

Inspection report
LIVERPOOL
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: September 2003

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Basic information

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Lead inspector:	Barry Jones HMI
Date of inspection:	September 2003

Introduction

1. This inspection of Liverpool local education authority (LEA) 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 (December 2001). The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's 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. Previous inspections of the LEA took place in May 1999 and in September 2000.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports; audit reports; and documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and members, focus groups of headteachers and governors, staff in other departments at that local authority, and diocesan representatives. The inspection drew on a concurrent HMI exercise that evaluated the quality of LEA support for Traveller education. Other agencies and LEA partners submitted written evidence of participation and joint working and participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA (published in December 2000). A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to schools, and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 70%.

3. Discussions tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. They also considered whether the support that is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, and is effective in contributing to improvements in the schools and provides value for money.

4. For each inspected function of the LEA, an inspection team makes a judgement which is converted into a numerical grade. The inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made against criteria for each inspected function of the LEA. These criteria can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report, along with short explanations of what each numerical grade represents. The numerical grades complement the areas of the report which comment on the individual functions scrutinised in this inspection. Some of the grades are used in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be updated regularly such that the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next assessment in December 2003.

Commentary

5. Liverpool is a major city with one of the highest degrees of deprivation in the country. The 1999 Ofsted report found that in most respects the LEA was providing very poor support to its schools and doing too little to overcome educational disadvantage. The subsequent report in 2000 found that the LEA had made very considerable progress. This inspection concludes that the progress has been maintained and that Liverpool LEA is now an effective organisation. The transformation is a model of good practice. It is a tribute to the efforts of elected members, officers, schools and pupils alike. There is a developing pride in the city which is bolstered by the award of 'European Capital of Culture' for 2008.

6. Liverpool is now a good LEA. Fundamental to this success are the drive, determination and leadership provided and sustained by senior officers and elected members. The authority is tackling robustly long-standing issues such as surplus places, expenditure on special educational needs and low attainment. Difficult decisions are being taken that are not popular with all schools but which are essential to bring about the necessary improvements. The LEA has challenged schools and, given the very high number of schools that were causing concern, a strong strategy of intervention with its weakest schools was required. The transformation in culture has been a very uncomfortable process that has tested the relationship between the LEA and its schools. The emphasis, rightly, is now on producing self-evaluating, self-reliant schools and this necessitates a further maturing in the partnership.

7. Since 1999, the attainment of pupils has risen at a rate above, and sometimes well above, the national average. For instance, in 1999 the percentage of Liverpool pupils gaining five or more higher grades in the GCSE examinations was 15% less than the national average, but by 2002 the gap had been halved. From a high number of 16 schools in special measures, it now has none and this is a remarkable achievement. The LEA is not complacent, however, and recognises that there is still much to be done. Staying-on rates are low, pupils' attainment remains below national averages generally and there is still a significant proportion of secondary schools with low attainment.

8. The LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion is good. Well-established, very effective partnership and multi-agency team working are critical, contributory factors. In particular, support for looked-after children is outstanding. Good progress has also been made in implementing strategies for supporting children with a range of special educational needs.

9. The LEA is now effective and performance is often good or very good. The following functions are exercised particularly effectively:

- the leadership and advice provided by senior officers;
- corporate plans and their implementation;
- decision-making and allocation of resources to priorities;
- collaboration between agencies;
- the strategy for school improvement and its implementation;
- leadership, management and value for money of services for school improvement;

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- definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention;
 - monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data;
 - identification and intervention in under-performing schools;
 - support for governors;
 - effectiveness of strategies to promote continuous improvement;
 - support for literacy and numeracy in primary schools;
 - support for the Key Stage 3 strategy;
 - property services and asset management planning;
 - support for assuring the supply and quality of teachers;
 - strategy for promoting social inclusion;
 - statutory obligations in respect of special educational needs;
 - support for looked after children;
 - provision of education for pupils who have no school place;
 - support for behaviour;
 - provision of school places and admissions;
 - effectiveness of combating racism;
 - support for early years; and
 - support for 14-19 education.

10. There are no major weaknesses but the performance of the payroll service is unsatisfactory. Although the scrutiny function is performed well overall, there are weaknesses in the performance of the scrutiny committee.

11. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment, published in December 2002, gave the education service one star for performance. This reflected low performance in special educational needs and social inclusion in particular. The capacity to make further improvement was rated as two stars, indicating an improving situation. This report confirms that there has been further improvement. All 16 recommendations from the previous report have been implemented satisfactorily and, in four-fifths of these, progress is good or very good. Nevertheless, even given this very good progress, there is still much to do to achieve the LEA's own expectations and further reduce the attainment gap. Liverpool is an improving, effective LEA. Its capacity to carry out the recommendations in this report is good.

Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement

Context

12. The socio-economic context of Liverpool LEA remains broadly as it was at the time of the previous inspection. This is a severely disadvantaged city; it is ranked the third most deprived out of 366 districts on the Index of Multiple Deprivation and, in 2000, 25 out of 33 wards were amongst the 10% most deprived nationally. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is more than twice the national average and unemployment levels, at 7%, are worse than the national figure.

13. The population of the city has declined significantly over the last 20 years and in January 2003 stood at 457,337. There are approximately 2000 fewer pupils of primary age than at the time of the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is in line with national averages. There are 765 asylum-seeking children in Liverpool schools. In 2001, the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need (SEN) was in line with national averages for both primary and secondary-aged children. The percentage of pupils with statements who are taught in special schools is above the national average.

14. In January 2003, the LEA maintained six nursery schools, 144 primary schools, 32 secondary, 19 special and four pupil referral units. There were 74,821 pupils, with approximately half the schools being voluntary-aided or holding foundation status. Since the last inspection, the LEA has closed 17 primary schools through amalgamation or closure, one secondary school, two special schools and one pupil referral unit. The LEA is currently consulting on the closure of three other special schools.

Performance

15. There has been good progress since the previous inspection in 2000 which noted that the performance of Liverpool pupils compared unfavourably with national averages and that progress between key stages was below national trends. Standards have improved at a rate above the national trend at Key Stages 2 and 3 and at GCSE level. This reflects a positive, improving picture and the gap between the LEA and national averages in national tests and examinations at ages 11, 14 and 16 is being significantly reduced. For instance, in 1999 the percentage of Liverpool pupils gaining five or more higher grades in the GCSE examinations was 15% less than the national average, but by 2002 the gap had halved.

16. In four-fifths of Ofsted inspections of primary schools since January 2001, pupils' attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage was judged to be below or well below national expectations. However in 2002, at the end of the Foundation Stage, three-quarters reached or exceeded the early learning goals. At Key Stage 1, the percentage of pupils achieving Level

2 or higher improved to reach the national average and was above those of statistical neighbours.¹

17. At other key stages, attainment is below national averages but in line with statistical neighbours, including the percentage of pupils gaining level 4 or higher at Key Stage 2 in literacy and numeracy, and level 5 or higher at Key Stage 3 in mathematics and science. At GCSE level, 10% of looked after children achieved five or more higher grades in 2003, above the national average. At post-16, in GCE advanced level examinations the average point score by pupils in LEA maintained sixth forms rose by 10% from 2001 to 2002.

18. The large reduction in the number of schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses is an outstanding achievement. In 1999 there were 16 schools in special measures; currently there are none. The number of schools with serious weaknesses has also reduced from 15 to two over the same period. This very good progress is also reflected in the judgements from section 10 inspections. From September 2002 to August 2003, 94% of Liverpool schools inspected were judged to be at least satisfactory and 75% were good or better.

19. The LEA has analysed pupils' progress between key stages. In line with the rising trend, there is year-on-year improvement in value-added measures but progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 is still unsatisfactory.

20. In 2002, attendance rates in both primary (93.3%) and secondary school (89.3%) were in line with statistical neighbours but below the national average. Attendance is improving at faster than the national trend at secondary level and in line with it at primary level. The proportion of pupils permanently excluded in 2002 was broadly in line for secondary-aged pupils and above for primary-aged pupils.

Council structure

21. The council currently consists of 63 Liberal Democrat, 31 Labour, three Liberal and two Liverpool Labour members. The city has been under a Liberal Democrat administration since May 1998. The council has adopted a leader and cabinet structure. There is a single-party executive board with ten members. One cabinet member has the portfolio for education and one of the eight select committees has the dedicated brief for education. The latter is large and has up to 45 participants. Co-opted members include parents and diocesan representatives but not teachers' or governors' representatives. The council's constitution determines that all working groups, including the select committees, should contain a majority of representatives from the majority party. Additional scrutiny and local accountability are provided through area committees. A strategic monitoring group was set up following the critical Ofsted report in 1999. It has a wide-ranging membership including elected members, schools' representatives, the executive director for education, the chief executive of the Greater Merseyside Learning Skills Council (LSC) and other stakeholders. The effectiveness of these arrangements is analysed in section five of this report.

¹ Statistical neighbours are Salford, Knowsley, Middlesbrough, Kingston Upon Hull, City of Nottingham, Newcastle, Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Walsall and Greenwich

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

22. The strategy for school improvement was highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. There has been good progress in on three recommendations from the 2000 report. The much improved strategy for social inclusion, the planning for Excellence in Liverpool² and other relevant operational plans are well integrated within the school improvement strategy. There has also been good progress on generating school targets based on pupils' prior attainment but these are not fully reflected in either LEA or Excellence in Liverpool targets. Nevertheless, overall, the strategy is now good.

23. The strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive audit which draws on an appropriate range of data and external evaluation by a range of agencies, including Ofsted. The programmes derive logically from the analysis of the outcomes of the previous Education Development Plan (EDP) and the performance of the LEA and its schools. There is, however, no evaluation of the cost effectiveness of its previous strategy. This is a weakness, particularly given the scale of support and the costs involved. It makes it difficult to determine the capacity needed for future development.

24. The EDP is highly satisfactory. National priorities are well addressed and the two local priorities are fully justified by the audit and local circumstances. All national themes are imaginatively integrated across priorities. Responsibilities for delivery, monitoring and evaluation are clearly delineated in activity plans. Overarching strategies to support social inclusion and to raise the attainment at under-achieving schools and for groups of pupils are good and are characterised by innovative solutions. For the most part, links between actions, activities, priorities and success criteria are also clear although specific success criteria are sometimes too vague.

25. The LEA is strongly committed to providing a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils, under its "*Curriculum with Character*" initiative. EDP activities promote the development of innovative projects using the Liverpool environment to develop creative teaching materials, for example in music and the arts. "*Healthy Schools*", "*Sportslinx*", and primary modern foreign languages initiatives are co-ordinated very effectively and are well regarded by pupils, parents and schools. Elected members have strongly supported these initiatives and instigated the setting-up of a Liverpool schools' parliament in 2001. The development of the citizenship curriculum has been enhanced by a programme of training that has enabled many schools to establish effective school councils.

26. The EDP is the main plan for education but it is complemented by several other plans reflecting a wide range of initiatives, often with their own funding streams and planning requirements. One significant initiative is Excellence in Liverpool but there are also two statutory Education Action Zones (EAZs) and four mini EAZs. A major strength of the LEA is the leadership it has exercised to harness the potential of these schemes. Consequently, there is a very coherent school improvement strategy. The linkage between the various plans is very good, which, given the complexity of the arrangements, is testimony to the

² Excellence in Liverpool is the local version of Excellence in Cities

effectiveness of the LEA. Similarly, there are strong and consistent links with corporate plans.

27. Excellence in Liverpool has overcome some initial difficulties. Evaluation has been a relative weakness but this is recognised and a scrutiny group has been established. It now has clear leadership and contributes significantly to school improvement. Learning mentors have contributed well to promoting high standards of behaviour and are valued by schools. Support for gifted and talented pupils is highly satisfactory and is analysed in section two of this report. Four city learning centres are now in place and progress has been satisfactory despite some staffing difficulties. There are eight student support centres and these are well integrated into other arrangements for LEA support for behaviour. Work is under way to bring the EAZs under the Excellence in Liverpool umbrella and to rationalise the wide range of initiatives. The five gifted and talented networks are being re-configured to mesh with the four groups of schools linked to the leadership incentive grants. The collaboration and joint membership between the management boards for the city learning centres and the LEA steering groups for information and communication technology (ICT) have the potential to strengthen the dissemination of good practice.

28. The school improvement strategy is ambitious, reflecting the city's commitment to reach national levels of performance. The LEA targets for Key Stage 3 and GCSE are very challenging but are realistic given the resources allocated to these priority areas, and consequently are supported by the schools. The 2004 LEA targets for numeracy and literacy at Key Stage 2 have been set in consultation with the DfES but are not sufficiently based on pupils' prior attainment. They imply a ten-fold acceleration in the rates of improvement currently being achieved and are about 7% above the schools' aggregated targets. Excellence in Liverpool targets for 2002 were also unrealistic, for instance, the target for 5+ A*-C was 9% above the EDP target for the same schools. The newly developed practice of incorporating a factor for Excellence in Liverpool additionality into the target-setting process for EDP targets is a sensible development.

Recommendation

In order to improve target-setting:

- ensure that targets for Key Stage 2 literacy and numeracy are based on an analysis of prior attainment and an appropriate degree of challenge so that the targets are realistic and achievable.

29. Good progress has been made on implementing the LEA's strategy. The LEA has addressed strongly the 16 recommendations from the last Ofsted inspection. Progress is at least satisfactory in all cases and it has been good or very good in 13 (four-fifths); a significant achievement. This is another strong indicator of an improving, effective LEA.

30. In 2002, the LEA met its targets for GCSE, the revised Key Stage 2 numeracy target and permanent exclusion targets. It missed its targets for reducing unauthorised absence and its target for Key Stage 2 literacy but the latter was in line with the shortfall nationally. It also missed its target for the attainment of looked after children, but this masks the very good support for, and progress made by, this group of children – results obtained were above the national average.

31. There is strong evidence that the EDP has helped to promote improvement in schools. Overall, the implementation of EDP1 was good and provisional results for 2003 indicate that this has been true for the first year of implementing EDP2.

32. The school effectiveness team regularly monitors and evaluates progress on the EDP and Excellence in Liverpool action plan. Findings are reported to the strategic monitoring group which also has monitoring and evaluation roles. For the most part, these arrangements work well and where slippage has been detected, remedial action has been timely and effective. However, occasionally reporting is too positive. For instance, there was insufficient reference in reports to shortfalls or omissions in Excellence in Liverpool targets for 2002.

Funding and allocation of resources to priorities

33. In 2000, funding per pupil was high in comparison with the average for other metropolitan authorities and nationally. It remains so and as a result no fieldwork was carried out in this area. The allocation of resources to priorities was highly satisfactory at the last inspection and is now good. In 2003/04 the council funded schools' budgets at 102.2% of the Government's assessed need and continues to give a high priority to funding schools and other education services.

34. Substantial extra resources have been secured through a range of government programmes. These include Excellence in Cities, ten Sure Start projects, urban renewal funding from a range of programmes; and a very large capital programme for schools through Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and New Deal for Schools. This currently includes projects with more than £30 million per year in traditional capital investment and £76 million over a four year period through PFI. In 2002, income from the Standards Fund was over £50 million.

35. Education resources are clearly targeted to priorities. There is a clear rationale for the division of resources between schools and central services. High levels of resources have sensibly been targeted to school improvement and there has been an impressive reduction in the number of schools causing concern. Resources have also been targeted to tackling the difficult social inclusion issues which arise from the level of deprivation in Liverpool. Liverpool schools are funded well above the national average and pupil-teacher ratios are more favourable than nationally or when compared with statistical neighbours. Budgetary control is good, but the council is only just developing its medium-term strategy to plan income and expenditure levels over a longer term.

36. Capital resources have also been directed at meeting important educational priorities in Liverpool. Extensive capital resources are used effectively to link school building programmes with action to tackle school improvement priorities and reorganisation of school place provision. It has significantly improved the quality of the building stock in Liverpool. The quality of financial information available to schools has been improved to include three-year projections.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

37. Strategies to promote continuous improvement were good at the time of the previous inspection and remain so.

38. The council has a rigorous performance management system which links corporate and education plans effectively into service plans and individual performance targets. There is a clear central framework for the production of service plans and a good system for monitoring targets in the plans. An extensive management development programme is being used to develop all managers further.

39. Effective use has been made of a range of external and internal reviews to feed into service improvement. In the initial years of Best Value, the council overall carried out 67 reviews, 15 of these within education. Many of these led to radical action - for example the outsourcing of the council's information technology services. Improvement plans have been rigorously monitored. In addition, a range of internal and external reviews have been carried out focusing on specific aspects of service delivery; for example the review of the ICT support to schools carried out in 2003. The quality of the LEA's self-evaluation conducted for this inspection is good.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

Summary

40. Support is well managed and effective and gives good value for money. It meets the needs of the schools well and priorities are modified to meet new needs as they emerge. The LEA supports and challenges schools well and satisfactorily promotes schools' self-improvement. It has been highly successful in improving the weakest schools but has some way to go in promoting a culture where school self-evaluation is embedded and schools are self-reliant. The LEA's support has good capacity to improve which is based on services' sound understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and on the action they take to improve themselves.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

41. At the time of the last inspection, the leadership and performance management of these services were good. They remain so and no fieldwork was undertaken. Deployment, strategic planning and effectiveness of services are also uniformly good, having been highly satisfactory previously.

42. The recommendation to review the deployment of officers for routine visits to schools has been acted on and the use made of this time is good. Reorganisation of the service and cross-divisional working have led to improvements. For example, the ethnic minority service has now been incorporated in the school effectiveness branch. This enables schools' and pupils' needs to be met better. Support for children under five has been strengthened as a result of closer working with the SEN service.

43. Following its success in improving its weakest schools, the service has re-aligned its priorities in order to meet changed needs. It is placing more emphasis on the promotion of school autonomy together with the newly emerging developments in 14-19 education and the SEN inclusion agenda. This flexible approach indicates the service's capacity to improve further as it responds to changing circumstances.

44. The expertise of the service was highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It is now very good. It is a large service and has no gaps in curriculum expertise. Where there have been difficulties in recruiting officers with expertise in school management, senior staff have been seconded from their schools to work with the service. When necessary, expertise is also brought in from outside the LEA. Consultants from the national college for school leadership are being used to support schools in challenging circumstances.

45. The value for money offered by this service was satisfactory in the last inspection. It is now good. This is seen, above all, in the effectiveness of support for schools causing concern. The LEA is contributing significantly to improving pupils' attainment.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

46. The last inspection found the LEA's definition of monitoring and support, and schools' understanding of it, to be satisfactory. Its work has improved and is now good.

47. The role of the school effectiveness branch has been defined clearly and is well aligned with the principles of intervention in inverse proportion to success. School categories are also clearly defined, following full consultation with schools. The system continues to develop and further refinements are under consideration. The education department's system for schools' self-evaluation is good and used by all schools; the outcomes contribute to the LEA's assessment of each school's need for support.

The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need

48. This was unsatisfactory in the last inspection. It is now good. Improvements in the provision and use of data have produced an accurate understanding of schools' needs by both the schools and the LEA.

49. Visits by school effectiveness officers have been well targeted, for example on performance review and target-setting. The education department's increased emphasis on promoting school autonomy has yet, in the view of the officers and of this inspection, to be fully effective in the schools. The schools' use of and growing trust in self-evaluation show that progress has been made, that the department is focusing on a clear area of need, and that it is succeeding in moving the schools in the right direction.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools

50. This was satisfactory in the last inspection. There has been good progress and it is now good. The work of monitoring and challenge is integrated very effectively into schools' own improvement processes. The identification of developing problems in the course of the monitoring work leads to successful intervention and preventive work with schools.

51. The work is based on the combination of school self-evaluation and the provision of good quality data. These include trends, value-added analyses, contextualised information and local benchmark data. There is effective monitoring of the progress made by minority ethnic groups and vulnerable children generally. It underpins a secure target-setting process with targets based on pupils' prior attainment and capabilities with a reasonable degree of challenge.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools

52. This work was highly successful in 2000. The report of that inspection showed that the number of schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses had declined sharply since the first inspection in 1999. That trend has continued and there are now no schools in special measures and only two which remain in the category of serious weaknesses. This part of the LEA's work is now very good.

53. When a school enters one of the more serious categories of concern, either as a result of external inspection or as a result of the LEA's monitoring, a project group of officers is formed to work with the school and secure the necessary improvement. The work of these groups is highly valued by the headteachers involved because of its guarantee of an agreed level of support related to the schools' identified needs. Headteachers particularly value access to management support services as well as to curriculum support. They are supported well and the autonomous management of their schools is promoted effectively. The co-ordination of support from within the school effectiveness service, as well as with other services of the education department, is a major strength of the work. Further valuable support for headteachers newly appointed to schools in difficulty is provided by mentor headteachers.

54. Good progress has been made in raising pupils' attainment in under-performing schools. For instance, at the time of the 1999 inspection, in six secondary schools less than 10% of the pupils achieved five or more higher grade GCSEs. Provisional data for 2003 show that in only two schools was the percentage below 20%. In two schools previously in special measures there have been very considerable increases of 22% and 31% respectively in this percentage.

Support for literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3 strategies

55. Support for literacy and numeracy were both good at the time of the last inspection. They remain good and no fieldwork was carried out. Support for Key Stage 3 was not inspected in the previous inspections. It is good.

56. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is rising and the LEA's analysis shows that, since 2000, it has risen faster than nationally. Attainment is also improving faster than predicted from pupils' previous attainment, and this rate of progress has accelerated since the support for Key Stage 3 began. The gap with the national figures is closing but, as provisional figures for 2003 show, not fast enough to meet the LEA's targets for English, mathematics or science. Only the targets for ICT were met.

57. Both the school survey and discussion with teachers showed that the schools value the support they are receiving. The work has been planned by a steering group which includes representatives of the secondary headteachers. This has been effective in winning over headteachers and other teachers who were initially sceptical about the strategy.

58. Support in most subjects is now better fitted to schools' needs as it is based on an analysis of performance. For example, as the programme of support has been extended to special schools, consultants with expertise in SEN as well as in the curriculum have been used. The work is well co-ordinated with literacy and numeracy support in Key Stage 2. This is particularly true in the EAZs where the links between phases are stronger than in other parts of the city.

59. The management of the strategy and the quality of the support provided by consultants are good. They are leading to improvements. The support is being expanded in accordance with the national strategy, with work on behaviour and attendance planned to begin this term. Until recently, the development of cross-curricular work has been weak.

The problem was identified during the review of the implementation of this priority in the EDP and, as a result, each school now has a “link” consultant whose role is to co-ordinate the support provided across the curriculum. In addition, ICT development has been limited because of a shortage of specialist teachers. The problem having been identified, training for non-specialists was provided.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

60. Support was satisfactory in 2000 and remains so. The LEA has addressed well the recommendation from the previous report to produce a clear strategy for ICT. This links effectively with the EDP, the Key Stage 3 strategy and Excellence in Liverpool initiatives. Progress in other aspects, such as training, has been slower but there have been significant improvements in the last year. Given this, the good quality of recent appointments and the establishment of a strategy group, capacity for further improvement is good.

61. Ofsted data show that, based on teacher assessments, pupils’ attainment at Key Stage 3 is above statistical neighbours but below national averages. Data were not available for the percentage of pupils in Key Stage 4 who attained a nationally accredited award. The LEA’s knowledge of standards in schools has been insecure and good quality data are not yet used effectively by the LEA to allocate support to schools. The LEA is now taking reasonable steps to improve confidence in assessment. The 2003 Key Stage 3 target, which was exceeded, was based on pupils’ general attainment; that for 2004 is appropriately based on pupils’ prior attainment in ICT.

62. The LEA’s strategy for implementing the National Grid for Learning initiative is good and has significantly improved resource levels in schools. In 2002, the ratio of pupils to computers in primary schools was better than the national average but below in secondary schools. There have been further improvements in the last year, particularly relating to broadband access.

63. Take-up of New Opportunities Fund training is below national averages and schools report that the quality of the training is too variable. In particular, there was insufficient support for non-specialists who selected the computer-based on-line package. Support to schools has improved in the last year and a range of courses to support the teaching of literacy and numeracy is also provided.

64. Improvements in the last year have not yet fully affected standards in schools. In the school survey, schools reported support as less than satisfactory particularly in primary schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for ICT:

- ensure that good quality data are collected and used effectively to allocate support to schools.

Support for minority ethnic groups including Travellers

65. Previously the LEA's support to schools in raising standards of minority ethnic heritage and Traveller children was unsatisfactory and there were weak arrangements for monitoring levels of attainment and exclusion. Since then there has been good progress. Improvements in support for Traveller children are more recent but have already provided a sound foundation for further development. The LEA's support is now highly satisfactory.

66. The LEA has clear, comprehensive and appropriate policies. The requirements for the distribution of the Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant are met and the LEA has been successful in attracting other external funding, for example, to support the development of data management and analysis systems. There has been a sharp influx of children of asylum seekers. The LEA is responding effectively and provides help with initial induction, assessment, target-setting and support in lessons, but there is nevertheless a high level of dissatisfaction in schools with the current position. In part, this reflects schools' differing capacities to manage a very diverse population and some unrealistic expectations of LEA support.

67. The LEA performs comprehensive analyses of the attainment and progress of minority ethnic pupils which show a mixed picture. There is significant improvement by Somali and Yemeni pupils. Black pupils continue to underachieve but support is now used more effectively. Challenging targets for improvement are underpinned by a good range of activities in the EDP and by additional resources negotiated through a local public service agreement. Systems for monitoring levels of attainment and exclusions are well established.

68. The Traveller Education Service (TES) is making good progress in raising its profile in schools, the Traveller community and with various other agencies in the city and across the region. There has been recent improvement following the appointment of an education support worker and a full-time teacher. They have consolidated earlier work undertaken by the present co-ordinator of the TES. Valuable links have been established with different groups, for example Sure Start and the pupil attendance and education welfare service, in order to raise awareness and understanding of Traveller culture and lifestyle and their implications for schooling. Contributions to race equality training have raised the profile of the Traveller community with governors, staff in the education department and in schools.

69. The TES has positive and trusting relationships with the Traveller families and there are good relationships with the schools that have Traveller pupils. The TES staff now direct their time and expertise more effectively to improve pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Schools have responded positively to meeting the needs of the Traveller pupils, particularly with those who have recently transferred to secondary school. Currently there is no service level agreement between the TES and the schools to define more precisely respective roles and responsibilities in setting targets and timescales to evaluate progress. Both schools and the TES need to plan strategically for the longer-term engagement of both Traveller pupils and parents.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

70. In the previous inspections this area was not covered. The LEA provides highly satisfactory support.

71. The strategy is well articulated in the EDP and closely linked to Excellence Challenge and Excellence in Liverpool. The activities related to gifted and talented pupils are well co-ordinated and together form a coherent approach. The LEA provides good direction and guidance to schools which enable them to identify and support gifted pupils consistently well. The best practice is found within Excellence in Liverpool clusters. Gifted pupils in primary schools make good progress and those in secondary schools make at least satisfactory progress with a rising trend in results in the GCSE. Nevertheless, provision for talented pupils is not effective enough and there is limited sharing of good practice.

72. The Excellence clusters provide useful opportunities for the training of teachers. Summer schools have encouraged links between primary and secondary schools and improved transition. The LEA has successfully organised summer schools and a range of subject-specific workshops over the last five years, with over 400 pupils taking part. Evaluation shows that these experiences improve pupils' personal skills but measuring effectiveness in terms of achievement is not sufficiently robust.

73. Beacon and specialist schools provide useful support. The LEA uses a variety of mechanisms to involve all schools, for example through training events, working with advanced skills teachers and providing advice on good resources. Nevertheless, primary schools outside Excellence in Liverpool perceive that there is insufficient dissemination of good practice.

Support for governors, leadership and management

74. Support for school leadership and management was satisfactory in 2000. Evidence from the LEA's self-evaluation demonstrates that there is sound progress and that support is now highly satisfactory. Support to governors was highly satisfactory in 2000; substantial progress has been made and support is now good. Governor vacancies are well below national averages.

75. Since the last inspection, the governor services unit has moved into the school effectiveness branch. This has enabled managers and officers to work more closely together; response rates have been improved and triggers or alerts acted upon more quickly and effectively. This is confirmed by the school survey. The training courses, both off and on-site courses tailored to schools' needs, are valued by the schools. Eighty nine schools use the LEA's clerking service and evaluations show high customer satisfaction with the service.

76. A representative of the director attends at least one meeting a term in each school, with an agreed agenda. The set of briefing materials made available for this visit is very good. There is good support for a range of issues such as data analysis, curriculum and target-setting. Communications with governors are further enhanced by a termly newsletter and termly meetings with the director and other senior officers. A website is being established but this is still embryonic. The LEA has been proactive in supporting the setting

up of an independent governors' forum. In the process, it has overcome some historical reluctance on the part of schools to have a single group representing all phases.

77. Support for governors as employers is good and the package of support for the appointment of headteachers is valued. A comprehensive range of service level agreements is available. Support is usually good but there are exceptions. Governors report that financial information arrives late, hindering budget-setting in some schools.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

78. The processes for reviewing and improving the effectiveness of management support services to schools were not inspected previously. They are now highly satisfactory and there is good capacity to improve further. Service agreements for LEA services and the quality and timeliness of financial information have been improved. They are now highly satisfactory.

79. Good progress has been made in developing a range of alternative providers of services to schools. Payroll services and ICT support to the education department and schools are being provided by Liverpool Direct Limited (LDL), a joint venture company established with a private provider. This company also provides a range of customer services in Liverpool, including education awards. The LEA brokered arrangements for a number of providers to offer technical property support to schools and this is reviewed under asset management planning. Facilities management services will be through the private contractors for the 18 schools which have PFI schemes.

80. **Financial support services** were highly satisfactory in 2000 and remain so. No detailed fieldwork was carried out except that one important issue was examined. The LEA has carried out extensive work to help schools to manage the level of their balances. Prior to the last financial year, overall school balances had been rising significantly in line with most authorities. The LEA is taking appropriate action and requires schools with high deficits to submit spending plans. At the end of the financial year 2002-03, 11 schools had licensed deficits and LEA monitoring shows that there continues to be a rising trend.

81. **Personnel services** were satisfactory in the previous inspection and remain so. No fieldwork was carried out in this inspection. The support provided to schools and employees by the school effectiveness branch on difficult personnel issues is good. Payroll services are, however, currently unsatisfactory following the introduction of a new human resources and payroll computer system in 2003.

Recommendation

In order to improve the financial management of schools:

- urgent action should be taken to remedy the problems with payroll management information.

82. Services for the **management use of ICT** were satisfactory at the last inspection and are now highly satisfactory.

83. Liverpool was one of the first LEAs in the country to provide broadband connections to all schools. Once school use increased, however, there were congestion problems with the connection. Schools have been offered a premium broadband service with substantially enhanced capacity and an increasing proportion of schools is using this. The next stages of development of an ICT infrastructure require many schools to take greater responsibility, but monitoring by the LEA reveals that some schools do not have sufficient capacity to do this securely.

84. Implementation of the pupil level annual school census was carried out reasonably smoothly and the process was used to improve the quality of pupil data held by the LEA and schools. Good progress is being made with the development of electronic pupil databases in both the LEA and schools and increasing the electronic interchange of information. School profiles are being populated with a good range of attainment, financial and other information. Systems for tracking individual pupils, for example excluded pupils or looked after children, are ahead of most LEAs.

85. Technical support to both the education department and schools is provided by LDL, which has good systems for monitoring the quality of the services to schools and for rectifying problems. Many schools, however, remain unconvinced about the quality of the service provided by LDL. A robust review of ICT support to schools was completed in July 2003 by an external consultant. This clearly identified strengths and weaknesses in the services provided to schools and produced a series of recommendations for future development of the ICT infrastructure.

Recommendation

In order to improve schools' management capacity the LEA should:

- develop schools' capacity for financial management including the use of ICT for management purposes.

86. **Catering services** were satisfactory at the previous inspection and are now highly satisfactory. As recommended in the previous inspection, a Best Value review of the service was carried out. This has resulted in action to improve the service, for example, improvements in healthy eating and external accreditation of the service. Schools using the service are positive about its quality.

The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

87. In the previous inspection this area was not covered. The work is good.

88. The LEA makes good use of national and local strategies to recruit and retain teachers. Consequently, the proportion of teacher vacancies in Liverpool is well below average and in 2002 there were no unfilled vacancies. Retention rates for teachers are good. Sickness and absence rates are in line with national figures. The LEA is effective in analysing future staffing needs. The partnership work with other LEAs and private partners ensures that supply meets demand. It underpins provision of relevant courses for those returning to teaching, leads to good participation in the Graduate Teacher Scheme and good relationships with local supply teacher agencies.

89. The LEA is not complacent. A recruitment strategy manager has been appointed to analyse needs in the longer term and encourage representation of the city's ethnic groups in the teaching force. Good plans are in place to ensure that schools get the support they need to implement the reform of the school workforce and tackle workload issues.

90. Liverpool is proactive in the recruitment of newly qualified teachers and ensures that schools have access to a large pool of candidates. The induction programme for newly qualified teachers is of high quality, with good opportunities for professional development and guidance. In 2002, 88% of newly qualified teachers remained in Liverpool schools in their second year, which is a higher retention rate than nationally.

91. The LEA provides good support for the recruitment of headteachers and the mentoring programme for newly-appointed headteachers meets their needs effectively. The LEA promotes national training programmes for headteachers and aspiring headteachers and take-up is higher than the national average. The LEA makes good use of a range of external trainers, consultants and its own staff to provide a comprehensive and relevant programme of in-service training and consultancy. The programme covers a wide range of subjects and is directed to needs identified in the EDP, such as training for subject co-ordinators and middle managers. Evaluation indicates a 95% satisfaction rate, with a high proportion of good to excellent ratings.

Section 3: Special educational needs

Summary

92. There has been improvement in almost all aspects of the LEA's support for special educational needs (SEN) since the inspection in 2000. There have been substantial improvements in the speed of assessment and the quality of statements of SEN, more pupils with SEN are educated in the mainstream and the rising cost of SEN provision has been brought under control. While arrangements for monitoring the quality and cost of support for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools are not yet fully developed, they already provide LEA officers with a reasonably accurate assessment of strengths and weaknesses within schools. Schools and parents give broad support to the councils' proposals for change but implementation has produced tensions within the partnerships.

The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

93. In 2000, the LEA's planned strategy for SEN was good but yet to be implemented. Good progress has been made on most elements of the strategy but some weaknesses in financial planning have hindered progress in establishing a constructive relationship with all schools. These are being addressed and the LEA's strategy is highly satisfactory and capacity is now good.

94. The implementation of the SEN strategy is well led by officers. The involvement of elected members in the development of the SEN strategic plan and the implementation of the strategy through the SEN working group and the strategic monitoring group have been measured and are constructive. Monitoring of the proposed actions has been rigorous. The strategy has been developed into a clearly presented and detailed strategic plan with appropriate timescales and targets. A series of task groups, involving representatives from special and mainstream schools and professionals from a range of agencies, work diligently to develop well-constructed options. These are based on a sound and detailed analysis of needs. The strategy is linked to the council's medium-term strategy. For instance, implementation of the strategy to reduce the number of pupils educated in special schools or outside the city has resulted in £90,000 savings. This money is being allocated to provide additional support for inclusion in mainstream schools. However, there is insufficient reference to resources in the SEN strategic plan and in documentation made available to schools.

95. The LEA rightly considers that the success of the SEN strategy depends upon a change in attitudes in schools towards pupils with SEN, and in particular those with challenging behaviour in schools. Consultation has led to changes in detailed proposals. However, responses to the school survey indicate that a significant minority of headteachers are unhappy with many aspects of the implementation of the strategy. Much of the immediate concern relates to criticism of the way the delegation of the funding of support for pupils with statements has contributed to financial difficulties for some schools. However, these responses also reflect uncertainty about the financial implications of the strategy overall and for specific schools. Too little financial information is included within the plan and this

inevitably leads to headteachers' uncertainty and anxiety about the funding of future services to support pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

96. Considerable progress has been made in reconstituting the services to support pupils with SEN in line with the council's strategic aims of inclusion. Multi-agency panels which oversee provision in particular phases have led to improvements in the consistency and quality of assessment and commissioning of support. The role of special schools as providers of outreach support is developing well.

Recommendations

In order to improve the transparency and credibility of the LEA's strategy for pupils with SEN, the LEA should:

- include details of the estimated costs and proposals for the funding of each element of the strategic plan for SEN; and
- set out more clearly for schools the financial implications of proposed changes.

Statutory obligations

97. At the time of the last inspection the LEA's performance in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of pupils with SEN was unsatisfactory. In particular, the proportion of statements produced in 18 weeks was far too low. The LEA has responded successfully and its performance in meeting statutory obligations is now good.

98. Processes relating to statutory assessment have been reviewed and revised to improve efficiency and to bring them into line with the new SEN Code of Practice. An effective Best Value review identified underlying weaknesses in administration, assisted this overhaul of the process and provided the foundation for service improvement.

99. Criteria for statutory assessment have been clarified and are well presented in guidance to schools and LEA officers. Appropriate levels of educational psychologist time have been allocated to support statutory assessment and have improved the quality and speed of assessment. As a result, improvements in the speed of assessment are secure. For the last eighteen months, over 95% of statements that do not require information from outside agencies have been produced within 18 weeks. There is improved collaboration between the LEA and other agencies, including health. Almost 60% of all new statements were completed within 18 weeks in 2002/03 and this has risen to over 80% for the first quarter of this financial year.

100. The quality of statements is good. Specifications of future support are mostly clear and well supported by professional advice. They provide schools and LEA professional staff with a clear basis for developing programmes of support for pupils with SEN. Annual reviews are monitored centrally and satisfactory arrangements are in place to ensure evidence of progress is available. Considerable progress has been made in brokering support from other agencies for pupils with SEN. For example, speech and language support is now offered to schools from a centre jointly run by the LEA, health and a national charity.

101. The Liverpool parent partnership team is long established and effective. The service continues to be managed in-house but appropriate arrangements have been established to ensure independence. The proportion of assessment decisions referred to tribunal for appeal is broadly in line with that found nationally.

SEN functions to support school improvement

102. In 2000, the LEA's performance in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement was satisfactory. Better monitoring and evaluation were recommended to sharpen the focus on raising the attainment of pupils with SEN. Monitoring arrangements have improved and the LEA's performance in this area is now highly satisfactory.

103. Effective advice, training and guidance are provided for SEN co-ordinators, particularly in relation to implementation of the council's SEN strategic plan. The LEA actively supports peer group meetings. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of support for pupils with SEN within schools are satisfactory and provide LEA officers with a reasonably accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses. Information is collated from a range of sources including annual reviews of statements, support teachers provided by the special education integrated support service, and the monitoring of individual education plans by designated school effectiveness officers. A self-evaluation review recently undertaken by assigned school effectiveness officers in the spring term has the potential to provide the baseline for more systematic analysis of schools' needs and to better focus additional support. Information from Ofsted school inspection reports is also analysed diligently and the inspections over the last year indicate an improving picture within LEA schools in terms of the quality of provision and the learning and progress of pupils with SEN.

104. The annual review process provides schools with information on attainment and progress of individual pupils. For the last two years, useful training and guidance have been provided to all schools to adopt the assessment and target-setting system currently used by the council's special schools. However, the LEA has yet to fully implement systems to monitor the attainment of pupils with SEN.

Value for money

105. In 2000, the LEA provided unsatisfactory value for money. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation were underdeveloped. Progress has been sound, costs have been brought under control and the LEA's performance in this area is now satisfactory.

106. Monitoring of school expenditure provides LEA managers with sufficient information to identify and support schools where necessary but these processes are not yet sufficiently systematic. All SEN services have good systems of performance management and robust systems of budgetary control. Where services trade with schools, buy-back rates have been very high, for example the sensory impairment and speech and language resources bases.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

Summary

107. In 2000, the LEA was promoting social inclusion satisfactorily. While aspects of planning were poorly conceived, in practice much of the provision for vulnerable children was well focussed. The council rightly postponed a recommended cross-cutting Best Value review of its services to support vulnerable children so that officers could concentrate on leading a national pilot of the Behaviour and Education Support Team initiative which was new at the time. Since the last inspection all aspects of the council's approach to promoting social inclusion have improved. The LEA's effectiveness in promoting social inclusion is good. The recent acceleration in tackling issues means that its capacity for further improvement is very good.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

108. The LEA has a very good strategy for social inclusion that is being implemented well and is benefiting schools and groups at risk of exclusion. The council's commitment to promoting social inclusion is a key priority and is reflected throughout strategic and departmental planning. Promotion of inclusion rightly sits at the heart of regeneration strategies and is identified as the key to raising the attainment of pupils. The definition of inclusion, evident within policies and strategies, is suitably broad and recognises all of the disadvantaged groups within the local community. The council's commitment is matched by challenging targets. Half of the twelve local public service agreement targets address socially excluded groups directly or indirectly.

109. The LEA has a good strategic overview of the performance of services that focus directly on inclusion. The refocusing of support for vulnerable pupils on earlier intervention and prevention, particularly with those pupils with difficult behaviour, is increasing the capacity of schools to embrace inclusive education. The ability of the LEA to monitor and evaluate achievement of a wide range of specific groups of pupils is demonstrated across a range of services. Partnership and multi-agency working to promote social inclusion is particularly strong.

110. A range of performance indicators reflect the effectiveness of the LEA's support for social inclusion. The number of permanent exclusions is falling, the proportion of pupils with SEN being educated in the mainstream is rising, and all the indicators for the performance of looked after children show improvement.

The supply of school places

111. School place planning was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. There has been very good progress and planning is now good.

112. The council continues to face difficult issues as the school population in Liverpool continues to decline, albeit at a slower rate than previously. Since 1999, nearly 10,000 primary and secondary places have been removed. The school organisation committee has

worked effectively. There is a high proportion of voluntary-aided schools in Liverpool and co-operation with the dioceses is now good.

113. In the primary sector, surplus places remain high at 14%. However, the council is sensibly delaying decisions about the primary school provision in some areas until decisions have been taken about housing initiatives later this year. Action to tackle surplus places in the secondary sector has been good. One secondary school has been closed recently. The LEA's targeted support to schools has helped them to increase their popularity and therefore increased the numbers in some secondary schools. Proposals are being developed jointly with partners to open two City Academies in 2005 and 2006 respectively. Planning to ensure that these proposals tackle issues in existing schools is good.

114. Too much of the post-16 provision remains in school sixth forms which are too small to provide satisfactory education. Following a 16-19 area inspection, firm and positive action is being taken to address this issue.

Asset management planning

115. Asset management planning was not inspected previously. It is now good.

116. Prior to the first inspection in 1999, school buildings had been neglected and as a result there were very serious problems with their condition. Since that time, substantial resources have been invested to improve school buildings. Large PFI schemes, which include £76 million credits for construction, are producing 18 new or rehabilitated schools. This investment, which is improving the quality of education within the schools and the confidence in the neighbourhoods surrounding them, is managed effectively by the LEA. The new and rehabilitated schools have been delivered to cost and largely to time.

117. The LEA now has good quality information about the condition, suitability and capacity of Liverpool schools. Effective consultation arrangements have been developed with schools to plan this investment. The improved information is being used to plan a bid for further investment in the first phase of the Building Schools for the Future initiative. The planning for capital investment is linked effectively with school improvement and the planning of school places.

118. Property services provided to schools were satisfactory in the previous inspection. There has been good progress and they are now good. The LEA brokered arrangements whereby schools were offered technical support services through a range of alternative providers. They were primarily private providers, but included the council's design consultancy, which is in the process of becoming part of a joint venture.

119. Schools have been rightly expected to produce their own asset management plans. Almost all schools are using the technical advice from the providers brokered by the LEA to help them to do this. The LEA is working appropriately with schools to ensure that the increased devolved formula capital allocated to schools is used in accordance with the priorities identified by the overall LEA asset management plan.

Admissions

120. The administration of admissions and co-operation between secondary schools were poor in 2000. Progress has been very good and admissions procedures are now good.

121. Secondary admissions are complex because of the high number of admission authorities and the number of single-sex schools. The LEA has had a major success in improving admissions processes. There are two main indicators of this success. In 1998, 15% of secondary admissions went to appeal and this proportion has been reduced to 2.8% in 2003. In 1998, 79% of parents received their first preference for secondary admissions and this increased to 93% in 2003.

122. The improvement stems substantially from the positive work to improve co-operation between schools through the admissions forum. This has reduced inefficient processes of multiple applications which had reduced first preferences and led to many appeals. Further work is still needed, however, to meet the DfES requirements on admissions processes for 2005. The LEA is addressing this issue and consultation is taking place on whether to introduce a single preference or equal preference scheme.

123. A rigorous process of self-review including a Best Value review in 2001/02 has led to improved information to parents on admissions and appeals, reductions in bureaucracy in the admissions process and agreements on common dates for admissions between schools.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

124. This was highly satisfactory in 2000. Since then there has been good progress. The management of an expanded range of alternative providers has improved and the LEA has been more effective in promoting re-integration and alternatives to exclusion. Provision in this area is now good.

125. The performance of the LEA against key indicators is already good and continues to improve. The latest monitoring information shows that the LEA consistently places pupils who are excluded from schools within the statutory deadlines and all pupils in alternative education are provided with 25 hours education per week. Re-integration rates have improved sharply over the last year and are now in line with national averages.

126. Improving provision for pupils educated other than at school has been integral to the LEA's strategy to promote inclusion and improve support for behaviour in schools. Bringing together the four pupil referral units and the home tuition service has produced more coherence and consistency. The role of the amalgamated service is now more focused on re-integration into mainstream schools. More consistent and detailed assessment of permanently excluded pupils, involving professional advice from health and social services, is leading to more appropriate placement in mainstream or in alternative provision. External fundings have been used to develop a negotiated transfer scheme as an alternative to exclusion. Some 239 negotiated transfers took place in 2002/03. These schemes have been effective in supporting the work of the two dedicated re-integration officers. Both the range and quality of alternative education provision have improved and continue to develop. A directory of providers gives schools up-to-date information on alternative provision and the newly appointed co-ordinator has already improved the management of this area. Suitable provision

is made for pupils educated out of school as a result of illness or medical condition. Pregnant schoolgirls are being well supported in mainstream provision.

127. Arrangements for the monitoring and quality assurance of arrangements for education out of school have enabled monthly contact to be maintained with young people placed in alternative educational provision. An internal audit review of arrangements in 2002/03 highlighted a range of deficiencies and the response by LEA officers has been prompt and robust. This has already prompted urgent remedial action to monitoring systems and the removal of underperforming providers.

Attendance

128. In the last inspection support for attendance was satisfactory. There has been satisfactory progress and, in particular, the recommendation to appoint a single manager for the pupil attendance and education welfare service (PAEWS) has been addressed. Support is now highly satisfactory.

129. Attendance rates are lower than the national average. Between 1999/2000 and 2002/03 they have fluctuated and improved a little overall but in secondary schools the rate remains just below 90%. In 2002, the targets in both phases were missed. The targets for 2003 and 2004 have been raised through local public service agreements, but given the present trend, they are unlikely to be achieved. Attendance data are collected and analysed rigorously. However, the data are not used systematically in monitoring visits to improve the attendance of pupils educated out of school or minority ethnic groups.

130. The PAEWS supports schools with a rational system of allocation of time, based on the level of need in each school. Additionally, schools may purchase extra support. The support also includes some well-publicised campaigns to promote good attendance. These include free admission to leisure services and a city-wide awards ceremony. The service description issued to schools outlines the support that the schools may expect from the service. This specifies action to follow up absence but does not reflect the high priority given in practice to promoting good attendance. Follow-up action is vigorously pursued. It includes a system of evening telephoning of parents or guardians of absent pupils and one area of the city is piloting fast-track prosecution. During the period of the pilot, there was an improvement of 4% in the area. There has also been some good collaboration with the behaviour support teams, each of which has a PAEWS officer assigned to it. The strategy is being used with other LEAs by the DfES as an innovative model of good practice. In addition, there is a confidential telephone service on which people may report suspected truancy. The vigorous pursuit of truancy is good and there is a slow improvement in attendance as a result.

Behaviour support

131. When inspected in 1999 the LEA's support for behaviour was unsatisfactory. When re-inspected in 2000 there had been an appropriate emphasis on preventing exclusion, with the development of a range of alternatives to segregated provision. Since 2000 there has been further very good progress and support for behaviour is now good.

132. The level of permanent exclusions has fallen from its peak of 235 in 1997/98 to 112 in 2002/03, meeting the government target of a one-third reduction. Permanent exclusions at secondary level are in line with national rates. While the level of permanent exclusion of primary pupils has been high relative to national rates, focused action by the LEA in primary schools has reduced the number of exclusions in recent months. Standards of behaviour have been good in over 95% of schools inspected in the last year.

133. The behaviour support plan for 2001 to 2004 is ambitious, well-structured and clear. It has been implemented speedily, rigorously and with determination. Consultation with schools and other stakeholders has been extensive. The council's provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties at special schools has been reconstituted into three centres of expertise. These are already providing an improved range of services for mainstream schools, including outreach support, and are well supported by multi-agency providers. Other developments such as the provision of learning mentors and student support centres within the Excellence in Liverpool initiative, and improvements in the provision for pupils educated out of school, are key elements of the strategy.

134. Support for behaviour has been further improved as a consequence of Liverpool's involvement as a pilot for the government's Behaviour and Education Support Team initiative. Over the last year, three teams have been established to serve specific secondary schools and associated primaries in areas of high need. These multi-agency teams have been able to focus high quality professional support, particularly that from child and adolescent health services, on children at risk of social exclusion as well as building the capacity of schools to better respond to issues of behaviour. However, the LEA's plans for extending the good practice in these areas across the city are underdeveloped. The responses to the school survey indicate a high level of dissatisfaction within schools outside the targeted areas. Early evidence suggests that the initiative is improving pupils' behaviour and teachers' expertise in dealing with challenging behaviour.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

135. In 2000 the LEA's arrangements in relation to health, safety, welfare and child protection were unsatisfactory. Weaknesses in joint working between schools and social services were a major concern. There has been good progress and performance in this area is now highly satisfactory.

136. The LEA has recently produced comprehensive and accessible child protection guidelines for schools. An extensive programme of training is provided for teachers, governors and other relevant staff. All newly-designated child protection teachers receive a two-day training course with update training for established staff. The LEA's capacity to provide advice and guidance to schools has increased over the past year since the appointment of a dedicated child protection support officer with a social work background. Working relationships between education and social services in relation to child protection are good and social workers work well with staff in schools. There are good examples of joint training events with health and social services.

137. The LEA accords a high priority to promoting healthy schools which is well justified by its audit of health statistics for the city. All but four schools have achieved, or are in the

process of securing, 'healthy school' status. This initiative also provides a framework for child protection. In addition, the LEA's child protection coordinator, inclusion and other officers all contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of provision in schools. These arrangements are secure but they are not sufficiently systematic thereby reducing efficiency.

138. The LEA has a well-established programme of support for schools in relation to health and safety. Comprehensive health and safety policy and guidance were issued to schools in 2002. These have been the subject of detailed consultation with school staff and professional associations. Extensive training is provided for schools' staff and a self-evaluation tool has been developed for use in schools. A risk-based programme of audit visits ensures that council health and safety officers visit some 20% of schools annually. Guidance is regularly up-dated and, for example, new health and safety guidelines for outdoor activities and school trips have just been issued.

Looked after children

139. Previously the LEA's support for looked after children was satisfactory. Since then there has been rapid and sustained improvement. The LEA's support for this vulnerable group is now excellent and includes several examples of good practice.

140. The implementation of the service improvement plan has been overseen by elected members through the corporate parenting implementation group. The new corporate policy and guidelines, issued in 2002, are clear and comprehensive and reflect the high level of corporate commitment to this vulnerable group of children.

141. Since 2000, there has been a fall of 17% in total numbers. However, because of an increase in the number of looked after children successfully fostered within Liverpool, the proportion taught in Liverpool schools has risen from 50 to 81%. In 2002, attainment was in line or better than that found for looked after children nationally, as were levels of exclusion and attendance. Also, for these areas improvement rates over the last three years have been above the national trend. The LEA's aim, reflected in its targets in the EDP and other plans, is for the performance of looked after children to match that of other Liverpool pupils within three years. This is very challenging. In addition, the LEA has been successful in attracting external funding to develop services for these children. The LEA's support represents very good value for money.

142. The authority has established a 'virtual' school for looked after children. Services have been reconstituted to provide coherent support to these pupils as a group. A board of corporate governors is central to this strategy and has led to more effective strategic management and leadership. Monitoring of pupils' attainment is supported by vastly improved analysis of pupil-level data from education and social services. Information exchange is facilitated by well-developed information-sharing agreements. Monthly updates are provided to key personnel within all education services and other service providers both within and outside the LEA. Rigorous monitoring ensures that all children have a designated teacher and a high quality personal education plan.

143. Extra-curricular motivational programmes and celebratory events have been developed, including an annual 'young people of the year' celebration ceremony, creative arts

project and water sports day. Post-16 support is a particularly high priority and specific actions have been agreed in partnership with the Connexions service.

Measures to combat racism

144. In 2000 the LEA's performance in combating racism was highly satisfactory. Since then the LEA has successfully implemented the recommendation to provide access courses to attract ethnic minority heritage teachers. The LEA's performance in this area has improved significantly and is now good.

145. The response to the recommendations of the report into the death of Stephen Lawrence was prompt, well-structured and balanced. The LEA's recently revised strategy has provided schools with clear, comprehensive guidance on policy and practice in tackling racism within schools. While the response to the Race Relations Act 2000 has been prompt within council departments, aspects of implementation within schools have been slower and a school workforce audit has only just commenced.

146. Comprehensive and customised race equality training is provided to officers, newly qualified teachers, school staff and governors, and attendance is closely monitored. The LEA's monitoring and Ofsted school inspection reports confirm that the schools are improving anti-racism policy and practice. Robust systems for monitoring racist incidents within schools are in place and the LEA is diligent in monitoring and following up on issues.

147. Good relationships have been established between the council and minority ethnic community representatives. The Black History project has received considerable praise from community representatives.

Section 5: Corporate issues

Summary

148. At the time of the previous inspection in 2000, major changes in the departmental structure of the city council had recently been implemented. Those changes are now fully embedded into corporate planning. The unremitting drive for improvement has brought further progress as a result of the work of both elected members and officers. The Local Government Improvement Programme review in September 2001 highlighted the tremendous strides made in a relatively short space of the time. The corporate assessment, published in December 2002 by the Audit Commission, supports this judgement. Education was identified as the department having made the most progress overall. The capacity for further improvement is good.

Corporate planning

149. Corporate planning involving education is very good. Education is the council's top priority and corporate processes ensure that all service areas contribute. Education is well represented in the corporate plan and in the community strategy. There is a strong and effective drive to mesh the corporate planning with partnership working, and partnerships are rightly identified as the key to the delivery of the council's priorities. The corporate assessment in December 2002 commented that the inter-relationships between the partnerships are complex and not understood by many, including councillors. This has been recognised. Partners report that the authority is exhibiting clear leadership on this issue and progress is being made.

150. Performance management in the education service is good. Rigorous and systematic performance review engages all staff, so that corporate and service plans, and the linkages between them, are understood. Systems of self-review and external moderation are in place. Corporate priorities are included in departmental and service plans and monitoring of performance against education targets is in place. Performance against Best Value performance indicators is reported to members and more widely through the Corporate Performance Plan. Over 75% of key performance indicators are on track. There is quarterly monitoring of targets negotiated through the local public service agreement although the LEA is not on target to meet highly aspirational attendance targets. The education service introduced exception reporting in 2000 and this is done on a weekly basis. This has developed well after a faltering start and now works as an early warning system. Implementation of corporate plans is good.

Decision-making and leadership of senior officers and elected members

151. There is a clear and effective process of decision-making at the corporate level, including a well-established system of forward planning and consultation. Implementation is speedy and makes effective use of the weekly meeting between the director and the executive member with the portfolio for education. There is appropriate delegation of powers to officers and relationships between officers and members are strong. Financial decision-

making is timely but not always sufficiently transparent, for instance in the delegation of SEN funding to primary schools. Financial management is good.

152. Elected members demonstrate a high level of commitment and have given strong leadership on funding, surplus places and inclusion. Difficult decisions are taken in full consultation with interested partners. There is cross-party consensus on the great majority of issues. The executive member with responsibility for education demonstrates a good knowledge of, and interest in, educational issues and a desire to hold the council and the education service to account. The combined work of the executive member, the strategic monitoring group and area committees means that the scrutiny function is performed satisfactorily in the council as a whole. However, the scrutiny function is not performed satisfactorily by the relevant select committee. It has not sufficiently clarified its purpose, the role of co-opted members is unclear and there is a lack of prioritisation of issues which means that its conscientious members work hard but not always to maximum effect. The committee nominates members for working groups but the relationship of these groups to the select committee is not well defined.

Recommendation

In order to improve scrutiny:

- clarify the purpose and role of the select committee with responsibility for education and provide advice, support and training to secure rigorous scrutiny of education and the work of the LEA.

153. Senior officers give very good leadership. This is evident in the effective school improvement and social inclusion strategies. They have high expectations and these are shared by elected members. They provide timely, comprehensive advice to members on a full range of policies. The advice takes account of the wider strategic implications of policy and the detailed technical aspects of implementing each option. Elected members who are not members of the executive also have access to briefings by officers and receive good quality advice.

154. The LEA has exercised considerable leadership in its dealings with schools. It has, for instance, played a very prominent role in Excellence in Liverpool. It has also been proactive in the last three years in tackling a daunting legacy of problems including long-standing, controversial issues. It has shown resolve and courage in pursuing policies, some of which have been unpopular with schools. The very high proportion of schools previously in special measures and identified as having serious weaknesses has necessitated a strong intervention strategy.

155. The LEA consults widely with schools. Following the 1999 inspection, the LEA was required to consult with schools through the professional associations. This has worked well for secondary issues but not at the primary level, where attendance by headteachers at meetings is sometimes low. There has been a considered response and consultation is now being channeled through cluster meetings. Schools are also very much involved in more detailed formulation of policy through membership of working groups. The LEA is heavily involved in facilitating the collaborative work between schools through Leadership Incentive Grant and other initiatives. In discussions with schools there was recognition of the LEA's

role in securing improvement but some concern whether the momentum can be sustained. In part, schools have an unrealistic expectation of support and the LEA monitoring reveals that some schools need to develop as self-evaluating, self-reliant institutions.

Partnership

156. The quality and range of effective partnerships are major strengths of the LEA and have contributed to significant improvements. Collaboration is very good and there is a strategic approach to partnership within the city. The local strategic partnership has been developed through the Liverpool First Board and the Liverpool Partnership Group. The LEA supports the learning partnership well and has active involvement with area partnerships and cluster groups of schools. The Early Years and Development and Childcare Partnership is strong and links with the Greater Merseyside LSC are good.

157. All relevant areas of partnership activity relating to social inclusion are good. At a corporate level, partnership working is efficiently co-ordinated by the Liverpool Partnership Group. At a departmental level, effective partnership working has been at the heart of many of the council's main successes. Partnership work secured £1.5 additional funding to support the summer community activity initiatives. This project led to a reduction in incidents and bad behaviour across the council in 2002 and 2003 that were amongst the lowest for urban areas in England. Multi-agency working between social services, education, Connexions and others is one of the key features of the outstanding support for looked after children.

Support for early years

158. Support for early years was not inspected previously. It is good.

159. The city has a long-standing tradition of making extensive provision for early years education. The LEA provides early education places for all three and four year-olds whose parents want one. The current take-up is 90%. There is also support for 484 providers in the private and voluntary sectors through the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP). The EYDCP is a good example of good collaboration with external partners. The partnership includes a representative from the council's central regeneration section so that provision can be linked to increased demand arising from new housing projects. There are also representatives of a trade union, the local LSC and of job centres to ensure provision takes account of training and employment issues.

160. Children make good progress, resulting in sound attainment. Four-fifths of inspection reports since January 2001 have shown pupils' attainment below national expectations, but at the end of the foundation stage, three-quarters reach or exceed the early learning goals. At the end of Key Stage 1, attainment reaches the national average. This demonstrates that the children get a good start to their education.

161. The level of support for providers is good. A team of five consultants, led by a senior consultant, is further strengthened by part-time teacher advisers and an area SEN co-ordinator. All providers, including those in the private and voluntary sectors, are able to call on appropriate support. The service level agreement between the EYDCP and the school

effectiveness service ensures that equivalent training is provided to both maintained and non-maintained sectors.

162. The LEA has made good use of external funding sources. There are ten Sure Start schemes and an Early Excellence centre. The most striking development in early years provision, however, has been in support for SEN. The consultants all have a role as area SEN co-ordinators, in addition to the work of the team's co-ordinating SEN specialist. Additionally, all providers have access to a named educational psychologist. The support enables earlier provision to be made in reception classes and Sure Start is working specifically on transition for pupils with SEN.

163. The service is aware of the need to improve relations with the nursery schools. Primary schools are generally satisfied with the authority's support for early years but nursery schools are not. The nursery schools have to prepare for local management when their understanding of their role in the totality of provision in the city is not entirely clear.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for early years:

- clarify the role for nursery schools within the total provision for early years.

Support for 14-19 education

164. This was not inspected previously. Support is good and good progress has been made following a critical 16-19 area wide inspection in October 2000.

165. In conjunction with the Liverpool Learning Partnership, the LEA has addressed the issues for action identified in the 16-19 area wide inspection. There has been a fundamental review of post-16 provision. A very significant positive outcome to this process has been the formulation of a 14-19 Entitlement Statement which has been agreed by all interested partners. This is a bold and ground-breaking initiative. An appropriate range of options has been given to clusters of schools within the authority and there is a rigorous procedure to scrutinise proposals and ensure that young people receive their entitlement. The LEA collaborates effectively with local partners and the partners have been successful in attracting external funding to support 14-19 development.

166. A coherent strategy, included in the EDP, is making a significant contribution to the raising of standards at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Standards of attainment are rising faster than the national rate. Despite this, there is still a considerable challenge facing the LEA. Although they demonstrate a significant rise in attainment over the last three years, there were eight schools in 2003 where less than 25% of pupils attained five or more higher grades at GCSE. Targets are set and monitored in sixth forms. In 1999, only 64% of Year 11 pupils stayed on into full-time education and training which was well below the national average. LEA monitoring shows an increase in the number of pupils staying on into sixth forms but participation rates overall remain below the Greater Merseyside average.

167. Good support on curriculum development is given to schools by the LEA and this is highly valued by them. A further education college takes the lead on the Increased Flexibility

Programme for 14-16 year olds and it is well supported by the LEA. The Greater Merseyside LSC reports that there are considerably more participating pupils than in any other comparable initiative in other areas. This is an extremely well co-ordinated programme and the LEA has helped to promote the associated curriculum managers' networks and conferences.

168. In collaboration with its partners, the LEA provides high quality information and guidance for Year 11 students, including students in special schools, through a directory of post-16 learning opportunities. There is good support for vulnerable students through a range of initiatives which include Excellence Challenge.

Appendix 1: Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations designed to help the further progress of the LEA. The following are key to that progress and should be considered as priorities for action. They are:

In order to improve financial management information to schools:

- urgent action should be taken to remedy the problems with payroll management information.

In order to improve scrutiny:

- clarify the purpose and role of the select committee with responsibility for education and provide advice, support and training to secure rigorous scrutiny of education and the work of the LEA;

The report also makes the following recommendations:

In order to improve schools' management capacity the LEA should:

- develop schools' capacity for financial management including the use of ICT for management purposes.

In order to improve the transparency and credibility of the LEA's strategy for pupils with SEN the LEA should:

- include details of the estimated costs and proposals for the funding of each element of the strategic plan for SEN; and
- set out more clearly the financial implications for schools of proposed changes.

In order to improve support for early years:

- clarify the role for nursery schools within the total provision for early years.

In order to improve target-setting:

- ensure that targets for Key Stage 2 literacy and numeracy are based on an analysis of prior attainment and an appropriate degree of challenge so that the targets are realistic and achievable.

In order to improve support for ICT:

- ensure that data are collected and used effectively to allocate support to schools.

Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
SECTION 1 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	7	
2	The performance of schools	5	
3	Funding, including the co-ordination of external funding	2	NI
4	The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	2	
5	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	2	
6	The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities	2	
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	2	
SECTION 2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT			
8	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools	2	
9	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	2	
10	the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	2	
11	The effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	1	
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	2	
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	2	
14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	4	
No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	2	

16	Support to schools in raising standards of ethnic minority and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grants	3	
17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	3	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value	3	NI
19	Support to school governors	2	
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	3	
20a	Financial services	3	NI
20b	Human resources	4	NI
20c	Property services	2	
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	3	
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	0	NI
20f	Grounds maintenance	0	NI
20g	Catering	2	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	2	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement	2	NI
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	2	
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	2	
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	2	NI
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	1	
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	2	
28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	2	
SECTION 3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	3	

30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	2	
31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	3	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money	4	
SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	2	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	
No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	2	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	2	
37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place	2	
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	3	
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	2	
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	3	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	1	
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	2	
SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	1	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	2	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	2	
46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	3	

47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	1	
48	The quality of advice given to elected members	2	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	1	
OVERALL JUDGEMENTS			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	1	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	2	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	2	

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 1 to 7 point scale:

- Grade 1 – Very good
- Grade 2 – Good
- Grade 3 – Highly satisfactory
- Grade 4 – Satisfactory
- Grade 5 – Unsatisfactory
- Grade 6 – Poor, significant weaknesses
- Grade 7 – Very poor, fails to provide effective support to schools