



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
POOLE
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (September 2000)*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.
2. The inspection was 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, staff in the learning services directorate and in other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 76 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to four first, five middle, one primary, one combined, three secondary and two special schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support that is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money. Further evidence was considered from the inspection of the implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategies in another six primary schools.

COMMENTARY

4. Poole became a unitary authority in 1997 as part of local government reorganisation. It is small, compact, mainly urban and has the largest natural harbour in Europe. The population was 140,940 in 2001 and is projected to grow by three per cent over the next ten years. The borough is relatively prosperous and the cost of housing is high. There are pockets of deprivation. Unemployment is well below national averages but this masks a low wage economy generally. The borough has a balanced economy based on services, manufacturing and tourism.

5. The organisation of school provision is excessively complex. There is a three-tier system with first, middle and secondary schools. Although Poole only has 42 schools, there are nine different types including selective grammar schools. This is further complicated since there are six distinct ages when pupils transfer between schools. The authority reviewed school organisation in 1999 but decided to retain the status quo. A further review is now needed and informed by better data on pupils' attainment, the impact on the continuity and progression in pupils' learning and mobility issues.

6. Standards at GCSE level and at Key Stage 3 are rising and are well above national averages. However, standards at Key Stage 2 while close to national averages, are not rising rapidly enough, particularly in mathematics. The LEA is not on course to achieve its 2002 targets in numeracy or literacy. There is a significant inflow of able pupils into the borough at Key Stage 3, which appears to boost performance in secondary schools. There has been inadequate analysis to examine the apparent differences in performance at different key stages and to inform strategic planning across a range of functions.

7. The Education Development Plan addresses national priorities well but there is insufficient attention to local priorities. The plans for behaviour, special educational needs and early years are all of good quality. The partnership with schools is sound. A significant feature of the first four years is the high turnover (50 per cent of the schools) in headteachers. There is good, challenging support for management and Poole schools are ably led.

8. The exercise of the following functions is good or very good:

- strategy and support for pupils with special educational needs;
- support for children in public care;
- support for early years;
- support for governors;
- support for schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses;
- support for school management;
- services for personnel and finance;
- leadership by senior officers;
- performance management;
- co-ordinated action involving several agencies;
- health and safety; and
- admissions.

9. The LEA exercises the majority of its other functions satisfactorily but the following are not performed effectively:

- support for numeracy;
- property services and asset management planning;
- support for gifted and talented;
- support for pupils who have no school place;
- support for minority ethnic groups; and
- use of performance data to inform strategic planning and target-setting.

10. The Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) is extremely low by national standards. Education has been designated as the highest priority by the council and has been funded slightly above SSA for the last two years. High levels of delegation mean that individual school budgets are close to national norms, but some central services are thinly staffed. Despite this, most services are providing support which is sound and often good, and hence give good value for money.

11. There is no separate education department. The borough has a distinctive structure in which policy directors have a mixed, rotating portfolio to facilitate cross-cutting approaches to provision and avoid compartmentalisation. Schools are not yet convinced of the merits of this structure but they recognise that multi-agency work is sound. For example, there is close and effective collaborative support for children in public care and for other vulnerable children. One policy director has the statutory responsibility for education and provides strong leadership, soundly supported by her management team.

12. The authority has piloted a leader and cabinet system since September 2000, following extensive consultation. The council has been innovative and adopted a structure which gives sufficient opportunities for backbenchers to contribute to formation and evaluation of policy. However, the scrutiny function is not being satisfactorily performed. Elected members are committed, knowledgeable about educational matters and supportive of schools. They have provided effective steers on budget issues, early years and special educational needs, but have not shown sufficient leadership on difficult issues such as school organisation and ages of transfer. The latter continue to be a contentious and unresolved issue.

13. Poole LEA fulfils most of its functions satisfactorily, but there are a few key weaknesses. The LEA needs to assimilate much better data to inform a review of school organisation and to do this openly and transparently and to act within a reasonable time. There is an urgent need to review strategies to meet targets in 2002 for 11-year-old pupils. The LEA is characterised by professional, committed, enthusiastic staff determined to make Poole a good place to teach and learn, but central support is often stretched by demand. Nevertheless, the LEA has the capacity to implement the recommendations made in this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

14. Poole became a unitary authority in 1997 as part of local government reorganisation. It is a mainly urban, seaside borough with the largest natural harbour in Europe. The total population is 140,940, which is projected to increase by three per cent over the next ten years. It is compact, covering an area of only 25 square miles.

15. Poole is prosperous; the cost of housing is very high and rising at a rate greater than the average increase in the south-east. The DLTR index ranks Poole at 284 out of 354 districts (where the district ranked first has the most deprivation). The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is approximately half the national average.

	LEA	National
Primary	8.1 ¹	19.7
Secondary	9.3	17.6

16. Unemployment is well below national averages, but this masks a low wage economy generally and there are pockets of deprivation. The proportion of the population in social classes 1 and 2 is in line with the national average (1991 census).

17. The LEA maintains a complex three-tier pattern. There are nine different types of school and six distinct ages when pupils transfer between schools. The population in January 2001 was:

	Number	Age - range	Pupil Population
First	15	4-8, 4-9, 3-8	4,768
Middle	10	8-12, 9-13	4,403
Combined Schools	5	4-12,	2,378
Primary	1	4-11	374
Secondary	8	12-16, 13-18, 12-18	7,524
Special	3	3-11, 3-16, 3-18	249
Learning Support Centre			24
			19,720

18. There are two single sex selective grammar schools with sixth forms and four other secondary schools also have sixth forms. Of the eight secondary schools, four are foundation schools, one voluntary aided and one a community school. Two schools are specialist technology colleges. One foundation school is situated on the boundary of the borough and its catchment area contains both Poole and Dorset schools. In 2001/2002, the two grammar schools selected just under half of their total intake from outside Poole. The out-of-borough intake to these three schools represents approximately one-fifth of the secondary population. There is also a loss of pupils to other boroughs, but the LEA does not have precise data.

¹ See para 117

19. There are three special schools that cater for primary pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, pupils with severe learning difficulties, and moderate learning difficulties, respectively. In January 2001, the percentage of pupils in special schools was well above the average at primary and in line at secondary level. The percentage of primary-aged pupils with statements of special education need is above the national average, but the percentage of secondary-aged pupils is below.

20. The borough has a very low percentage of minority ethnic pupils. There is a very low level of LEA nursery provision and a heavy dependency on the voluntary and independent sectors. There is a place for all four-year-olds and 94 per cent were taken up in 1999/2000. The staying on rate in 2000 (74 per cent) for post-16 education continues the rising trend.

21. The pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools in 2000/2001 was well above that for statistical neighbours and nationally.

	LEA	Neighbours	National
Primary	25.1	23.1	22.4
Secondary	17.1	17.3	17.1

Performance

22. Attainment on entry to schools is broadly in line with national averages. Standards in Key Stages 1 and 2 are broadly in line with national averages, while they are significantly above at Key Stages 3 and 4. Compared to statistical neighbours, at Key Stages 1 and 2 English results are similar, while those for mathematics are below; at Key Stages 3 and 4, results are consistently above. However, it is not the same cohort of pupils as approximately one-fifth of the secondary pupils, the majority of above average ability, come from out of borough after age 11.

23. At Key Stage 3, results are significantly above national averages and well above in English; improvement rates are also above national rates except for mathematics, which is in line. At GCSE level in 2000, the proportion of pupils attaining five A* to C grades (59.9 per cent) was the sixth highest figure for English LEAs and well above the national average (47.4 per cent). Also 98 per cent gained at least one grade A*-G, which is significantly better than the national or statistical neighbours' average. Performance in Poole secondary schools is high. When the results in the two grammar schools are excluded, LEA analysis shows that results for the other schools are still similar to national averages at Key Stage 3 and slightly above at GCSE level.

24. Standards at Key Stage 2 are not as high as they should be, particularly in mathematics. In 2000, when compared with like schools, at least half the schools score the lowest grades (E/E*). This comparison is based on free school meals data and the LEA and schools rightly question whether data are truly representative, but an unsatisfactory picture is still obtained when an indicator such as entitlement to housing benefit is used by the LEA. The percentages of pupils gaining Level 4 or above in both English and mathematics are below the national trend and well below

the statistical neighbours' trend. The progress of pupils between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is below the average national rate.

25. There is considerable variation in the performance of secondary schools but this variation is probably attributable mostly to the selective system. ²In primary schools there are significant variations in performance at Key Stage 2 in numeracy and literacy by pupils attending the same school. In 2000, in almost half the mainstream schools the percentage of pupils gaining Level 4 or higher in numeracy was between ten and 20 per cent below the percentage gaining Level 4 or higher in literacy. These differences are unacceptably great, particularly as cohorts are relatively large in these schools. They challenge the schools' perceptions that apparent underperformance is explained by discrepancies in free school meals data.

26. The average points score of pupils at GCE Advanced level in 2000 was well above the national average and improving above the national rate.

27. OFSTED inspections of Poole schools indicates that the percentage of secondary schools judged to be good or very good overall is well above the national average. In primary schools the picture is more mixed. The percentage of primary schools (80 per cent) judged to be good or very good is significantly above the national figure (70 per cent). However, in the most recent inspections, the quality of standards was judged to be below the national average, while the quality of teaching in Poole primary schools was in line with the national figure.

28. Both attendance rates and unauthorised absence are in line with the national average in primary schools, and better than the average in secondary schools. Permanent exclusions are in line with the national average in primary schools, but below in secondary schools.

Funding

29. Poole's education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) is below unitary authorities' and statistical neighbours' averages and overall the sixth lowest for the primary and secondary sectors in England. However, its spending since local government reorganisation has increased in real terms from 98.6 per cent of SSA in 1997/1978 to 101 per cent in 2001/2002.

£ per pupil 2001/2002	SSA primary	SSA secondary
Poole	2,332	2,992
Unitary Authority average	2,537	3,262
England Average	2,588	3,304
Statistical Neighbours	2,460	3,159

30. Increases in SSA have been fully passed on to education and the Secretary of State's targets for improvement in school budgets and delegation have been exceeded. The percentage of the local schools budget that is delegated is currently 87.5 per cent, well above the unitary average of 86.3 per cent.

² Combined, primary and middle deemed primary in the context of Poole

31. As a result of higher delegation and spend relative to SSA, individual school budget (ISB) shares match the unitary average and exceed the average for statistical neighbours.

£ per pupil 2000/2001	ISB primary	ISB secondary
Poole	1,800	2,514
Unitary Authority average	1,807	2,524
England Average	1,869	2,559
Statistical Neighbours	1,773	2,474

32. Spending on strategic and regulatory duties is the lowest for all unitary authorities and net funding allocated to school improvement is the fourth lowest of all unitary authorities. Although spending on home-to-school transport is in line with the unitary average and its statistical neighbours, it represents a high proportion of retained expenditure, inflated by the cost of supporting entitled travel to the two grammar schools in the borough.

33. There is relatively little extra funding available to the LEA. The socio-economic indicators do not trigger support through regeneration programmes or national initiatives to combat disadvantage.

Council structure

34. The May 1999 elections produced 19 Liberal Democrats, 17 Conservative and three Labour elected members, which resulted in a Liberal minority administration. The council has piloted a leader/cabinet system since September 2000 and this was confirmed, after extensive consultation, in June 2001. The council has been innovative and there are some features which are distinctive to Poole. It has identified four themes as a focus for its work: learning; care; environment and prosperity; and community information and support services. Each theme has a policy advisory group (PAG) and a separate scrutiny committee.

35. These arrangements provide good opportunities for backbenchers and other partners to participate in the formulation and evaluation of policy. At this early stage in the council's development, the overview and scrutiny committee for learning is not satisfactorily performing its scrutiny functions. There has been training for the role but there is still insufficient challenge and questioning of council policy and its effectiveness. There is overlap in the composition of the PAG and the scrutiny committee but the lines of communication are not sufficiently clear to ensure that the planning/implementation/review cycle is coherent and cohesive.

Corporate structure

36. The council adopts a corporate 'community governance' approach. The corporate management team comprises a chief executive and six policy directors. Policy directors each have their own portfolios of service units and corporate projects which are subject to change. Each policy director is assigned certain wards to support elected members. Poole's aim is use flexible structures to create a climate for good cross-service working and a shared ownership at senior management level of authority initiatives. There are 24 service units of which two have predominantly a

school improvement function, namely school advice and support service (SASS) and pupil and parent support services. For other services, for example information and communication technology, personnel provide support across the council including to education. Heads of service are directly accountable to elected members as there is no departmental structure.

37. The delivery of education does challenge this structure. Corporate policy means there is no education department but one of the policy directors is the statutory chief education officer. However, other policy directors may head up projects involving education and the head of school advice and support service is in a different portfolio group to the head of pupil and parent support services. There has been accommodation for education within this structure. A senior education management team meets regularly and heads of service are accountable to the policy director (education), as well as to elected members.

38. There is a clear, effective advocacy for education and strong leadership from the policy director (education), well supported by her schools' management team. Lines of communication and accountability are clear. There is evidence that the corporate approach works well, for instance, in encouraging the holistic approach to meeting the needs of one community including school improvements.

Recommendation

In order to improve corporate structure:

- Increase the rigour for scrutiny of policies, independent questioning of cabinet decisions and the accountability of individual services by elected members.

The Education Development Plan

39. The Education Development Plan (EDP) has more strengths than weaknesses. The strengths include the clarity with which national priorities are reflected. There are weaknesses in relation to acknowledged local issues such as support for curriculum continuity and progression arising from differing ages of transfer.

40. The EDP was approved by Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for the full three-year period. Subsequently in April 2000, the LEA was requested to submit an additional literacy plan for Key Stage 2 as a condition for continued DfES approval. The LEA met this requirement.

41. A strong, positive feature of the audit is the LEA's scrutiny of OFSTED reports and linkage with the termly review of schools conducted by assigned advisers. It clearly provides up-to-date information on the strengths and weaknesses of schools. This assists the LEA to identify key issues for further action. There is one significant omission. In successive years, the EDP lists as a weakness the difficulties in progression and continuity arising from the complexities of school organisation in Poole. The EDP does not analyse this local issue well, detail explicitly enough strategies to improve the situation or review progress made. There is no clear chain of logic from audit to priority, to activity plans and to outcomes.

42. The audit does not highlight sufficiently the unsatisfactory trends in standards from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2. There is no analysis to examine the variation in performance between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 or the impact of school organisational features. There are undoubtedly major strengths in the performance of LEA schools but the analysis encourages complacency where there are weaknesses and fails to challenge schools on causes for underperformance at Key Stage 2.

43. The EDP identifies clearly the actions to be taken and nominates the persons responsible and the resources allocated to each activity. The priority areas set for school improvement are teaching and learning, literacy, numeracy, leadership and management, social inclusion, early years, special educational needs and information and communication technology. The LEA has appropriate plans to implement national initiatives such as the national numeracy and literacy strategies.

44. Some activities focus on underachieving pupils, particularly boys, and others on underachieving schools, but not subject departments explicitly. The support for schools causing concern is integrated well into the priorities in the EDP. Plans to promote social inclusion are well presented and argued, and underpin sound support for vulnerable children. An exception is that there is no commentary on the needs of minority ethnic pupils. Activities contained in the EDP do not represent a coherent approach to supporting these pupils.

45. The LEA has monitored progress with implementing the EDP well, publishes its findings and shares these widely with schools. For each activity, the report records whether planned actions were taken and whether the stated criteria were met. Progress with the EDP is sound in most respects. The LEA analysis shows that in 2000/2001 139 out of 148 actions, (94 per cent) were successfully completed and about 85 per cent of success criteria were met.

46. In 2000, the LEA met its targets for Key Stage 2, GCSE and reducing exclusions but not those relating to the percentage of unauthorised absence in schools. The LEA revised its Key Stage 2 targets for 2001, increasing the English target from 80 to 81 but the mathematics target was reduced from 73 to 70. Provisional results for 2001 indicate a significant drop from the 2000 results. This means that the LEA is not on course to meet its 2002 targets, requiring approximately a 12 per cent improvement in both numeracy and literacy. The LEA is responding vigorously to this shortfall and has identified a range of strategies to be implemented in the coming year.

47. Elected members are well informed about the EDP and its implementation. The policy advisory group considered the EDP and required it to be strengthened with regard to support for underachieving schools. However, the scrutiny process has not probed sufficiently the underlying reasons for under-performance at Key Stage 2.

Recommendation:

When devising its Education Development Plan for 2002-2007 the LEA should pay particular attention to local issues including:

- strategies to improve continuity and progression in pupils' learning when transferring schools;
- analyse the impact of school organisational features and consider ways of rationalising the present complex system; and
- raising standards at Key Stage 2.

The allocation of resources to priorities

48. Poole has prioritised and targets its spending to support education sensibly. Spending has risen and is now maintained above education Standard Spending Assessment. Within its education budget the council has taken effective action through the development of a needs led funding formula for school budgets. In 2000/2001 spending was boosted by a council tax increase of 12.8 per cent to support education spending. This has helped to fund an 'invest to save' initiative which targeted £400,000 on the release of special education needs co-ordinators to assist in an early intervention strategy designed to reduce subsequent dependence on more expensive out of borough special education placements. Although the council is working towards three-year financial planning, the budget strategy is effectively an annual exercise, but with flexibility for service to retain underspends and take responsibility for overspends. The education budget is managed well and stakeholders are appropriately involved and informed about the budget process.

49. School balances are too high and are questionable in the light of underperformance at Key Stage 2, high pupil teacher ratio (PTRs) in primary schools and the extra support allocated to education through increased council tax. They will near ten per cent in aggregate at the end of the 2000/2001 financial year. Although the LEA appropriately identifies three per cent of budget (or £25,000, whichever is the higher) as acceptable to cover for contingencies, it has been unsuccessful in arresting the escalation of school balances.

50. The council's approach to supporting schools' capital needs in 2001/2002 has only recently been resolved. External funding available to schools through formula capital and New Deal for Schools allocations has contributed to school building stock improving at a rate faster than the position overall within the council. For the current year, the LEA continued the allocation of additional capital funding from its own resources.

Recommendation:

- Strengthen and prioritise the strategy for challenging high school balances.

Best Value and performance management

51. Poole's approach to Best Value within education is satisfactory. The district auditor has given unqualified approval for the Best Value Performance Plan. The Best Value review of special educational needs was one of 16 Best Value reviews in the first year and was completed within timetable. The inspection report is appended. In year two, the local authority has sensibly determined to review its role in adult education in the context of the responsibilities now assumed by the learning and skills council. Appropriately, broad themes have been identified for future reviews. Although the use of locally developed performance indicators is not yet extensive, planning is increasingly linked to ensuring that performance outcomes are closely tied into resource allocation. Corporate objectives, service and individual targets are now included in concise service statements which can be viewed on the intranet. All but two service units have been accredited with Investors in People awards and employee development interviews provide the basis for further reinforcing effective performance management. The performance management of services to support school improvement is good.

52. Schools do not demonstrate a high awareness of Best Value principles and statements of their application are not systematically collected or reviewed by the LEA. However, through its process of including school budget strategy in its annual individual performance review with schools, briefings on benchmarking and in the forthcoming launch of its own helpful and accessible document on '*Buying for Quality*,' Poole is making good progress in promoting school autonomy.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

53. The support for school improvement is sound with a few weaknesses. In all the 16 schools visited, the LEA was providing sound support and in five schools it was good. The support was judged to be effective overall except for one school. Value for money is good for the small advisory service.

Implications of other functions

54. The central role of school advice and support service is well supported by other services of the LEA. The special educational needs functions of the LEA are discharged well. Provision for the access of pupils to education has more strengths than weaknesses. It is particularly good for children in public care and for children at risk, but there are weaknesses in the provision for minority ethnic pupils and combating racism.

55. School budgets are in line with statistical neighbours despite very low Standard Spending Assessment per pupil. This reflects high levels of delegation and funding above Standard Spending Assessment by the council. It also means that some central services are thinly resourced. Despite this, most services are providing support which is sound and often good. Hence value for money is good.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

56. The LEA exercises these functions well. The LEA's strategy for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention accords with the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations. It focuses clearly on targeting resources where they are most needed and on helping schools become autonomous. This strategy has been developed in close consultation with schools and has been adapted appropriately in the light of experience. Discussions with headteachers and visits to school showed that there is a good level of understanding and approval of the LEA's approach to this area of its work.

57. The LEA uses performance data, OFSTED section 10 reports and evidence from assigned adviser visits to place all its schools into one of three categories, ranging from 'light touch' schools to schools causing concern. The entitlement to resources and time for each type of school is clearly defined and allocated appropriately in inverse proportion to success. The LEA conducts regular, termly reviews of each school, drawing on relevant information and judgements from across departments. Appropriate adjustments are then made to the amount of support given to schools.

58. The LEA keeps clear records of the range of services each school receives. This allows the distribution of support to be monitored carefully. It also helps the LEA build up an overall picture of the strengths and weaknesses of its schools. Notes of visits of assigned advisers and other officers are clear and concise. These records are shared with governors when there are major issues in a school but not as a matter of course. This limits their usefulness in helping governors to support and challenge their schools appropriately.

59. The LEA has been rigorous in challenging schools to improve the quality of leadership and management. Since Poole was established as a unitary authority, there have been 26 changes in headteacher involving half the LEA's 42 schools. Headteachers and governing bodies have also been consistently challenged to improve financial planning and to ensure that the deployment of resources is driven by the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Discussions with officers and visits to school suggest that the extent to which assigned advisers challenge schools to set aspirational targets and look critically at pupil performance varies. Some headteachers feel that they are challenged rigorously while others would welcome more challenge.

60. Assigned advisers provide very good support for schools. Schools value advisers for their expertise, commitment, sensitivity, and their openness to suggestions about how they could improve the service. Headteachers feel that there is good liaison between advisers and fellow officers. This ensures that support is informed, focused and draws on relevant expertise.

61. The LEA is clearly committed to ensuring that its schools are well managed. Where improvement has been too slow, it has not hesitated to intervene directly. This process has been facilitated by clear and determined leadership from senior officers and by good advice and support on personnel issues. Advisers have had to devote a considerable amount of time to schools with management difficulties.

62. When it was established, the LEA made the sensible decision not to try to cover the whole curriculum. There is a small team of advisers and advisory teachers whose expertise covers each phase, the core subjects and special educational needs. The LEA buys in the expertise of consultants and seconded teachers and headteachers as necessary. Their work is closely related to Education Development Plan priorities. In addition, the LEA provides appropriate information on request where there are gaps in its own expertise. This works well in first and middle schools but there are weaknesses in secondary schools.

63. The school advice and support services is well led and managed effectively and is held in high regard by schools. There is a well-established performance management system and advisers' targets and training programmes are linked appropriately to Education Development Plan priorities. There are sound strategies in place to develop greater consistency in the way that advisers monitor, support and challenge schools.

Recommendations

- Copy all notes from assigned advisers and results from other monitoring visits to the governing body; and
- extend training for assigned advisers in the analysis and interpretation of performance data.

Collection and analysis of data

64. The LEA's collection and analysis of data are unsatisfactory. The LEA's provision of data to schools is improving, but there are significant weaknesses in the analysis of data by the LEA to inform planning and target-setting.

65. The data information provided by the LEA to schools does not currently add sufficiently to that provided by national sources. Data are analysed to give year-on-year trends and by gender and socio-economic indicators. However, the small size of the LEA, and the diversity of its schools, mean that schools can make only limited use of the data for benchmarking. A wider view beyond the borough is needed to encourage a raising of expectations in individual schools at Key Stage 2, in particular. This is being established in financial benchmarking where all schools are monitored and challenged by the LEA and have access, via the Internet, to data on schools outside the borough.

66. The LEA's capacity to provide schools with evidence of the quality of value-added support by the school has been hindered by the lack of a comprehensive, functioning central database of pupil information. This is an area where rapid improvements are being made but are not yet in place. The LEA now has the computer systems and work is in progress. Analyses have been done for progress from Key Stage 3 to 4, but not for Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. The transfer of data between primary and middle to secondary schools is unsatisfactory. The LEA has provided schools with supporting software but the transfer is still mainly paper-based.

67. The LEA is providing good support to schools to enable them to become more autonomous. It has recently provided software to every school which enables these schools to track pupil progress more effectively. This has been supported by a substantial training programme, although some first schools judge they still need more help.

68. The LEA funds standardised tests in Year 4, which provide useful information to underpin target-setting. In all schools an assigned adviser is provided with a commentary as a basis for discussion and negotiates targets with schools. However, the quality of the data held by the school is usually superior to that held by the LEA. The LEA does notify schools officially where targets are judged to be too low. School visits reveal that there is inconsistent challenge on this issue. The LEA has only been partially successful in reducing the gap between LEA and schools' aggregated targets. For 2002, there remains a shortfall of three per cent for numeracy and six per cent for literacy. In schools visited, challenging targets had been set in first, special and secondary schools but in only half the middle schools.

69. Data are well used by the LEA to identify and support schools causing concern, but not consistently to monitor the progress of particular groups of pupils, for instance, minority ethnic pupils. Procedures for identifying under-performance in subjects across the LEA and in subject departments in secondary schools are at an early stage of development. A system of 'early alerts' is planned to be implemented

from January 2002. There are weaknesses, reported in Section 5, in analysing data to inform strategic planning by the LEA.

Recommendation

- Implement plans to improve pupil tracking at both school and LEA level and the transfer of data between schools; and
- strengthen procedures so that aggregate targets set by primary schools are in line with 2002 LEA targets.

Support for literacy

70. Support for literacy is satisfactory overall. It is effective in Key Stages 1, 3 and 4, but not consistently so in Key Stage 2.

71. At Key Stage 1, pupils' results are in line both with national averages and those for similar authorities. In 2000, results for writing were above the national average. At Key Stage 3, English results for the last two years have been above the average nationally and for similar authorities. In 2000, results were significantly above the national average. At both key stages 1 and 3, the rate of improvement has been above the national average. At Key Stage 2, English results for 2000 were in line with the national average but significantly worse than like schools. The unconfirmed figures for 2001 indicate a further drop in English results. It is unlikely that the target for 2002 will be reached.

72. The support for the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy has been soundly managed. The results of the school survey and visits to schools show that teachers and headteachers hold the literacy team in high regard. The literacy action plan has been drawn up and modified appropriately in consultation with schools and on the basis of feedback from consultative bodies such as the literacy steering group and co-ordinators' support group. Actions, timescales and responsibilities are clearly identified, but success criteria are not always quantified sufficiently. Good links have been established between the literacy support programme and support for early years, special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language. The range of training provided is appropriate and reflects national priorities and locally identified needs. Because of its small size, the LEA decided to deliver two levels of intensive literacy support to all schools, with the focus in the first two years being placed appropriately on schools with the greatest need. Results for schools in this category show clear improvement.

73. A good start has been made to the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. A literacy consultant has recently been appointed and the required training is being implemented as scheduled.

Support for numeracy

74. The quality of support for numeracy has strengths but it is not yet effective, particularly in primary schools and is therefore unsatisfactory overall.

75. Standards at Key Stage 1 are in line with statistical neighbours and national averages. However, progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and standards attained by 11 year-olds are below what they should be. In 2000, 67.9 per cent of pupils scored Level 4 or better, well below the figure of 75.4 per cent for statistical neighbours. Other analysis shows that, compared to similar schools, two of the 16 schools with Year 6 pupils were placed in the bottom five per cent nationally and ten in the bottom quartile. Provisional results for 2001 show a further significant dip in performance. This indicates a shortfall of 12 per cent against the 2002 target, which is unlikely to be reached.

76. Evidence from the school survey and school visits indicates that almost all schools judge the support for teaching numeracy to be good. The consultant is well regarded. Co-ordinators in schools are well supported by network meetings, briefings and in-service training. There is close working between the consultant and the assigned adviser to monitor the quality of teaching, although this does not focus sharply enough on identifying reasons for underperformance. A good range of guidance materials is available to schools, including a small resource centre. There are sound links to other strategies, for instance early years and special needs. When the numeracy strategy was introduced, there was insufficient support and training for the leading mathematics teachers. This has now been rectified, but their work is still not sufficiently monitored.

77. There is a paradox: the quality of the support appears to be high, but it is not effective enough. The LEA has a plethora of charts and pictures but the analysis is not sufficiently critical and does not shed much light on this issue. For instance, there is emphasis on year on year improvements but insufficient attention to placing these in a national context. The analysis is too accepting of the underperformance rather than questioning and challenging it. This is demonstrated by the fact that the LEA lowered its 2001 target of 73 per cent to match the 70 per cent figure from an aggregation of schools' targets. This was 11 per cent below the literacy target. A further sign of complacency on the part of schools is that there was no take up for proposed numeracy summer schools in 1999 or 2000 and they were cancelled.

78. Standards at Key Stage 3 and 4 are above national averages and in line with statistical neighbours. Rates of improvement from Key Stage 2 to 3 are influenced by the net inflow of pupils to the borough and it is a weakness that this has not been analysed by the LEA. In 2000, at Key Stage 3, the mathematics results for pupils at two Poole schools were significantly above the average for like schools and for four they were below. Support for secondary schools has been narrow but is being considerably enhanced through the introduction of the Key Stage 3 strategy. Conferences have been well received by the schools.

Recommendations literacy and numeracy

- Raise teachers' expectations, particularly in Key Stage 2; and
- improve the rigour of analysis to target additional support effectively, raise the level of challenge and evaluate the effectiveness of support.

Support for information and communication technology

79. Support for information and communication technology (ICT) is generally satisfactory but evaluation of the impact of support and training is weak. The development plan, drawn up in consultation with schools, governors and advisers, has been adapted appropriately in the light of feedback and clearly reflects national and local priorities.

80. All schools have internet access via the ISDN lines. The nine secondary schools have access to broadband via the south west grid for learning and the LEA is exploring ways of extending this to primary schools. Currently one primary school has broadband access through collaboration with a neighbouring technology college.

81. Progress in relation to training has been slow. In 2000/2001, the ratio of Poole teachers receiving ICT training in both primary and secondary schools was well below the ratio nationally. However, the rate of progress has increased since the recent appointment of an ICT adviser. Many schools delayed starting the New Opportunities Fund training, but all schools will have begun training by March 2002. The ICT adviser provides appropriate advice on analysing training needs and preparing relevant programmes to meet those needs. Training is delivered in partnership with two providers and is being well received by schools. The LEA has provided schools with useful information on the preparation of ICT development plans. The adviser examines all plans rigorously to ensure quality and consistency of approach.

82. There has been very limited monitoring of the effectiveness of support. The LEA relies on visits to schools and meetings with ICT co-ordinators to evaluate the impact of training on teachers' skills and confidence. However, there has been no formalised presentation of these qualitative judgements. Key Stage 3 results in ICT improved from 1999 to 2000 but these were based on unmoderated teacher assessments. The LEA has no statistical evidence on pupils' ICT performance at the end of Key Stage 2 and no indicators of the impact of ICT training on teaching and learning in other areas of the curriculum.

83. The LEA has produced good support materials and advice on formalising school policies and on ensuring that pupils do not gain access to undesirable materials on the Internet. Sound strategies are also being developed for disseminating good practice through briefing sessions and the LEA's website.

Recommendation

- Evaluate the impact on pupil attainment and progress of the support and resources provided for information and communication technology.

Support for schools causing concern

84. Support for schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses is good; for other schools designated by the LEA as causing concern strengths outweigh weaknesses.

85. Only one school in Poole LEA has been judged to require special measures. This secondary school was found to have serious weaknesses during an OFSTED inspection in April 1999. During a further monitoring inspection by Her Majesty's Inspector in February 2000, it was found that insufficient progress had been made on the key issues identified in the action plan, and that special measures were required. Since then the LEA have given considerable support, including a major investment of funds and officer time. The community leisure centre was built on the school site providing an excellent resource for the school. Two additional governors were appointed and substantial governor support provided. The LEA provided two days per term for monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, and has provided good support for management at the school. This includes securing an experienced substantive headteacher, appointing an additional headteacher and providing a middle management course. A shortcoming is that the LEA does not monitor sufficiently that the action plan is being delivered and places too much reliance on the headteacher in this respect.

86. Currently one school is identified as having serious weaknesses and one as underachieving. Monitoring visits by Her Majesty's Inspector show that the LEA has provided effective support and both are improving schools. The LEA has designated three other schools as causing concern and intensive support is being provided to these schools.

87. The LEA made a slow start and there are instances when concerns over leadership and standards were not sufficiently clearly communicated to governing bodies. The LEA has improved and the schools now receive the support they need, including advisory, financial and personnel. For schools requiring intensive support, a school conference is convened involving all partners and a comprehensive action plan devised. There are termly reports on progress to an elected members' working group.

Support for governors

88. The support for governors is very good. The LEA provides a first-rate, cost-effective and efficient service that is rightly held in high regard by schools and governors alike. Increasingly challenging Education Development Plan priorities for training have been exceeded and then revised to be more focussed on governors' strategic roles, year-on-year. Take up for training events is high, with all but one school having taken part in central training sessions and a growing number having received whole governing body training which has been targeted well at their needs. Vacancies on governing bodies are low. The LEA takes advantage of all opportunities to recruit and encourage new governors and actively helps schools on those few occasions where there are difficulties filling co-opted or LEA places.

89. Consultation and liaison between governors and the LEA is a strength. All but one school buy into the subscription scheme. All schools visited paid tribute to the high quality advice and support they are thus provided through briefings for clerks, the termly governors' forum, regular briefing sessions, the newsletter and from the telephone help line. Governors and head teachers alike feel well informed and appreciate the expert advice they receive. Increasingly, and rightly, the LEA is concentrating on developing the autonomy of its governing bodies.

Support for school management

90. Support for school management is good. Improving school leadership and management is a key concern of the LEA and is one of the priorities in the Education Development Plan.

91. Consistently good support is provided for headteachers by assigned advisers and by the personnel department. Both these services were given a high rating in the schools' survey and in interviews with headteachers. OFSTED reports and visits to schools confirm that Poole schools are well led and this augurs well for the future.

92. The LEA places considerable emphasis on helping schools develop the skills and mechanisms for self-evaluation. It has done this mainly through organising a series of OFSTED accredited courses for headteachers and deputy headteachers. The school survey showed that these had been very well received and several of the headteachers interviewed were planning to enrol other members of their management teams on the courses or to invite the LEA to present a course on site.

93. The LEA also organises a good range of other courses for senior managers. Through the Poole effectiveness network and the Poole headteachers' development group, it organises a series of meetings where national experts are invited to share their thinking on a range of relevant issues. Every year, the LEA also organises a major conference on raising standards.

94. There is a clearly defined programme of induction for headteachers who are new to the authority. This includes additional support from assigned inspectors and advice from mentor headteachers. Those who are new to the role are given further support through the leadership and management programme for new headteachers (HEADLAMP). The national programmes for serving headteachers (LPSH) and aspiring headteachers (NPQH) are also well supported by the LEA. In addition, the LEA runs its own course for aspiring headteachers.

95. The LEA has sound strategies for recruitment and retention of teachers and there are few vacancies currently. The LEA benefits from a successful primary school based initial teacher training (SCITT) scheme. Twenty-five teachers are trained annually. A secondary SCITT is currently being planned for September 2002. There is a well-planned programme of support for newly qualified teachers, involving regular courses and briefing sessions covering a wide range of relevant issues. This has been well received by newly qualified teachers and their mentors.

96. The LEA provides a range of support for middle managers, including briefings on subject issues and training on the role of the subject leader. In the school survey, this support was rated as less than satisfactory, especially by primary schools. However, examination of documentation, course evaluations and discussions with teachers and headteachers lead inspectors to conclude that support for middle management is satisfactory.

Support for early years

97. Support for early years is very good. There is a well co-ordinated and coherent approach to ensuring appropriate early years and childcare provision within the borough. The LEA's strategy is clearly set out in the Education Development Plan and in the Early Years Childcare Development Plan. Both these plans are carefully monitored and very good progress has been made, in relation to the targets set.

98. The composition of the early years and childcare development partnership (EYCDP) is appropriate and there are effective working relationships between the providers involved. Elected members have taken appropriate action when issues have been raised by members of the EYCDP. There is a sufficient number of places for all four-year-olds. In addition, the partnership currently offers all children funded places for three terms prior to school entry. Plans to extend provision for pupils from nought to three years old have been delayed by difficulties of finding accommodation and of recruiting staff. However, the council has bid successfully for significant extra funding and extra nursery units are to be opened shortly. This acceleration means that the LEA is likely to meet the related Government targets for 2002.

99. Education and social services work well together to provide coherent and consistent support for children and parents at both school and pre-school phases. There is good support for children with special educational needs, including children with profound learning difficulties.

100. The LEA is making a very positive contribution to raising standards in early years settings through a strong focus on training and quality assurance. Particular emphasis is placed on ensuring that pre-school children have comparable experiences whatever settings they are in and that there is a continuity of experience as they transfer from the Foundation Stage to Year One. OFSTED nursery inspections for 1999 to 2000 showed that provision in Poole was of an acceptable standard in all the settings examined. Inspections of primary schools from 1996/1997 to 1999 showed that the progress made by under fives and the quality of teaching that they received were well above the average nationally and for similar authorities. The LEA is having a decided impact in this area. The support of the advisory service is held in high regard, as indicated by the school survey and in interviews with headteachers. Schools value the expertise, drive, enthusiasm and sensitivity of the staff concerned.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

101. The council has identified five key outcomes and developed priorities for each of these. Education is afforded a high priority and the corporate structure ensures that this is shared across all directorates. The Best Value Performance Plan links well with education plans and includes a corporate action plan which specifies key targets, actions and plans. There is currently no planning that sets a vision for Poole over the next ten years but progress towards a community plan is on course. The council was consulting at the time of the inspection. Overall, there is sound and improving cohesion in policy and planning in relation to education.

102. Elected members demonstrate a high level of commitment and are very supportive of schools. In a small, highly consultative authority, workloads are often high and the modernised political structure has not resulted in less working groups or committees. There is a minority administration but a consensual approach to decision making has been a feature of this authority. Financial decision-making is open, timely and effective. Members have given strong leadership on funding special educational needs and support for early years. However, there was a perception in the majority of schools visited during this inspection that there is a lack of political will to tackle some difficult issues; for instance, ages of transfer, school organisation and home-to-school transport. This view is shared by the inspection team for reasons explained in Section 5. Advice to elected members is good generally, but the under-performance at Key Stage 2 has not been highlighted sufficiently.

103. The corporate structure is described in Section 1 of this report. Schools are not yet convinced of the merits of the structure and the council has agreed that the education role will not be rotated. The strength of the educational input at the council's strategic director level is an important factor. The council has demonstrated that it is prepared to be flexible in order to meet education's specialised needs, although this does on occasion result in some duplication of effort.

104. Each service unit and the policy directorate has a business plan. Those for school advice and support service, and pupil parent support services are sound with a three-year outline and a one-year action plan that is reviewed annually. There are effective links between corporate and service business plans. The business plan for the policy directorate is weak in the area which relates to education and targets are too vague. There is no long-term planning which sets a vision for Poole over the next ten years but the authority is currently consulting on a community strategy plan. Progress with implementing plans is reviewed regularly and appropriate action taken.

105. The quality of plans is good generally, for instance, the behaviour support plan and Early Years Childcare and Development Plan and individual plans link well together. The LEA has also produced a 'strategy for education'. This lists core principles and usefully sets out the borough's vision, mission and core values and how education contributes to these. However, there is no single document or plan that draws together all the educational initiatives, targets and success criteria.

Recommendation

- Draw together in one plan all the educational initiatives, timescales and targets.

Partnerships

106. The LEA has good links with the local further education college and is further developing links with business at primary and secondary level. A strength of the LEA is the effective collaboration at the corporate level between education and social services, health and the police. Liaison with the police has led to effective work on drug education and police bases have been established in two secondary schools. Support for children in public care is a good example where joint working has been particularly successful. The effectiveness of this strategy is not evident in the responses in the school survey. Links with health and social services are rated as satisfactory and better than other LEAs in secondary schools, but as unsatisfactory in primary schools. School visits, however, revealed a more positive picture in primary schools. Some dissatisfaction was expressed regarding the lack of a designated person in social services to deal with an individual school's queries.

107. Partnership with schools is sound and improving. Officers provide clear, strong leadership and have gained the trust of the schools. There have been tensions in the past but the LEA has listened, responded and acted. For instance, the LEA acknowledges that it tried to develop too many initiatives simultaneously as a new unitary resulting in high administrative demands on schools. In response to schools' concerns, the number of activities has been reduced, an annual timetable of consultations is published and agreed with schools, and the number of consultative groups have been reduced. The LEA is following the communications standard issued by the DfES and any consultation/survey requires the approval of the education senior management team. Nevertheless, there are still a wide range of working groups which place substantial demands on individual headteachers in a small authority. Headteachers accept this because the groups are seen to make an effective contribution to the evolving authority. The advisory group for school advice and support service works well and is effective. That for pupil parent support services is more recently established and is not yet effective. Its membership is currently too narrow and the group has not been used sufficiently to bridge the gap in school and LEA perceptions about the effectiveness of services, for example, behaviour support. Communications are good although there have been exceptions, notably with special schools. The LEA have also established a parents' forum and a pupils' forum where young people can have a voice in the work of the authority.

108. A key feature of school organisation is the locally established groups of schools, called pyramids. While these are appropriately school led and the LEA provides support on request, there is no coherent LEA strategy to make use of the structures to promote school improvement. Issues over catchment areas and high pupil mobility militate against using the structure to promote continuity and progression. This, to a degree, undermines the need for the pyramid structure.

Recommendation

- Make better use of the pyramid structure for promoting continuity and progression when pupils transfer schools.

Management services

109. Overall **management services** available to support schools are good, although property services have a poor record and do not command schools' confidence. Service level agreements are well set out and follow a common and accessible format describing appropriately differentiated services. In addition, the council offers schools the opportunity to access both effective procurement and facilities management arrangements, although these only partially meet schools' curriculum needs.

110. **Personnel support** is very good. It is provided through the corporate personnel service unit by staff dedicated to education service support. The service is consistently, and deservedly, highly rated by schools and benefits from a high buy-back. Supporting documentation, policies and the personnel handbook are of a consistently good quality. Good work has been undertaken to assist schools in competency and grievance issues and in supporting governors in Poole schools in the management of a significant turnover of headteachers since local government reorganisation. Appropriate work is being undertaken to assist schools in the management of absence, although schools do not always receive prompting to ensure referrals.

111. **Financial support** is good. The traded service is similarly provided through a corporate service unit. Schools have the opportunity for a high degree of autonomy in the management of their finances. All schools have their own bank accounts and manage the major portion of their payments. School spending is appropriately, but not intrusively, tracked. The number of school deficits has been reduced from 14 (one-third of schools) in 1998/1999 to only one at the beginning of 2001/2002. In addition to the traded financial service, the LEA monitors and challenges the school's strategy for the deployment of its resources to support its school development planning. It is intended that schools will receive an assessment in writing and may be categorised to receive additional support as a result. The arrangement is not yet embedded nor fully understood by schools. At this early stage, the allocation of diagnostic time is not related to potential need.

112. **Payroll** overall is satisfactory. All non-foundation schools buy back the LEA provision, which it is currently seeking to update and develop better personnel record links.

113. Support for school **information and communication technology administration** has more strengths than weaknesses. There are some significant strengths in provision. All non-foundation schools are directly linked to the local authority 'loop', which supports a developing and potentially very effective intranet. Since re-organisation the LEA has replaced all school networks and servers, which are in turn connected with the borough server. Both curriculum and administrative

activity is supported by these links. All non-foundation schools in the past have been provided with a basic hardware configuration, although with recently provided enhanced common administrative software schools now have had to provide upgrades to hardware. Schools administration is being supported through systems common to all non-foundation schools. Electronic mail capacity for schools is effective and some filtering of communications with schools is in place, although school visits identified some wasteful blanket targeting of communications.

114. There are, however, weaknesses. Schools do not yet have equal access to the 'loop'. Response times to schools' request for technical support are too slow as a result of corporate demands and guidance and advice is not always sufficiently based on a knowledge of schools' needs. Technical support is currently being reorganised to address these acknowledged weaknesses. Although theoretically schools are free to procure their own administrative information and communication technology hardware and software, schools visited perceived that they have little option but to use the council support. Planning to secure the integration of administration and curriculum networks in schools is not satisfactory.

115. **Home-to-school transport** arrangements are well organised. Good practice includes accessible application forms and the use of parental surveys. Poole has produced good safety codes for passengers, drivers and escorts, as well as a helpful minibus guide for schools. Per pupil costs for the borough are inflated by the free transport entitlement, subject to distance, for pupils successful in achieving entry to one of the two selective schools. Unsatisfactorily there is a lack of equity of treatment elsewhere. Parents of children, for instance, who have failed to secure entry to a selective school as their first preference and who are then unable to be accommodated in their local community school, because it is oversubscribed, are required to meet costs of transport.

116. The support for the **maintenance of property** is weak and many schools' experience of work secured through the former construction related services has been unsatisfactory. Partly in response to the concerns of schools, the council has appropriately re-organised and combined its property services functions. It recognises the need to re-establish the confidence of schools.

117. The council overall makes satisfactory, and in some cases good arrangements, to secure **a school meals service**. It provides a service itself in special schools and is appropriately beginning to review delivery arrangements for the hot meals to ensure better value for money and make more effective use of some accommodation. In the secondary sector, it has assisted community and aided secondary schools in negotiating individual contracts with providers to offer provision tailored to individual need, including some profit sharing arrangements. However, in first and middle schools only a cold meal is available. Although the service works efficiently and the council ensures nutritional standards, schools' experience is that take up of free school meal entitlement is comparatively low as a result. As well as causing some concern about pupil entitlement and welfare, schools rightly identify the impact on the validity of benchmarking comparisons using this data.

Recommendations

- Improve the catalogue provided to schools recommending effective providers for management services and curriculum support;
- ensure that all schools have equal access to information and communication technology systems and provide an acceptable level of technical support and guidance;
- clarify procurement arrangements for information and communication technology; and
- address the potential inequity in the current arrangements for home-to-school transport.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Strategy

118. The LEA has a good strategy for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). There is a good balance of provision comprising special schools, provision in mainstream schools and support services. It provides for a continuum of support and a clear commitment to the inclusion of pupils with SEN. There are effective systems for consultation with representatives of schools and parents. The strategy has been communicated well to mainstream schools who have a good understanding of its implications. There have been instances where special schools themselves have been uncertain about their future role as centres of excellence. The lack of clarity in the school organisation plan compounds this.

119. The strategy for achieving effective integration, particularly enhancing the capabilities of mainstream schools, and supporting links between special and mainstream schools is clear and appropriate. Positive progress has been made on implementing the strategy; three schools have bases for hearing impaired children and one for pupils with specific learning difficulties.

120. The policy appropriately promotes early identification and intervention to support pupils and recognises a continuing role for special schools and other specialist provision. The policy, and the recent Best Value review and action plan, are included in an extensive and helpful SEN handbook and which gives detailed guidance to schools.

Statutory obligations

121. The LEA meets its statutory obligations well. Arrangements follow the existing SEN Code of Practice and are suitably anticipating the changes in the revised Code of Practice.

122. The processing of statements is very efficient. In 1999/2000 all statements were processed within the national guideline of 18 weeks and there is still a very impressive figure of 98.2 per cent when exceptions are considered. The latter is also an indication of effective working relationships with other agencies.

123. Annual reviews and transition plans are well administered. As a result of support that has been provided at Stage 3, the number of pupils with a statement for specific learning difficulties has reduced from 63 in 1997 to 12 in 2001.

124. There is a developing parent partnership scheme. Examples of effective partnership and extensive discussions with parents to resolve difficulties were apparent from discussions and scrutiny of case files. This has resulted in a very low number of appeals by parents to the special educational needs tribunal.

Improvement and value for money

125. Support for special educational needs (SEN) is good in both special and mainstream schools. The LEA's support for SEN co-ordinators (SENCO) is effective

and includes regular network meetings and good quality in-service training. The provision of release time for SENCOs has been widely appreciated and well used by schools. Advice on the preparation of individual education plans is sound and those seen were of good quality. Dissemination of good practice via the SENCO network is good but it has not been sufficiently communicated to governors.

126. The LEA continues to develop a good range of provision. Extra support is provided to schools where need is identified. There are effective joint-LEA arrangements for pupils with sensory impairment. Schools value, sometimes highly, the contribution of the education psychologist service. As nationally, schools report shortages in support for speech and language therapy. The shortage was identified in the Best Value review. The LEA has responded positively by appointing an additional language teacher and it is a clear priority in the SEN action plan. Support from the literacy and numeracy support services was satisfactory in schools visited. There is effective regional co-ordination for low-incidence SEN.

127. Secondary pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are placed in schools out of the borough. Poole's schools are currently dissatisfied with the in-school provision available within the borough. The role of one special school has been extended to provide outreach support to EBD pupils in mainstream schools and this is a positive development. It is too early to judge its effectiveness.

128. The annual audit of the use of resources delegated to schools and the effectiveness of the provision is thorough and conducted well. The written report to schools is analytical and usefully identifies development points; a weakness is that it is not routinely shared with the governing body.

129. The mechanism for generating resources for SEN schools is good. Funding for pupil places in special schools has been increased recently to support the minimum recommended staffing levels. A pragmatic, but as yet insecure, approach has been developed to support outreach work. However, the intention to provide outreach support from the special schools is included in the SEN policy and action plan. The LEA is steadily reducing the number of statements and there are appropriate targets for further reductions. Overall, the LEA provides good value for money.

Recommendation

- Clarify and implement the aim to develop special schools as centres of excellence, including the provision of support to mainstream schools.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

School organisation

130. The pattern of school provision in Poole is exceptionally and unsatisfactorily varied within a small borough. Such is the complexity of the arrangements that, in extreme cases an individual pupil might attend different schools in each of Years 6, 7, 8 and 9. The movement of pupils appears to be considerable, often a tactic used by parents to ensure later entry into their preferred schools. Rationalisation of the current arrangements is inhibited by arrangements in bordering authorities but, even allowing for this, LEA monitoring of pupil mobility and the impact on curriculum continuity, progression and standards are poor.

131. Following local government reorganisation a task group (comprising members, officers and headteachers) was established to review ages of transfer. The council's decision in 1999 to retain the status quo in order to concentrate on the raising of standards was understandable. However, subsequent inaction is not; elected members have not provided clear leadership and schools perceive that there is a lack of political will to address this issue. The report to members in 1999 by the policy director (education) identified shortcomings with the current organisation of schools and progress in tackling these issues has not been adequately monitored or incorporated into the Education Development Plan. The LEA has not systematically gathered relevant data, such as value added, to better inform discussions when the issue is next reviewed.

132. A task group also looked at post-16 provision and outcomes are more positive and work is continuing. This has resulted in a strategy group being set up which meets termly. There has also been sound progress on collaboration between schools and the local further education college. The borough has very good sixth form provision including the further education college, two grammar schools and large, viable sixth forms in four other schools. The staying-on rate into full-time post-16 education has been rising steadily and there are strong, developing links with the learning skills council.

Recommendation

- Collect and analyse comprehensive data to assess the effectiveness of school organisation and to inform a review of current arrangements.

The supply of school places

133. Support for the supply of school places has more strengths than weaknesses. Poole's overall match of places to needs is good. Numbers of surplus places in both primary and secondary are less than in comparator groups and the margin between the number of places overall and the forecasted pupil population is small. Appropriate adjustments have been made to standard numbers to assist sensible use of individual school accommodation and meet class size organisation needs. Forecasting of pupil trends in the context of a very complex configuration of school types is satisfactory.

134. The school organisation plan has significant shortcomings as a planning tool. It provides an adequate description of numbers of pupils and projections and principles for managing the current pattern of provision. Nevertheless, it lacks sufficient analysis of pupil movement, both into and out of the borough and between schools. In addition, the analysis of trends and destinations of children with SEN is insufficient.

Recommendation

- Improve the school organisation plan to include pupil mobility and an analysis of trends and destinations of special educational needs pupils.

Asset management

135. Overall, support for asset management is unsatisfactory. The council's strategic approach is sound, but implementation of aspects of it, project management, the conduct of the council's landlord function and the clarity of communication to schools, are unsatisfactory. The council has, however, recently taken measures for schools to clarify progress on the implementation of the asset management plan (AMP) and the new head of property services is programmed to meet all heads of schools in the next few months.

136. AMP documentation overall is sound and the local policy statement is a clear, full and useful document with good links to other strategic plans. Schools can access AMP information on the council's Intranet. The strategy to undertake condition surveys on a quinquennial basis supplemented by annual monitoring inspections is appropriate and satisfactory. To date, however, schools have been hindered in their understanding of their condition survey by both inaccuracies in some initial work and by the absence of routinely assigned surveyors. Some schools have had to employ their own surveyors to supplement the council's work. Monitoring of the extent to which schools have undertaken their responsibilities has been insufficiently effective. However, recent changes, the involvement of the assigned adviser in consideration of AMP related issues and the allocation to each school of a building surveyor, are positive developments. In response to unsatisfactory experience both in excessive fees contributing to high costs and difficulties in project management, the council has agreed to pilot community schools managing their own capital work. The approach both demonstrates an appropriate responsiveness by the council and is consistent with its support for school autonomy. Satisfactory checks are in place and initial indications are encouraging.

137. Overall the backlog of the highest priority maintenance work has broadly been matched by identified school, New Deal for Schools and local authority resources. Schools are appropriately represented on groups that recommend capital allocations in light of identified need.

Admissions

138. Poole's approach to the management of admissions in a very complex context is very good and in many ways exemplary. Through discussions and agreement of the admissions authorities on its admission forum, the council secured

the role of operating a single admission system for all schools in the borough. This involves use of a single form, common closing dates for application and common notification dates. Parents are invited to express a single 'first' preference for all schools in the borough and admission authorities criteria reflect this. Multiple first preferences have been eliminated, and although the level of success in meeting first preferences at the secondary stage is inevitably lower, appeals are not significantly high and reflect the clarity of the system for parents. The authority is, however, exceeding its powers in requesting parents of children seeking entry into independent schools to indicate this as a first preference.

139. Despite the excessively complex provision, admissions literature is clear. Information on oversubscription is provided for schools in all sectors. Provision is made to ensure the council receives feedback from parents about the clarity and comprehensiveness of its information. One shortcoming is the absence of any assistance in the admissions booklet in community languages. However, there is separate published material and the council intends to incorporate it in the booklet next year. Appeals against admission decisions lodged within the required timetable are completed within acceptable timescales.

Recommendation

- Process information for parents intending to apply to independent schools separately from the expression of a first preference for admission to maintained schools.

Provision of education other than at school

140. Provision for education otherwise than at school is unsatisfactory because the learning support centre is not registered as a pupil referral unit, insufficient effort is made to reintegrate excluded pupils back into full-time school provision and numbers who return to school are low. Major strengths are that, partly because the LEA has been very successful in reducing permanent exclusions, it is well on course to providing full time provision by 2002.

141. Education for pupils who are permanently excluded, or at risk of exclusion, is delivered through a youth centre and a range of other settings. The youth centre is not registered as a pupil referral unit. This is unsatisfactory as it is not subject to the control and accountabilities of a governing body or external scrutiny by OFSTED.

142. In September 2001, there were only nine permanently excluded pupils without a school. Of these, eight have been out of school for less than six months and receive over sixteen hours of tuition per week; the ninth pupil has only just moved into the borough. The LEA is on course to providing full-time provision from 2002 for all pupils excluded for more than 15 days. Referral systems are well known to the schools and are handled well by the service. Schools are not well informed about provision for excluded pupils, and are sceptical about its quality. Reintegration is a major challenge for a small LEA in which six of the eight secondary schools are oversubscribed. Reintegration rates into mainstream schools are very low.

143. The LEA successfully provides alternative programmes. There is sound attention to developing basic skills and providing work experience, but the LEA is not able to offer a full curriculum entitlement to these pupils. There is good collaboration with other agencies including the youth offending team and good links with the local further education college. The pupils have a personal tutor but the monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment is not sufficiently rigorous. The LEA recognises the weaknesses in curriculum provision and is addressing this issue. It has secured funding for two more teachers to deliver full-time provision and is negotiating with schools to use specialist facilities.

144. Provision has been improved by the appointment of an 'inclusion officer'. At the outset, she was instrumental in resolving a very unsatisfactory situation, namely identifying 20 pupils who had been out of school for more than a year, 'unofficially excluded', and in bringing them back into the system. Her work is now appropriately focused on preventing exclusions and pastoral reviews for pupils and this work is effective.

145. Arrangements for educating children at home or in hospital owing to illness are satisfactory and appropriate to their need and capability. The LEA recently reviewed its sick children's services and further improvements are currently being implemented. This is well managed. The LEA monitors the education of children, by their parents, at home (22 currently) very well. Assigned advisers visit annually and, where necessary, make an interim six-monthly visit, to ensure an appropriate curriculum. Reports are detailed and helpful.

146. The LEA spending on education other than at school is low compared to similar authorities and LEAs nationally. The school survey, confirmed by visits to schools, shows that there is general dissatisfaction with the alternative provision. The authority does have plans to improve provision for excluded pupils.

Recommendation

- Agree a reintegration policy and improve communications with schools about provision for education otherwise than at school; and
- take immediate steps to ensure that tuition units generated by the LEA are registered as pupil referral units or provide suitable education, as required by the Education Act 1996.

Attendance

147. LEA support for attendance is sound. Attendance rates are generally above national averages and in line with those for similar authorities. The percentage of unauthorised absences in secondary schools has been better than the national average for the last four years.

148. There is a coherent strategy outlined in the Education Development Plan. Procedures for monitoring and analysing attendance data are sound. The LEA challenges schools to improve attendance but the Education Development Plan targets for reducing unauthorised absences are not sufficiently reflected in the schools' targets.

149. The service uses a wide range of measures to improve attendance. These include register checks, advice on setting up first day contact systems, truancy sweeps and mediation between school and home to explore reasons for non-attendance. Members of the service also conduct assemblies focusing on attendance issues and advise schools on drawing up attendance policies and rewards systems. Recently, there has been a particular focus on pupils whose attendance falls below eighty per cent. These pupils are interviewed by education welfare officers and an action plan is drawn up with clearly defined targets for improvement. Visits to school show that this strategy has resulted in rapid improvements in the attendance of some pupils. The service works well with health, social services, the police, voluntary and other agencies to encourage attendance. Legal powers are used appropriately.

150. The service performs effectively its duties in relation to specific groups, particularly children in public care, children at risk and Travellers' children. Criteria for the prioritisation of the service's work are clear and understood by schools. In practice this results in children with the most need receiving the most intensive support.

151. Leadership and management of the service are sound. Staff are committed and hard-working and their work is valued by schools. Recently the service has been operating below its full complement of staff. A clear attempt has been made to minimise the effect of this by reorganising staff work programmes and practices and through the setting up of an effective e-mail system. However, with such a small service, this has led to visits to some schools being reduced to an average of once a month and less than some schools need.

Behaviour support

152. Support for behaviour has more strengths than weaknesses. The LEA has provided good strategic leadership for reducing and monitoring exclusion, and sound support to schools in support for the development of in-school centres. However, a coherent continuum of provision aligned to an appropriate strategy is not in place.

153. The behaviour support plan is good. It is clear and thorough, offering good guidance and realistic, achievable targets. Appropriate activities within the Education Development Plan provide a stimulus to further developments. However, schools do not feel well supported. Most secondary schools choose not to buy behaviour support from the LEA and one pyramid of schools has established a system with its own outreach worker. A positive development is the establishment of in-school centres in two schools.

154. The LEA has been particularly successful in reducing the number of permanent exclusions. The number reduced from 23 in 1996/1997 to six in 2000/2001, which was 12 below the target. There has been a significant reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions.

155. Behaviour management training has been provided for teachers and non-teaching staff, and this has been effective in some schools. It has concentrated on

anger management, which is not always appropriate for the very youngest children but the LEA is now increasingly using the database of training needs, established in July 2001, to improve the range of courses to deal with different behaviour management strategies. This is a positive move, as is the development of outreach for support and training for mainstream schools from the emotional and behavioural difficulties special school. Furthermore, very good links with the police have resulted in police bases being established in two secondary schools and police officers working with the youth offending team. As part of 'Focus on Youth', the police run activities for young people, for example, the 'harbour challenge' which involved sailing as a reward for good behaviour. This collaborative work is to be commended.

156. The LEA's spending on behaviour support is low but current arrangements are not cost-effective. It has good ambitions to devolve behaviour support funding to primary schools, to develop outreach support and to develop behaviour support centres in schools but at present schools are not clear of these intentions and remain dissatisfied.

Recommendation

- Establish a range of strategies that provide a continuum of provision for behaviour, making clear at each stage the school's responsibilities, the range of strategies that can be employed and criteria for referral to the next stage.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

157. The LEA's provision for health and safety is good and for child protection is very good. In both areas the LEA fulfils its statutory duties effectively. Schools respond positively about both these functions. The LEA spends four times the amount per pupil on child protection and health services than its statistical neighbours and than LEAs nationally but provides good value for money.

158. A detailed and thorough health and safety file is provided to all schools and regularly updated. It includes appropriate guidance policy documents, good advice on drugs awareness and prevention and a practical guide to risk assessment. There are useful links made with the police drug action team and with the Dorset 'promoting health in schools' scheme. A range of associated training is provided. The health visitor and the health and safety officer work closely with individual schools offering advice and guidance. Increasingly, and appropriately, the attached advisers or pupil and parent services are involved if the danger to health and safety is as a result of a behaviour problem. Health agencies work closely with the LEA to provide relevant advice.

159. Systems and strategy for ensuring child protection in Poole are impressive. A child protection quality assurance manager monitors the situation, keeping lists of named staff for child protection, children in public care and special needs up-to-date. Training is provided each term and detailed records are kept to make sure all schools send a representative. The work of the pupil parent support services and children and families social services is closely linked, strategically and at operational level, and is further enhanced by the excellent work of the area child protection committee (ACPC). The ACPC has produced the '*Children in Need*' framework,

designed to help staff fulfil their own responsibilities and at the same time secure appropriate services from other agencies. Launched in July 2001, it illustrates the priority given and commitment made in Poole to protect vulnerable children.

Children in public care

160. The support for children in public care is consistently very good, is highly rated nationally and provides good value for money. The children's services and the Quality Protects action plans link closely with the Education Development Plan to provide a clear, coherent and effective strategy. Over the three-year period of the current Education Development Plan, the LEA has acted constructively to improve its care for these children, to reduce exclusions and to increase their success chances of obtaining qualifications and accreditation.

161. Sixty-five per cent of pupils aged 16 or over who left care in 2000 gained a GCSE grade, which is much better than the national picture. The numbers who attain five or more high-grade passes is also increasing. In the national tests for 11 year-olds, performance of children in public care at Level 4 plus is satisfactory, but has weaknesses in mathematics and has yet to reach the target of 67 per cent included in the Best Value Performance Plan.

162. The LEA has provided all schools with a clear, detailed and comprehensive set of guidance. All schools have a designated teacher responsible and communication between schools and the LEA is good. Regular cross-service meetings and very good inter-agency collaboration between education, social services and health ensure that all the appropriate information, records, and plans, including the personal education plan, are in place in school within the statutory 20 days. Data are collected systematically and used to inform strategic planning. All personnel involved show a high degree of commitment both to the pastoral welfare and educational attainment of the individual children and to the continued improvement of the service overall.

Gifted and talented children

163. Support for gifted and talented pupils has been slow to develop and is unsatisfactory overall.

164. Despite being identified as a priority in the Education Development Plan over its three-year period, the LEA has not pressed forward development to convince all schools of the significance of this work. The LEA has not sufficiently focussed its efforts on the significant number of schools whose OFSTED report identified underachievement of able pupils as a key issue. Not all schools have co-ordinators for able pupils nor policies for gifted and able pupils and criteria for their identification. Only some schools identify their most talented pupils so that data can be built up centrally to track their progress and set challenging targets for them. Individual pupil data is only now becoming available for the LEA to begin to do so. Neither has the LEA persisted with areas where they have identified underachievement, for example, the number of pupils achieving Level 5 in the Key Stage 2 numeracy tests and the relative underachievement of girls, to focus its

support effectively. Although the Education Development Plan has targets to increase the percentage of pupils achieving higher levels by three per cent in all key stages, the improvement that has been made has been achieved more as a result of discrete work in individual schools than as the result of a co-ordinated central strategy.

165. On the positive side, LEA action has included annual conferences with national speakers, literacy and numeracy support for teachers to challenge higher attaining pupils, identified time for the assessment adviser to build up data and a part-time secondment to undertake research, track pupils and help to draft policy and advice.

166. Two successful summer schools have been run for pupils talented in literacy and the arts.

Recommendations

- Identify and monitor the attainment of gifted and able pupils across the LEA; and
- adapt and support a more consistent policy for gifted and talented with schools.

Minority ethnic children including Travellers

167. Overall, support for minority ethnic children is unsatisfactory. In the LEA, the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below the average nationally. There are 45 different languages represented and the pupils are scattered across the borough's schools. Despite attempts to collect the information from schools, the LEA does not have complete data on its minority ethnic pupils. Therefore, it is not in a position to monitor their attainment and progress thoroughly or to ensure that they are being set appropriate targets at each key stage.

168. Support for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) is the responsibility of the ethnic minority achievement service. Staff work closely with the early years and numeracy and literacy teams and they have established a resource base of useful materials for pupils and parents. A well-researched information pack has also been distributed to schools. The service has recently extended its brief to focus on provision of advice to schools as well as the provision of direct teaching for EAL pupils. This is indicated in its service level statement and reflected in the records of contacts with schools. It does not, however, seem to be understood by schools. Headteachers interviewed felt that their EAL pupils had not received sufficient support and had progressed despite, rather than because of, the service. This reflected the low rating which support for minority ethnic children received in the school survey.

169. Support for Travellers is satisfactory. Appropriate advice and support materials are provided for schools and parents, including parents of children in the early years and there is appropriate liaison with the behaviour support service to identify and support pupils in Key Stage 4 who are at risk of being excluded.

Recommendation

- Establish a comprehensive set of data for minority ethnic pupils and monitor their attainment and progress and set appropriate targets.

Measures to combat racism

170. The LEA has been slow to respond to the Macpherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

171. The council has a corporate policy on equal opportunities and this has been disseminated and monitored through policy directors' portfolio meetings. Its 'equal opportunities policy' and its 'managing diversity and dignity at work policy' make specific reference to combating racism. The council adopted the council for race equality standard and achieved Level 1 in 1999. 2002/2003 is the target date for achieving Level 2. Therefore, policies are in place but implementation following the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence has been slow.

172. A senior adviser has recently been appointed to take responsibility for this area. In March of this year, a useful guidance document on '*Preventing and Addressing Racist Incidents*' was distributed to all schools. This includes clear advice on recording and reporting racist incidents and on collating data. The legal responsibilities of schools and governing bodies are also clearly identified in that document. An appropriate training programme has been drawn up for teachers, headteachers and governors focusing on the Commission for Racial Equality guidance document '*Learning for All*'. In devising its programme, the LEA is drawing on the advice and expertise of consultants who have made a particular study of race equality education in predominantly white areas. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this work in terms of its impact on schools.

Recommendation

- Increase the speed of the implementation of the LEA's policies for combating racism.

Social exclusion

173. The LEA approach to tackling social exclusion is sound with a few weaknesses. It is central to Poole's corporate vision and philosophy. Strategic planning has strong corporate coherence and a clear commitment to regeneration and this is reflected in the Education Development Plan where it is a priority. The LEA has been successful on many fronts, particularly with its work on children in public care, attendance and exclusion rates. Close inter-agency work and good commitment on the part of staff involved have contributed to this positive work. The LEA has been less successful ensuring that provision outside school is geared to helping pupils return and reintegrate within a school setting.

174. The LEA organised an inclusion day conference in June 2001. This concentrated on special needs and in particular emotional and behavioural difficulties issues. As a result of concerns raised by headteachers, it was followed by a discussion meeting, which itself has led to the setting up of a regular open meeting. Although some reference was made to racism awareness, generally this aspect of inclusion has been less well managed. The LEA has started to provide schools with guidance on racism and associated issues but it has been slow to monitor the achievement of minority ethnic pupils. In Poole, a predominantly white area, the LEA is not sufficiently proactive in schools in this respect.

APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes a number of recommendations. The key issues are the underperformance at Key Stage 2, school organisation and data analysis. The following recommendations are fundamental:

When devising its Education Development Plan for 2002-2007 the LEA should pay particular attention to local issues including:

- strategies to improve continuity and progression in pupils' learning when transferring schools;
- analyse the impact of school organisational features and consider ways of rationalising the present complex system; and
- raising standards at Key Stage 2.

Collect and analyse comprehensive data to assess the effectiveness of school organisation and to inform a review of current arrangements.

In order to improve support for numeracy and literacy:

- raise teachers' expectations, particularly in Key Stage 2; and
- improve the rigour of analysis to target additional support effectively, raise the level of challenge and evaluate the effectiveness of support.

The following will also need to be addressed:

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT:

In order to improve the corporate structure:

- increase the rigour for scrutiny of policies, independent questioning of cabinet decisions and the accountability of individual services by elected members.

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- strengthen and prioritise the strategy for challenging high school balances.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to improve monitoring, challenge, support, intervention:

- copy all notes from assigned advisers and results from other monitoring visits to the governing body;
- extend training for assigned advisers in the analysis and interpretation of performance data.

In order to improve the collection and analysis of data:

- implement plans to improve pupil tracking at both school and LEA level and the transfer of data between schools;
- strengthen procedures so that aggregate targets set by primary schools are in line with 2002 LEA targets.

In order to improve support for information and communication technology (ICT):

- evaluate the impact on pupil attainment and progress of the support and resources provided for ICT.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In order to improve strategic management:

- draw together in one plan all the educational initiatives, timescales and targets; and
- make better use of the pyramid structure for promoting continuity and progression when pupils transfer schools.

In order to improve management services:

- improve the catalogue provided to schools recommending effective providers for management services and curriculum support;
- ensure that all schools have equal access to information and communication technology systems and provide an acceptable level of technical support and guidance;
- clarify procurement arrangements for information and communication technology;
- address the potential inequity in the current arrangements for home-to-school transport.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

In order to improve support for special educational needs:

- clarify and implement the aim to develop special schools as centres of excellence, including the provision of support to mainstream schools.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

In order to improve planning for the supply of school places:

- improve the school organisation plan to include pupil mobility and an analysis of trends and destinations of special educational needs pupils.

In order to improve admissions procedures:

- process information for parents intending to apply to independent schools separately from the expression of a first preference for admission to maintained schools.

In order to improve provision of education otherwise than at school:

- agree a reintegration policy and improve communications with schools about provision for education otherwise than at school; and
- take immediate steps to ensure that tuition units generated by the LEA are registered as pupil referral units or provide suitable education, as required by the Education Act 1996.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- establish a range of strategies that provide a continuum of provision for behaviour, making clear at each stage the school's responsibilities, the range of strategies that can be employed and criteria for referral to the next stage.

In order to improve support for gifted and talented children:

- identify and monitor the attainment of gifted and able pupils across the LEA; and
- adapt and support a more consistent policy for gifted and talented with schools.

In order to improve support for minority ethnic children including Travellers:

- establish a comprehensive set of data for minority ethnic pupils and monitor their attainment and progress and set appropriate targets.

In order to improve measures to combat racism:

- increase the speed of the implementation of the LEA's policies for combating racism.

In order to improve procedures for Best Value review:

- link success criteria more closely with the impact on pupils and make them more measurable and precise to aid monitoring; and
- clarify what is challenge and what is competition and ensure that there is detailed analysis of the potential competitors.

APPENDIX 2: BEST VALUE REVIEW FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

175. The Best Value review of the provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) started in July 2000 and reported to the learning overview and scrutiny committee in June 2001. It was rightly set up because of Poole's high expenditure on aspects of SEN compared to other LEAs, the need to review processes as a result of the new Code of Practice and the high proportion of pupils in out-of-borough special schools or statemented but not in a mainstream setting. The aims of the review were clearly defined in the Best Value Performance Plan 2001/2002. They represent a suitably challenging agenda for the authority.

176. The process of the review was comprehensive, involving the district auditor and the review board, led by the chief adviser. It had a wide-ranging remit covering pupil assessment and review processes; funding; support from related services; training and advice; approaches to inclusion; and evaluation strategies. It was rightly undertaken, as it started from some known weaknesses in provision and former dissatisfaction with the service.

177. Consultation was good and honestly reported. Surveys were sent to head teachers, parents and governors. Three working parties were set up by headteachers and representatives from a range of local agencies to explore and report on in-service training, quality assurance and processes and procedures. Good use was made of benchmarking data to compare Poole with neighbouring and other authorities regarding funding, statementing, making assessments, annual reviews and exclusions. OFSTED school reports were also used as a means of comparing practice. The section on challenge was weak because it simply justified current practice. Those arguments would have read more coherently within the competition section, which lacked detailed analysis of other potential providers or organisations with which links might be made.

178. The review has identified ten important issues each with a number of appropriate recommendations. The most challenging of these are the clarification of the role of special schools and the further delegation of funding and functions to schools. The initial action plan was clear and relevant but some actions, success criteria and timescales were insufficiently precise to help managers monitor performance. The updated plan is more helpful in detailing actions and outcomes, but still lacks measurable success criteria. Nevertheless, it provides the authority with a good agenda for development.

179. This review was a lengthy and detailed process but will probably result in some needed improvements. There is already some evidence of positive impact in practical terms. The special needs support service is a good service and it is likely to make further improvements as a result of this review.

Recommendation

- Link success criteria more closely with the impact on pupils and make them more measurable and precise to aid monitoring; and
- clarify what is challenge and what is competition and ensure that there is detailed analysis of the potential competitors.

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