alternative educational provision, using a range of services. Initiatives such as the 'Fast Forward' programme, which is aimed mainly at disaffected pupils in the later stages of Key Stage 4, and is provided by a number of partners including the colleges, secondary schools and the council, are beginning to contribute significantly to this success. The main pupil referral unit (PRU) is also very effective in its work with excluded pupils and those that have special difficulties. It is led with vision and provides a very good service. Its policy is to insist rigorously on good attendance, good behaviour and achievement within an academic curriculum. However, places at the unit are limited and it is highly selective in those it admits.

154. Despite these strengths, however, there are some unacceptable time delays in the reintegration of pupils. For example, of the 56 pupils permanently excluded from school in the year 2000, 16 had to wait, on average, six weeks after the expiry of their appeal date for home tuition to be provided. Moreover, a further 15 pupils had to wait an average of three months for alternative educational provision. A few of the delays occur when parents of excluded pupils actively seek reintegration into out-of-borough mainstream schools or when a pupil has very specific needs such as emotional and behavioural difficulties and requires specialist resource based provision. Delays have also been caused in the recent past by the time taken in collection and dissemination of data about excluded pupils, but this is now much improved and the LEA services are now able to respond more quickly and effectively. The improved data flow also enables the recently established pupil planning panel to work more effectively in allocating appropriate resources to these pupils.

155. The PRU also manages the hospital and home tuition services of the LEA. Hospital educational provision is satisfactory but, due to limited resources, some pupils who are allocated home tuition receive only two hours support a week. The

lack of resources also contributes to the delay in this provision for some pupils. This weakness has been recognised by the LEA and an additional full time home tutor is being recruited in an effort to increase pupils' entitlement to between five and ten hours a week, but this is still too low.

156. The pupil planning panel is working effectively, and programmes for individual pupils are often well planned to meet their needs. Pupils following GCSE courses continue to be provided with specialist tuition in the subject areas, either in their own school or through alternative provision. Education welfare officers (EWOs) provide effective links between excluding schools and schools services, and the LEA maintains increasingly detailed profiles on the support provided for, and the progress made by each pupil in this category. New plans, which involve a wide range of services and partners, are being finalised to improve support in line with the LEA's inclusion policy. When put into effect, later in 2001, these should raise significantly the standard of provision in this area. Beyond that, the authority was drafting budget plans at the time of the inspection to increase provision to full-time by the government's deadline of 2002.

## **Attendance**

157. The LEA gives satisfactory support to schools in improving attendance. It has a good policy. Its strategy is sound, and is effectively incorporated into key plans. Weaknesses in provision, of which there are few, have been identified and action plans are in place to improve them. The newly formed behaviour and attendance support team, although still developing, is having a positive influence on improving attendance figures and reducing exclusion rates.

158. Attendance in primary schools has been better than the national average for the past four years. Attendance in secondary schools was in line with the national average over a similar period but was above the national average last year. These levels of attendance are being sustained and improved. In the Autumn term 2000, the overall figure for both phases was over 95 per cent. Unauthorised absence in the primary sector has been consistently below the national average, and in the secondary sector has steadily improved and is now below the national average.

159. Targets have been set for improving attendance and these are being attained. Adequate procedures for monitoring and analysing attendance data are in place and lead to appropriate action. However, there is currently a lack of electronic analysis of attendance data. Link inspectors and EWOs target schools with lower attendance figures and make more monitoring visits. Four high schools with lower attendance rates have also been allocated additional school-based EWO time. There is some observable beneficial effect from this strategy and attendance figures are slowly improving. Appropriate use is made of legal powers when necessary.

160. A number of new initiatives have been included in the LEA's action plan. For example, there is a social inclusion programme designed to attract pupils back into, or keep them within the LEA's mainstream provision. A project linking schools and colleges is making a significant improvement to attendance figures at Key Stage 4. Truancy sweeps backed by a counselling service run by the education welfare service and, occasionally, in conjunction with the police, are proving effective. There

is a poster campaign on public transport. The council has recently won a national award for its efforts to reduce truancy.

161. The newly reorganised behaviour and attendance support team (BAST), which is responsible in part for improving attendance and which now includes EWOs, has a clearly defined role, which is well understood by both its members and schools. Although it is still developing under new leadership, four fifths of all schools expressed satisfaction with the service. The few who expressed dissatisfaction based their criticisms on historical levels of resourcing and a slow response time. These aspects are much improved and inter-agency working is good. Schools greatly appreciate the expanded role of EWOs, their ability to relate well to pupils, and their skill in tackling the problems that prevent pupils from attending school. The education welfare service is now managed well and is capable of improvement.

### **Behaviour support**

162. Overall, the LEA gives satisfactory support in promoting good behaviour, and has achieved some success in reducing the number of exclusions. The percentage of pupils permanently excluded from primary schools is slightly above the national percentage and permanent exclusions from secondary schools are in line with the national percentages. However, the percentages of permanent and fixed term exclusions have reduced over the last three years, which is better than the national picture. The LEA has set further challenging targets in both areas to be achieved by 2002 and it is on line to achieve these targets.

163. The LEA does not provide a totally cohesive behaviour support service. The behaviour support plan (BSP) is generally satisfactory, making a clear commitment to the principles of inclusion and multi-agency working, and outlining the provision available to schools. However, it lacks detail on how schools can gain access to support and lacks appropriate monitoring criteria. The BSP is currently being revised and a clear action plan accompanies the proposed revisions. These take account of the recent establishment of BAST, and describe staff and service development needs in the light of a planned increase in the range of service and wider inter-agency working. The draft plan has appropriate priorities and targets, a sensible timescale, well-defined success criteria and a critical review commentary on progress made in each of the priority areas. The LEA intends the new plan to be fully operational by April 2002 and good progress has already been made towards achieving the targets on time.

164. The schools' survey shows that many schools believe that the LEA's support has been inadequate in the recent past due to frequent changes or shortages of personnel and subsequent lack of continuity, in addition to a slow response to requests for support. However, most schools have experienced a marked improvement in the service over the past year as its restructuring and expansion have a positive effect. Schools are, however, still sometimes unclear as to how they gain access to the support available from BAST.

165. Two resourced bases have been established in mainstream schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) pupils and, although they are still developing, they are beginning to draw on the best practice of the PRU and good

links have been made between the three establishments. The PRU, on occasions, provides an outreach service to other schools or accepts seconded teachers from mainstream schools for in-service training in behaviour management skills. This is a further example of good practice within the LEA. There are, nevertheless, still some gaps in provision for EBD pupils which the authority intends fill by establishing a new EBD day school with satellite residential facilities.

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

166. The LEA carries out its statutory responsibilities in this area appropriately and gives a high priority to the safety and welfare of children. It has clear policies on health and safety, and schools are generally given good, comprehensive guidance on policy and procedures. Governors are given guidance on their statutory responsibilities. The LEA carries out inspections of school premises regularly and school co-ordinators for health and safety have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. The LEA also provides schools with clear advice on day-to-day matters and major incidents. Safety problems are promptly reported by schools and are carefully analysed. The LEA has provided first aid courses.

167. High quality in-service courses in child protection have been provided for school staff. The EWS has a close working relationship with children's services in matters of child protection. This ensures a speedy response when intervention is required. Inter-agency working is a strong feature of the LEA's provision in this area. However, social workers do not give consistent support to schools on non-urgent cases.

### **Children in public care**

168. The LEA's provision for children in public care is satisfactory and improving. A close working partnership is developing between children's services and schools services, which is leading to good value provision for these pupils. The quality protects management plan sets clear and appropriately challenging targets. The team focuses on improving the attainment of pupils and their attendance at school, and on providing 30 per cent of pupils with individual education plans and all pupils with personal education plans by the end of 2001.

169. Currently, the council cares for about 300 children and young adults. In order to improve the educational aspect of this provision, the service is seeking to recruit a teacher and an EWO to work in a mainly outreach capacity. The needs of schools are identified through visits by BAST and by consultation with headteachers. Allocation of provision is done through this same team and liaison with schools is good. The BAST team is very active in ensuring that headteachers and governing bodies understand the LEA's policy on inclusion and that wherever possible children in public care should be educated in mainstream schools.

170. A number of the pupils are currently in out-of-borough placements, a situation which the LEA is hoping to change in the near future when the new school with residential facilities is opened. This will allow the LEA to target its resources better and ensure improved monitoring of the outcomes.



171. The service has undergone major changes in the past two years and the foundations laid should provide more cohesive provision for pupils in public care. The council has taken responsibility effectively for the promotion of their educational achievement. Multi-agency strategies are working efficiently and effectively.

172. The main weakness in the service is related to data sharing, particularly on educational attainment and progress. At the moment, data is stored in a number of different ways by a range of agencies, which slows down communication. The team is proposing to adopt an electronic programme to collate the information held on these pupils, but technical difficulties have occurred. Despite this problem, workers are able to respond quickly to individual children's educational needs.

### **Ethnic minority children**

173. The LEA's support for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, including Travellers and asylum seekers, is satisfactory overall.

174. Although the LEA does not have a large number of pupils from minority ethnic groups, it does have a well-established specialist team (EMTAS). The team achieves considerable success with pupils in Key Stage 1 for whom English is an additional language (EAL) by raising pupils' competency in using English so that by the end of the key stage most are achieving as well as their peers. Detailed records are kept of the support given and of the achievement and progress made by pupils in this key stage. The team usually provides a school with sufficient strategic advice before withdrawing, and is always available for consultation and support should problems arise during Key Stage 2 or beyond. After Key Stage 1 support for pupils is available to meet some individual needs, for example those pupils who have recently arrived in this country. In addition, the EMTAS service provides in-service training for mainstream teachers to enable them to deliver the curriculum more effectively to bilingual pupils.

175. The team is very active in other areas that concern ethnic minority communities. It has been involved in family literacy projects, health courses, adult training and employment, and home-school liaison. Its links with other partners are strong.

176. Provision for Travellers' children tends to be seasonal and associated with the arrival of fairs and circuses. The LEA has appointed a specialist teacher to provide for the education of transient pupils as part of a pilot project. The arrival of asylum seekers is stretching the resources of the EMTAS team which, increasingly, has to redeploy staff to support these pupils.

### **Gifted and talented children**

177. The LEA is at the early stages in developing provision for gifted and talented pupils. However, it is moving with reasonable speed, although currently focusing mainly on the academic performance of pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4. It has helped the EiC partnership to establish a system of secondary school co-ordinators and local cluster co-ordinators and has been instrumental in developing training opportunities for these staff. It is currently producing policy guidelines for schools

and is strengthening the expertise available within the inspectorate. The authority recognises the need to focus more on the primary and middle years, but currently lacks clear plans for work with pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2.

## **Social exclusion**

178. The LEA has a very comprehensive policy and guidelines regarding equality of opportunity and social exclusion and is giving satisfactory support to schools and pupils. The authority has a strong commitment to increasing involvement in education by vulnerable groups of pupils, and has much work in progress that is likely to lead to greater inclusion. These include the establishment of better behaviour support systems, the efforts to further improve school attendance, and the improved monitoring of children in public care. Service provision is well planned and generally expert. Good use is made of links between council functions and with external partners. However, provision for pupils who have no school place currently has significant weaknesses. Overall, though, the authority's work on social exclusion has improved significantly in the recent past and is continuing to improve.

179. The council is committed to protecting cultural diversity and to opposing racism. Very clear directives are given to schools about racist behaviour and they are required to produce their own policy response. The LEA guidelines take account of harassment in all its forms and are firmly linked to the recommendations contained in the Macpherson Report. The council is providing extensive training on responding to racism. The BAST and EMTAS teams make strong contributions to the authority's work in this area. There has been increased multi-agency working recently to promote racial harmony. These strategies appear to be working well.

## **Recommendations**

**In order that schools, parents and pupils in Whitley Bay, Monkseaton and adjacent areas are able to plan on an informed basis, the council should, in the school organisation plan review for 2001:**

- publish a plan for 2001-2004 for places, provision and admissions in the areas affected. This plan should include a clear statement of how the LEA will monitor and evaluate provision, and if necessary how and when it will review the situation again.

**In order to improve provision for pupils who have no school place, schools services should, as soon as possible:**

- reduce the maximum time pupils wait for home tuition or other alternative educational provision; and
- increase the time entitlement of all pupils receiving alternative provision.

## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

**In order to ensure a good level of scrutiny of educational policy:**

- the select committee for lifelong learning should focus on strategic issues.

**In order to improve evaluation of the LEA's work, and to enable secure targeting of future activities:**

- senior managers in schools services should introduce more quantifiable success criteria into all plans.

**In order to ensure that schools' budgets remain in acceptable balance, the executive director (lifelong learning) and the executive director (finance) should:**

- continue to make sufficient budget provision to write off those deficits described as 'structural'; and
- implement reviews, at least annually, in any circumstances in which a school budget surplus exceeds 5 per cent, in particular considering whether there are any implications for standards of attainment or for the future construction of the funding formula.

**In order to improve the quality and impact of Best Value Reviews, the council should:**

- further increase the element of external challenge in reviews;
- ensure that reviews test the competitiveness of services more thoroughly; and
- ensure that consequent action plans are sharply focussed with measurable success criteria.

### **SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

**In order to ensure that support is given to schools only where it is needed, the head of school services should:**

- analyse the benefits gained in promoting self-evaluation or in disseminating good practice, of link inspectors' visits to schools and to governing bodies in categories A or B, and should seek to reduce the number and duration of these visits where possible.

**In order to improve support for curricular ICT, schools services should:**

- use the ICT development plan for lifelong learning to inform planning at all levels, and communicate this planning to schools;
- improve the quality of curricular guidance and support provided for schools; and
- ensure that all schools have satisfactory ICT development plans.

**In order to ensure that the system for supporting schools with weaknesses meets its declared aims, the head of schools services should:**

- ensure that governors and headteachers are informed in writing when a school enters category C, D or E in the performance review system; and
- explain to governors and headteachers the implications if a school causing some concern fails to make the progress expected after a period of support.

### **SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

**In order to ensure that rapid progress is being made in designing and installing an ICT infrastructure to support collaborative post-16 work, the executive directorate should:**

- monitor developments quarterly until they, and schools, are satisfied with the provision.

**In order to further improve financial planning and decision making, schools services should:**

- take steps to ensure that headteachers and governors play an active part in monitoring the impact of policy changes.

**In order to achieve continuous improvement in its services to schools, the executive directorate should:**

- implement the plan for its scheduled Best Value Review of SIMS and data management services to ensure that it encompasses ICT strategy, all the LEA's ICT technical support services and the educational technology centre; and
- in consultation with schools, identify and publish standards for each of the council's services against which a service specification can be defined, performance can be challenged and comparison can be made with other providers.

**In order to achieve continuous improvement in its services to schools the head of schools services should:**

- ensure that schools have access to objective and accurate advice on a range of alternatives, as well as council provision, for management support services.

**In order to ensure that the quality and costs of home to school transport are satisfactorily managed, the council should:**

- make provision in the 2001-02 budget to cover current commitments.

## **SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION**

**In order to establish a more challenging timescale for implementing the new SEN strategy, the executive directorate should:**

- review the emerging inclusion strategy action plan and ensure that it sets more demanding but realistic deadlines.

**In order to improve budget management and to manage requests for statutory SEN assessments efficiently and fairly:**

- the executive directors for finance and for lifelong learning should produce and implement by September 2001 a medium term plan for the management of demand for SEN statements and for associated budgets;
- the council should ensure that its SEN review reports clearly on the transitional costs of implementing an SEN strategy compatible with its emerging inclusion strategy; and
- the head of school services should, in consultation with schools and other stakeholders, produce revised criteria which will describe more clearly the circumstances in which the LEA will consider whether it should conduct an assessment, and in the meantime should apply the present criteria rigorously.

**In order to improve budget management and the quality of provision in schools, schools services should:**

- monitor more closely the effectiveness of schools' use of their SEN budgets.

## **SECTION 5: ACCESS**

**In order that schools, parents and pupils in Whitley Bay, Monkseaton and adjacent areas are able to plan on an informed basis, the council should, in the school organisation plan review for 2001:**

- publish a plan for 2001-2004 for places, provision and admissions in the areas affected. This plan should include a clear statement of how the LEA will monitor and evaluate provision, and if necessary how and when it will review the situation again.

**In order to improve provision for pupils who have no school place, schools services should, as soon as possible:**

- reduce the maximum time pupils wait for home tuition or other alternative educational provision; and
- increase the time entitlement of all pupils receiving alternative provision.

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