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APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This report details the findings of a short inspection conducted in September 2000 under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The purpose of the inspection, which was carried out at the request of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, was to evaluate the progress made by the LEA in responding to the findings and recommendations of the previous inspection which took place in 1999. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the local education authority (LEA) on Best Value.

2. This second inspection has followed up the progress of the LEA in implementing the post-inspection Action Plan and its Education Development Plan. It also evaluated the progress made by the LEA in supporting central government initiatives such as Excellence in Cities (known as Excellence in Liverpool) and the extension of Fair Funding.

3. The inspection was carried out by a small team of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and other OFSTED staff, in conjunction with the Audit Commission. Documentation provided by the LEA, including plans, reports and performance data, was scrutinised. Interviews were conducted with elected members, the chief executive, the executive director (education, lifelong learning and leisure) and education officers, the executive director (resources), headteachers and senior staff in schools, governors, archdiocesan and diocesan officers, the co-ordinator of Excellence in Liverpool, and the directors and chair or vice-chairpersons of the Education Action Zones. Evidence was also drawn from recent monitoring visits to Liverpool schools by HMI. A questionnaire was sent to all the LEA's schools and the response rate was 68 per cent.

COMMENTARY

4. The city of Liverpool has the highest degree of deprivation in the country. Standards at the end of primary education are, overall, below the national average. At GCSE they are well below the national average. Results are improving and at GCSE are doing so faster than the national trend. The 1999 OFSTED report found that in most respects Liverpool's local education authority (LEA) had made too little discernible contribution to those improvements. The LEA was providing very poor support overall to its schools, and performed some key functions inadequately. This report led to the appointment of consultants who recommended dramatic changes. A chief education officer and a deputy were seconded to Liverpool for three months. This marked the start of major reforms in the LEA's structure, policy and organisation of its provision. Many staff left the authority and a new and more positive direction was established. A new, permanent executive director was appointed and with a new senior management team, and with clearer leadership by the city council, has worked to an extensive recovery plan, based on 33 recommendations in the OFSTED report.

5. This inspection has found that the LEA has made very considerable progress in a short space of time, most notably in relation to the provision of inspection and advice, where schools are appreciative of the progress made. In other areas of its work the LEA has given much-needed and fundamental attention to its information and management systems. This is long overdue and likely to be beneficial in the long term, but schools are not at this stage aware of all that has been done. Our evidence shows that the authority has already met almost every recommendation in last year's report. In general, it has clarified its strategic management objectives and focused its work more clearly, completely overhauled its school effectiveness work, and significantly improved its strategy for special educational needs and its approach to encouraging social inclusion. Many functions that were previously performed unsatisfactorily or worse have now been brought up to at least a satisfactory level, or with the potential soon to be satisfactory. The LEA is implementing most aspects of its Education Development Plan (EDP) securely and in some instances to good effect, and in general it has handled new central initiatives very competently.

6. The credit for this progress should be shared fairly widely. The chief education officer from a neighbouring authority, seconded temporarily to Liverpool as interim manager after the previous report, took very prompt and decisive steps to restructure and reorientate the LEA. The city council has made some important decisions, such as increasing the resources available to education, has wisely given considerable delegated powers to officers, and has supported their work. The new chief executive has established an environment in which education staff can work more effectively and he has high expectations of them. The new executive director and his senior management team have clarified the objectives of teams, consulted well with schools, and introduced many sound new procedures, for instance concerning data analysis and schools causing concern. Senior managers have greatly improved performance management within the department, especially in the school effectiveness branch. Above all, they have given leadership of considerable quality.

7. Other factors, also, have helped. The LEA has made well-targeted and effective use of generous external funding to make progress on its objectives. A

number of headteachers and deputies have worked on specific tasks as secondees, and in many instances have given useful direction to the authority's new policies. Finally, although its precise effect is difficult to gauge, it appears that the monitoring of the authority by an independent board reporting to the DfEE has been useful to the LEA's progress.

8. Some problems remain. Certain secondary schools are oversubscribed whilst others have surplus places, an issue which is exacerbated by the community secondary schools admissions policy, which is unsatisfactory and ineffective. The city council has not tackled this successfully, despite having made one attempt recently. The LEA's record on the speed with which it issues statements of special educational need is still unsatisfactory. There is still a significant backlog of problems with the condition of school buildings. The EDP, although revised once already, continues to be unsatisfactory as a comprehensive working plan. Detailed links between the Excellence in Liverpool team and the mainstream work of the LEA are still not sufficiently secure.

9. Much remains to be done, but much has already been accomplished. Schools' perceptions of the LEA are still more critical than the average for LEAs inspected recently. However, this inspection has shown that the rate of change and of improvement in the LEA has been rapid. In our view that change is fundamental, and the improvement sustainable. We were impressed by the quality of leadership and management, professional and political. The major effort of raising standards in the schools still lies ahead, but we are confident of the LEA's capacity to make further progress.

THE CONTEXT OF THE LEA

Update

10. The socio-economic context of Liverpool LEA remains broadly as it was at the time of the first inspection. This is a severely disadvantaged city, with fewer residents with higher education qualifications than the national average, and far fewer people than average in the higher social classes. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is more than twice the national figure. Overall unemployment levels remain worse than the national figure, although they improved significantly from 1986 to 1996.

11. Members of minority ethnic groups form a smaller proportion of the population than nationally. Black groups form the largest minority ethnic group in the school population, followed by pupils of Chinese heritage.

12. Liverpool maintains six nursery, 157 primary, 34 secondary, and 21 special schools, and four pupil referral units. Nine schools have achieved Beacon status. The proportion of primary pupils attending special schools is above the national average and that of secondary pupils 2.6 per cent is well above average.

13. In their most recent inspections, OFSTED inspectors found the proportion of good or very good primary schools to be smaller in Liverpool (61 per cent) than nationally (70 per cent), although the proportion was broadly the same as that in statistically similar LEAs. Only 50 per cent of Liverpool secondary schools were found to be good or very good, as compared with 67 per cent nationally, although Liverpool schools performed better than those in similar LEAs (41 per cent). There was at least satisfactory improvement in 42 of the 48 Liverpool schools re-inspected since the 1999 inspection of the LEA, and there was good or very good improvement in 22 of these. However, one school was found in its re-inspection to require special measures and four had serious weaknesses.

14. Liverpool schools' results in the Key Stage 2 tests improved considerably in 1999 (the most recent year for which final KS2 data are available), and at GCSE they improved in 1999 and 2000. However, 1999 comparative data showed that, as with attendance and exclusion data, performance continued to compare unfavourably with national averages. National assessment data for that year showed that, overall, Liverpool pupils had made below average progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 compared with pupils nationally. Progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 was average, but progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 (GCSE) was well below average.

15. Under a new chief executive, there have been major changes in the departmental structure of the city council since the last inspection. The senior management group has been reduced from eleven chief officers to five executive directors plus the chief executive. The chief education officer is now the executive director, with a portfolio which includes education, lifelong learning and leisure (libraries, sports and arts).

16. The Liberal Democrat party holds 69 of the 99 seats on the City Council. The Council has modernised its structure and there is now an executive board, including a member with the brief for lifelong learning, and a select committee for lifelong learning.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The response to the first OFSTED report

17. The first inspection reported in May 1999 that the LEA's weaknesses outweighed its strengths. Some fundamental services were unsatisfactory and poorly managed. Key aspects of support for school improvement were lacking. Strategic planning was weak and in general schools were not receiving the support they needed. These problems were confirmed by the interim report in July 1999 by consultants employed jointly by the city council and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). At that stage the consultants said that the authority was seriously failing in the fulfilment of its role.

18. The council took appropriate and effective steps in response to the reports as soon as reasonably practicable. After the resignation of the previous director of education, the chief education officer (CEO) and deputy of other authorities were seconded to Liverpool for three months. About one sixth of the staff of the education department, including five of the six senior managers, left the service. The department moved to new, more appropriate premises, and was renamed as the education and lifelong learning service (ELLS), and reorganised into three branches (school effectiveness, education support, and strategy and resources). More than a dozen posts were filled temporarily by secondees, generally charting a new strategy or initiating a new function. These early steps, and the beginning of work on an action plan, represented a significant investment by the council of about £1.3m.

19. In the autumn of 1999 the council appointed a new director of education. Shortly afterwards he was promoted to the new, more senior post of executive director (education, lifelong learning and leisure) created in the new structure. In recognition of the urgent tasks facing him just within education, the extra responsibilities were removed from him and shared across other executive directorships. However, an additional post of assistant executive director is about to be created, under the executive director, with oversight of leisure.

20. During this early period the LEA was working to a series of milestones for improvement which had been set by the consultants, and in December 1999 the consultants assessed the progress made. The consultants found that the authority had met, substantially or in full, most of the milestones, and demonstrated improvement in a range of fundamentally important capabilities. They concluded that immediate large-scale outsourcing should not proceed at that time, subject to the LEA continuing to make progress against performance measures to be defined in a contract with schools. The contract was accordingly produced and its strengths and weaknesses are evaluated below. Additionally, the consultants recommended that the LEA should be subject to a rigorous independent monitoring regime for 12 months. This has taken the form of an independent monitoring board which reviews the LEA's performance monthly and reports to the Secretary of State.

The council's strategy

21. The majority party fully accepts the weaknesses highlighted in the previous OFSTED report and is strongly committed to rapid improvement. The council is

very keen to ensure that a secure and rigorous performance management regime is maintained across its services in order to ensure that improvement is not only rapid, but sustainable. A great deal of operational decision-making has been delegated to officers, although members recognise the need for the council to make policy decisions itself. Policy development is in hand on some issues, but the important matter of secondary admissions policy has not been handled well.

22. The council has now worked for over a year with its new system of an executive board developing policy and a select committee scrutinising policy and its implementation. The select committee system appears to be working well. It is attended by a considerable number of stakeholders and each meeting includes an opportunity to question senior officers. The select committee has undertaken some innovative work investigating school budget balances, and maintains a close scrutiny of progress on the post-inspection action plan. It also monitors the authority's progress on an extensive range of other plans. There are some indications that the archdiocesan and diocesan authorities are now further removed from educational decision-making than previously, but there is currently a good level of cooperation between them and the LEA.

The post-inspection action plan

23. The action plan in response to the first OFSTED report is clear, businesslike and purposeful. Links between this plan and the Education Development Plan, which sets out the service's larger scale scheme for supporting school improvement, are appropriate. The management of the action plan is inevitably onerous, given the number of weaknesses needing remedy, and it puts great weight on a few key officers.

24. The activities within the action plan are monitored by lead officers and by the senior management team with appropriate frequency. Crucially, a steering group of elected members, headteachers and the executive director meets monthly to analyse what is being achieved. There are good systems for seeking the views of headteachers and other stakeholders on progress made on the plan, and a report is made quarterly to the council's select committee. Overall, this is a good system of monitoring. It imposes a weight of work on all concerned, but this was justified by the gravity of the situation.

The Education Development Plan

25. The previous inspection identified serious weaknesses in the LEA's Education Development Plan and recommended that it be revised to show more clearly defined targets. Overall, the revised EDP is an improvement on its predecessor, but the criticisms in the first inspection report have not been entirely met.

26. The revised EDP sets out the way in which the service intends to contribute to the city's regeneration aims, and it embodies the service's intended programme of self-reform. The priorities for action to support school improvement are broadly relevant to needs, although the lack of detailed data in the audit of current provision means that the activities themselves sometimes lack precision. The present plan provides too little evidence of action to meet the needs of minority ethnic pupils or of

pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and there is not enough clarity on how activities will target particular groups. However, the authority has made significant strides in accumulating and analysing data since the EDP was revised, and will soon be in a good position to plan better targeted support work.

27. Priority 7 (Identifying and Disseminating Good Practice) is an agglomeration of disparate pieces of work, and does not have the force that would have derived from a coherent attempt to identify needs. Priority 4 (Promoting Social Inclusion) is also weak, and the description of some of the activities intended to improve provision is unconvincing because it lacks detail.

28. The quality of the planning for particular activities is very varied. In some cases deadlines are precise, and this represents an improvement since the EDP that was in place at the time of the first inspection. However, there are still instances where they are omitted or stated too broadly. Success criteria are also generally identified better than in the earlier plan, with many being appropriately defined in terms of educational outcomes. Others, though, are still vague and some would benefit from quantification.

29. Good systems have been developed for monitoring the implementation of the plan. Each priority is monitored in turn and the overall process is sensibly timed to inform the council's setting of its budget. At present, though, the evaluation of work tends to emphasise implementation of the activities rather than measurement of their effect on pupils and schools.

Other relevant plans and strategies

30. The previous inspection reported that overall strategic planning was unclear. It made several recommendations, including that initiatives should be mapped to bring coherence and purpose into strategic work, and that better performance indicators and improved monitoring should be introduced. The LEA has made at least satisfactory progress on these in the limited time available.

31. Every major education and lifelong learning service (ELLS) plan is now summarised in a common format. These detailed summaries, together with a general overview, are clear and helpful and will shortly be distributed to schools. Furthermore, procedures have now been established to ensure that any new plans or initiatives will, from their inception, have success criteria, outcome measures, and performance indicators. The arrangements for monitoring plans are satisfactory. These improvements meet all the relevant recommendations of the previous report. In addition, a system has been introduced through which all projected grant-aided development work has to be approved by the ELLS senior management team at an early stage, and an internal working group has now established basic but relevant common principles to guide such bids.

32. Significant changes have taken place recently to large scale planning in Liverpool which also support the work undertaken on these recommendations. For example, a new organisation, the Liverpool partnership group, draws together the city council and major partners, such as Liverpool health authority, local universities, and key business interests. One of the partnership's five objectives is to ensure that

Liverpool schools meet or exceed the national targets by 2005, and the prospectus gives prominence to the LEA's EDP and the other main educational initiatives such as Excellence in Liverpool. Milestones are cited for the range of educational plans, such as the Behaviour Support Plan. Overall, this gives a picture of education being at the heart of regeneration in the city's plans, and it is not difficult now to see the inter-relationship of the various educational activities. Activities undertaken within the past year suggest that this vision is having an effect.

33. There are many examples of cooperative working between the school effectiveness branch and other services or partners, such as the health authority. ELLS has also usefully created a new team for planning and regeneration, concerned with ensuring that ELLS developments are related closely to the corporate priorities. This team has made a sound start having been closely involved in the detailed work related to the inspection recommendations.

Liaison with the Education Action Zones

34. A major innovation since the previous inspection has been the development of two Education Action Zones in Liverpool. These were not LEA-led and the onus for developing the bids over a short period of time was left with schools.

35. Despite the fact that the LEA was not originally closely involved, liaison between the LEA and the zones on policy implementation and target-setting has been developing satisfactorily. However, the LEA's systems for monitoring and evaluation are not yet securely linked to the zones' own procedures and this has the potential to impede rapid development.

Consultation and communication

36. The previous inspection found that although there were extensive arrangements for consultation and communication, the outcome was inadequate and had not led to good partnership between the authority and schools. The LEA has made good progress to address this criticism. It has established a deliberate and consistent approach through the creation and implementation of a communications strategy. This includes regular structured meetings with the heads' management organisations and a network of task-specific consultative groups. The authority has undertaken a series of commissioned surveys of school opinion which has enabled it to monitor schools' perception of progress during a critical period of development. The surveys and our findings show an improving picture, albeit from a very low base.

37. Weekly bulletins to schools and monitoring by the authority of other communications allow a better mapping of information flow and consultation. The absence of an established electronic mail link with schools is, however, an impediment.

Resources and Fair Funding

38. The council has taken steps since the last inspection to improve the revenue funding for education. It has increased its education budget so that it is now marginally above education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), and has

signalled its intention to schools to issue indicative budgets in November to secure their funding at an established level for the next three years. Spending on schools overall, however, remains below the schools SSA blocks, because of a comparatively higher level of spending in the “other” block, including youth service and adult education.

39. The council’s education SSA is high compared with its statistical neighbours, metropolitan authorities and the England average. Planned spending on school budget shares overall, and on central services, reflects this, although special educational needs is an exception. The increase in expenditure on school improvement (from £26 per pupil in 1999/2000 to £42 per pupil in 2000/2001) has supported the LEA’s short-term strategy but it is now one of the higher allocations in the country.

40. Liverpool now delegates 86.2 per cent of the Local Schools Budget (LSB) to schools. A significant element of the increase in 2000/2001 has been the delegation of primary and special school meals funding which represents 2 per cent of the LSB. However, the delegation has only been nominal and the process has lacked transparency. School meal prices are relatively low and are subsidised. Schools have not participated in the decision of the council to set the school meal price, and do not readily know the level of subsidy and equipment costs supported by their individual school budgets.

41. The authority is reviewing its needs-led analysis of school funding appropriately and is consulting with representatives from primary and secondary schools. It hopes to implement changes in September 2002. However, it faces a genuine difficulty in balancing pressures from both the primary and secondary sectors. Ultimately the ability to move significantly to the resolution of the conflicting interests is limited without significant further growth or addressing the imbalance in spending of the ‘other’ blocks.

42. Overall, school balances are too high. This may reflect past uncertainty on behalf of schools about future funding and the development of strategies to anticipate falls in pupil numbers. However, balances in the primary sector are now particularly significant, and stand near to 10 per cent of the primary individual schools budget. The lifelong learning select committee has appropriately reviewed the council’s approach to balances, and officers are rightly monitoring and challenging schools where appropriate. Deficits are small and less frequent, and the authority has a good record of dealing promptly and effectively with school overspends.

Service provision and Best Value

43. The previous report was critical of inconsistencies in the standards of service planning and delivery, and in performance management. This inspection has shown that satisfactory progress has been made in response to the report’s recommendations. The authority has pursued four initiatives: a contract with Schools, individual school contracts, schemes of performance management and service level agreements (SLAs). These have enabled the LEA to build firm foundations to support consistent service delivery. However, the potential of this

infrastructure has not yet been fully exploited and schools have not had time to feel the impact.

44. Considerable effort has been invested in developing a comprehensive 'contract with schools'. This gives a pledge on resourcing and on the style of management and political administration. It also provides a job description for ELLS. It incorporates activities related to the implementation of the LEA's various plans and its routine work, and offers a range of performance indicators (PIs). The plan is extensive and unexceptionable. It is nevertheless symbolic in providing a useful reference point for schools to judge the performance of the LEA and a demonstration that the LEA has been able to set out the context within which it has to operate and to manage change.

45. In parallel to the main Contract, the LEA, having demonstrated its own obligations, has worked with schools to develop an individual school 'contract'. The contract is firmly linked to the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations and offers a framework within which schools can individually set out their performance as a basis for dialogue and challenge for the LEA and school governors. It is a useful and flexible roadmap of school activity and obligations. Its five common strands can be expanded by individual schools. Progress on the 'contract' (and observations about the LEA's own performance) is scheduled to be a key agenda item on the termly governors' meetings.

46. Schools have been involved in and, in most cases, appropriately consulted over, the development of SLAs for traded services. Services are provided at appropriate levels and over acceptable contract periods. One service adopted the good practice of identifying alternative providers to assist schools' exercise of choice. Although there is some confusion between service standards, targets and performance indicators, overall, the SLAs provide a satisfactory reference point both for the provider and the schools.

47. Good progress has been made within ELLS in the past twelve months in developing appropriate performance management models ahead of the continuing development of a corporate framework. Guidance and appropriate training are in place or in the process of completion. The authority has responded to concerns expressed by schools that it should ensure that a commitment to meet the needs of customers permeates the whole organisation. It has, accordingly, developed a staff code of conduct which is incorporated into work plans and the appraisal process. The service now has the basis for securely linking individual work programmes and project management to service plans and is seeking to adopt the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model in order to reinforce the work undertaken so far.

48. Overall, Liverpool is working energetically to develop performance measurement. It recognises the need to tighten up on a number of definitions and the appropriateness of some of the PIs. Its use of external comparative data to inform targets and resource allocations is not sufficiently developed. Schools have limited, and generally Liverpool-specific, benchmarking information to assist them in the deployment of resources.

Property management

49. The local authority has responded satisfactorily to the recommendations of the first report to give a high priority to the school property maintenance backlog and to encourage preventative maintenance through cooperation with and between schools. Headteachers interviewed acknowledged the commitment and responsiveness of staff in dealing with difficult capital and property issues, although there remains some unevenness of understanding of mutual responsibilities. Headteachers, officers and elected members all acknowledged the continuing poor state of many of Liverpool's school buildings and this was strongly reinforced by responses from the school surveys.

50. The authority's Asset Management Plan (AMP) identifies a backlog of £58m of priority work requiring attention over the next five years, of which 72 per cent is the council's responsibility. A good start has been made, assisted by a very supportive New Deal for Schools allocation including funding to replace three schools and over £4m to tackle leaking roofs. The authority is on schedule to conclude a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) accounting for £13m of the most urgent work in the AMP. A separate PFI will involve the replacement of another school. The council is also managing a capital programme in excess of £30m in the current year. In addition to substantial central Government funding and borrowing permission, it has directed additional funding from its own resources into school buildings and has begun to redistribute allocations within schools' budget shares to take account of the condition of buildings.

51. Scope remains to help schools be more closely tied into the strategy to tackle the backlog. The AMP could better consolidate details of individual schools' responsibilities in a form that could help both monitoring and programming, and potentially providing a focus for the deployment of school balances alongside formula capital allocations.

52. The LEA has made good progress since the first inspection in providing a framework to assist schools in securing more effective support for repairs and maintenance. It has now established a joint venture company with a seven-year contract to deal with repairs and maintenance of its public buildings, including schools. 142 schools have committed themselves to the partnership this year by returning their delegated repairs and maintenance budget. A partnership board is to be established with school representation.

Recommendations

In order to make it a more useful working document, a further review should be made of the EDP. This should ensure that activities are defined with consistent clarity and with reference to a reliable audit of need. It should ensure that success criteria are consistently quantified where that is feasible. Priority 4 (Promoting Social Inclusion) and Priority 7 (Identifying and Disseminating Good Practice) should both be overhauled and made more coherent.

In order to ensure maximum coherence between the LEA's work and that of the Education Action Zones, the school effectiveness branch should work with zone officers to align the various monitoring and evaluation systems in use.

In order to increase the transparency of the delegation of funds, to promote greater autonomy by schools, and to test the effectiveness of the service, the arrangements for the delegation of school meals to primary and special schools should be reviewed and a Best Value review programmed within the next year.

In order further to improve performance management, ELLS senior management should articulate clearly the links between performance management, objective-setting, and appraisal.

In order to encourage the tackling of the backlog of maintenance, ELLS should ensure that schools can more readily identify their buildings' repairs and maintenance responsibilities within the Asset Management Plan, and the strategy for the monitoring of school balances should be linked accordingly.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Identification of need

53. The previous report identified significant weaknesses in the LEA's analysis and use of performance data which lay at the heart of its many failings. At that time the authority was not able to make a full analysis of the performance of groups of pupils and it lacked the ability to collect, collate and analyse evidence on the performance and management of schools. Consequently it could not target its support appropriately. Moreover, the data provided by the LEA did not meet schools' needs.

54. The authority has taken action to remedy this weakness and is already providing a better service to schools. In general terms, the LEA is now well placed to achieve the Government's target for establishing a reliable management information system by 2002.

55. A management information systems team has been established, sensibly located within the strategy and resources branch. It has made a comprehensive review of the authority's development needs and has very good links with the school effectiveness branch. The overall strategy for the use of data is very sound, and operates at three levels: LEA-wide, school-based, and pupil-based.

56. The use of a geographic software package now enables the authority to identify the residence and school place of every pupil in Liverpool. This has been used to define precisely the contextual advantage or disadvantage experienced by each school. It has also been used by the education and lifelong learning service (ELLS) in the deployment to schools of the additional resources of the Excellence in Liverpool initiative. This represents a very useful step forward in supporting clear strategic planning.

57. At individual school level, the LEA uses its new data analysis capacity to assist school self-evaluation. Assigned inspectors will discuss the school's judgements with headteachers, based on a range of OFSTED criteria and it is planned to link the system to the branch's other means of identifying schools causing concern. This package has the potential to become a very helpful management tool for both the LEA and the schools.

58. All Liverpool schools are provided with a statistical summary of data about the local educational system which gives a useful context for their own planning. Each school is also provided with an electronic profile, designed by the authority's team, showing key data about its own performance and characteristics. A sensible range of data is collated and displayed, and relevant benchmark comparisons are made. Each school has access to the profiles of all the others, through an agreed code of usage, thus permitting an appropriate level of comparison and challenge. The data on pupils' attainment has so far been based on the performance of previous cohorts in a school, thus reducing its value. However, the LEA sensibly intends soon to augment this with the actual attainment of pupils currently on roll, thus taking account of pupil turnover and enabling easier analyses of performance against prior attainment. The formula currently used to generate indicative targets as a basis for

discussion with schools is unnecessarily complex and runs the risk of creating some under-expectation.

59. The establishment of a pupil-level database lies at the heart of the LEA's development work. This should in due course become a powerful tool for analysing the needs of schools and for deploying the authority's resources more precisely. The database includes evidence about pupils' special educational needs, and other aspects relevant to social inclusion. However, errors were found in some of the data provided for the system by schools and the database does not yet include accurate data on pupils' ethnicity. A project is in hand which should result in a resolution of this in the near future.

60. Overall, this is an area of work to which the LEA has given very considerable attention since the previous report and its progress on this recommendation has been good. The LEA's overall strategy is appropriate and it has gone about improvement in a clear-headed manner. Schools already see some improvement in the provision of data, but have yet to reap the full benefit from the groundwork done by the authority.

Targeting support

61. The previous inspection found that too many actions in the EDP were generalised across all schools and failed to take account of the need to differentiate between specific groups of schools and pupils. It also noted the proliferation of groups tackling strategic issues across the city. The report recommended that the authority should develop clearer criteria for involvement of schools in initiatives, and that more consistent monitoring and evaluation procedures should be developed for partnerships and projects.

62. Much has been achieved in clarifying the overall purposes of ELLS's strategic work. The authority is moving away from a generalised resourcing of deprived areas, towards targeting resources to schools, albeit generally within deprived areas, where pupils' progress needs to be boosted.

63. Overall, the LEA has taken reasonable steps to meet the recommendation in the report. Its EDP, however, is not always sufficiently explicit about which groups will be given what support and why, and the overall school improvement programme outlined in the EDP is not yet sufficiently related to the evidence about schools' needs which is now emerging from the recent improvements in data analysis. There is some over-visiting of schools by the school effectiveness branch, and insufficient definition of need.

The management of inspection and advice

64. The quality assurance service (QAS) was heavily criticised in the first OFSTED inspection. Its strategic direction and management were poor, its accountability negligible and its performance management regime inadequate. There were considerable inconsistencies in the work of officers, leading to widespread uncertainty in schools about the purpose of advisory visits, which rarely provided helpful or challenging feedback. The analysis of performance and management data

was weak. Overall, the QAS was a large service, which did not provide value for money.

65. Rapid and fundamental change has been made in response to the recommendations of the report. This has led to marked improvement, both in the quality of the redesigned service and in the perception of it among headteachers.

66. The service has now been reorganised into the school effectiveness branch (SEB), removing the previous distinction between inspectors and advisers. A new permanent head of service has provided highly effective leadership. Extensive changes in personnel have occurred. Appointments of good quality have been made and restoring morale appears to have been accomplished.

67. There has been a great improvement in service planning. The EDP is analysed into a performance management plan, which spells out in detail the full requirements on the service. The branch development plan sets out what management must do in order to facilitate the actions in the performance management plan. A work plan for each individual inspector defines his or her role and accountabilities, and the principal effectiveness officers (PEOs) have also drawn up phase development plans.

68. The match between these plans is good, and the hierarchy is clear and well understood. The implementation of plans is effectively monitored against detailed criteria. The plans constitute a good basis for the assignment of clear responsibilities and accountabilities, and for the setting of objectives. A good deal has been done to overcome the excessive variation in the quality of work which was noted in the previous inspection report.

69. Headteachers note a change for the better in the quality of the work done and in the clarity of deployment of the SEB. That change is considerable, and in our view sustainable, because it is underpinned by an effective, clearly understood system. The LEA was able to produce case studies of work with schools in which the advice and guidance given were evidently improved in quality and impact because of the action of the performance management regime. The performance management system is not yet fully developed, but it is already providing the systematic supervision and check on professional standards that were previously missing.

70. Meetings between each PEO and their SEOs are task-focused; they entail discussion of the tasks currently undertaken by the SEO, and they seek to improve the performance of them. They are not, therefore, discussions of competencies or development in the abstract, and they gain in efficacy as a result. Time is, however, intended to be set aside for the reflection on developing competence that is also needed, and for objective setting. The detail of the competencies required by effectiveness officers is not yet clear, nor is the part that targets for raising attainment will play.

71. The day-to-day work of the branch is now much more carefully planned, calendared, time-tabled and recorded than was previously the case. The systems devised are well-conceived and potentially a valuable source of data for the monitoring of work and analysis of working patterns. At present, the electronic record

of contact, for example, merely records visits, not the evaluative content of visits. Nevertheless, analysis of the data already raises questions, not least about the extent to which the pattern of visiting reflects the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success.

72. The work of the branch is now consistently challenging. The survey evidence suggests that headteachers for the most part welcome this, and understand clearly what it entails. It involves, so far as the branch is concerned, an intention that the effect of its work with schools should be to promote change, not simply to gather information or inspect them. Above all, there is an emphasis on improving pedagogy, to an extent which is more direct and explicit than is usual in LEAs. There are some indications, both from the case studies inspected and from the performance indicators, that this approach can be successful.

73. Each school has an entitlement to three days from the branch, connected with target-setting and review. The contact record shows that in practice the majority get a great deal more than this, for reasons that are not clearly related to the overall quality of the school. This may be temporarily acceptable, given that the branch is essentially engaged in reinventing itself, and needs to acquire a knowledge of its schools. However, as the database becomes more securely established, there will be no need for a pattern of visiting that is currently wasteful of resources and which potentially undermines schools' capacity to manage their own improvement. At present, there is no clear strategy for moving away from the assumption that all schools have an entitlement to regular visiting in addition to whatever may be needed for target setting. This is not consistent with the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations.

74. Although there is a significant problem regarding the targeting of SEB's work, this should not obscure the general finding that the branch is now a powerful tool for improvement. It is managed well by the head of branch and the PEOs; it is much better regarded by schools than its predecessor; it has an appropriate range of expertise, supplemented by the regular and judicious use of secondments. It is an expensive service, but an effective one.

Overall progress on implementing EDP

75. The detailed analysis provided below shows that the LEA has made very satisfactory progress in implementing nearly all the activities listed in the EDP. Where there have been difficulties in initiating activity this usually relates to a lack of clarity in the EDP itself. It is too early to judge the impact of many activities, but there is evidence of positive effect in work on literacy and numeracy in particular. There is some inevitable overlap between the work reported on below and action taken on recommendations of the previous report.

Literacy (EDP Priority 1 and also the subject of a recommendation)

76. Concern about implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) was one of the Secretary of State's original reasons for asking Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to bring forward the inspection of the LEA. The inspectors found an improving picture. Standards were generally rising in primary and special schools

and high quality training and support had been provided. The approach to literacy was becoming more coordinated, and there was recognition that networks for sharing good practice needed to be established. However, the literacy team was said to be stretched, planning in the EDP was too concerned with the short term, there had been little impact in the secondary schools, and weaknesses in teaching remained.

77. Good progress has been made on this issue, so that support for literacy is now regarded as a strength by secondary heads, and as a notable strength by primary heads. We believe that they are right. The revised EDP sets out the standard NLS prescription for the most part, but it is supported by very detailed planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The pedagogic weaknesses referred to in the inspection report have been addressed through training and guidance, although the literacy team still has concerns about guided and extended writing. Particular attention has been given to the KS2/KS3 transfer, and to support for KS3, especially to schools causing concern, through networking of schools; support for co-ordinators; support for summer schools; guidance on schemes of work and good teaching practice. There has also been attendance at termly meetings for heads of English; training for English teachers in methodology for the literacy hour; advice on meeting the particular needs of gifted and talented pupils; and additional support for Education Action Zones (EAZs). In addition, four secondary schools are being assisted in gaining the Basic Skills Quality Mark for literacy, as a pilot programme, and a number of secondary schools are being supported in raising attainment at KS3 and GCSE through improving literacy. All secondary schools now have whole-school literacy policies, and assistance has been given, for example, to science and history departments in analysing the linguistic demands made by texts.

78. The outcomes of the increased activity at KS3 are not clear. Standards in 1999 fell slightly, as they did nationally, but much of the activity described above dates only from the current year. By contrast, the scores in the KS2 tests showed steady improvement, at about the same rate as nationally and for statistical neighbours, probably resulting from gains in teachers' subject knowledge and ability to set clear learning objectives. In 1999, 65.2 per cent of pupils reached Level 4, not far short of the target for 2000. The target for 2002 appears attainable at this stage.

Numeracy (EDP Priority 2 and also the subject of a recommendation)

79. The previous report pointed out that standards in mathematics were below average at all stages except KS1, and that at KS2 the rate of improvement was below the national rate, leaving the LEA well adrift of its target. Numeracy was EDP Priority 2, and the LEA had increased advisory staffing in order to support schools better. The LEA was not part of the National Numeracy Project (NNP), but was using NNP materials and approaches to prepare schools for the NNS. This approach was beginning to bear fruit in the primary schools, particularly those receiving intensive support. Standards were rising, and the schools felt that the LEA's support had improved markedly. On the other hand, the LEA had had little impact on the secondary schools at that stage, and the planning did not make clear links between the activities specified, and the targets set.

80. The improvement noted at the time of the previous inspection has been sustained and extended. Secondary schools regard support for improvement as slightly better than satisfactory, and primary schools as good to very good. These judgements seem to us to be right. The actions and activities set out in the EDP are appropriate and supported by detailed planning, monitoring and evaluation. Implementation is on schedule. All indications are that the work of the consultants is highly regarded and this is, here as elsewhere, the main determinant of success. Their work is sensibly targeted, both to weaker schools and to particular groups of pupils, such as under-attaining boys, the gifted and talented, pupils with SEN, and pupils who have English as an additional language. The menu of activities set out in support of KS3 and KS2/KS3 transition is well-conceived.

81. Standards in mathematics are rising, as in a number of LEAs, faster than anticipated at KS2. They rose by 12.5 per cent in 1999, slightly above the national average. In absolute terms, they were still below the national average, but above that for statistical neighbours. The 2002 target appears attainable, although demanding. The KS3 results rose by 2.5 per cent. They were in line with statistical neighbours, but below the national figure.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (EDP Priority 3)

82. This priority has four principal strands: improving standards in ICT from KS1 to 16-plus; improving the strategic management of ICT; supporting schools as they develop their ICT infrastructure; and ensuring linkages between initiatives. These overall aims are appropriate, and the actions underpinning them are underway or being developed. It is, however, too early to assess the outcomes of most of the actions being undertaken.

83. Important training work is now in progress, and a basic skills package to support literacy and numeracy will be published on the council's intranet in December. Early indications are that a pilot scheme under the Primary Step project has raised attainment in literacy, and the Merseyside Online Project can be used as a tool to deliver aspects of the National Curriculum. Progress on connecting computers to the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) has been good.

84. Shortcomings have to be set against that progress. This part of the EDP is not a good planning document as most activities lack milestones, and some activities are aspirational, rather than deliverable by the LEA. Schools' view of support for ICT in the curriculum is poor; there is a sense of frustration and isolation amongst some staff; and there are too few training courses in basic ICT skills. Staff complain of inadequate support from the helpline dealing with ICT in the curriculum. The draft ICT strategy for support to schools is not well articulated, and is not closely linked to the priority.

Schools causing concern (EDP Priority 5 and also the subject of a recommendation)

85. The previous inspection found that the LEA was not able adequately to identify or support the range of schools causing concern. There was no clear specification of support for schools at different stages on the register of concern.

Targets and timescales for progress were insufficiently specific and governors were inadequately supported to play their part in school recovery.

86. The LEA has made very good progress in carrying out the previous report's recommendation that a coherent policy for identifying and intervening to support schools causing concern should be developed. It has also implemented EDP Priority 5 on this aspect of its work. The number of schools in special measures has been reduced from 15 (7 per cent of schools) in July 1999 to three (1.4 per cent) currently; this is well ahead of the LEA's target of eight. There are still too many schools with serious weaknesses but the LEA is confident that, following Section 10 inspections in the autumn term, the number will fall from 14 to its target for August 2000 of nine.

87. The LEA has carried out the necessary improvements in its support for schools causing concern with determination and vigour. A crucial step was the appointment of an intervention strategy manager to coordinate the implementation of the policy. An appropriate system has been devised which uses data to enable the early identification of schools that are not performing to a satisfactory standard. Schools that require additional support or intervention are placed on one of five levels in a register of concern. The LEA has placed over 50 schools at one of the lower three levels so that they can receive additional support to prevent deterioration. The register is reviewed regularly. Amounts of support and funding are appropriately differentiated between and within levels according to identified needs. Where necessary, the LEA has taken robust action to help replace heads and teachers, to remove delegated budgets and to appoint additional governors. It has also provided mentors for some headteachers and arranged partnerships with Beacon schools. When schools come out of special measures an appropriate exit strategy places them at level two for two terms so that they can be helped to maintain their improved performance.

88. Discussions with heads and governors of schools causing concern confirmed that the improvement in support is rooted in the LEA's clear and consistent strategy, which accords well with the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations. Sensibly, schools at level three, of which there is only one at present, are treated in many respects like schools with serious weaknesses or in special measures. For schools at levels three to five, the monthly project group meetings play a valuable role in improvement as they monitor progress and hold the school to account. Governors receive effective support that enables them to play a full part in their school's recovery.

89. Although the LEA has greatly improved its support for schools causing concern, it is aware that there is still much to do in strengthening its partnership with schools and reducing the number with difficulties. The school survey showed that schools are satisfied with the LEA's support in this aspect but an important indicator of increased effectiveness will be the number of schools that are found to have serious weaknesses or to require special measures by OFSTED inspections during the coming year.

Support for school management (EDP Priority 6 and also the subject of a recommendation)

90. In the previous inspection, the LEA's support for school management and development planning was found to be limited in range and effectiveness and not to be meeting the needs of the majority of schools visited, particularly in the secondary sector. The report recommended that assigned inspectors should have sufficient management and phase expertise to support schools in their development planning, and that the LEA should develop consistent criteria, agreed with schools, for effectively monitoring the implementation of development plans. The LEA is making satisfactory progress in implementing this recommendation.

91. Priority 6 of the EDP concerns supporting the quality of leadership and management, including school self-review. The lack of timescales in the Priority hinders evaluation, but the LEA has made satisfactory progress in implementing all these activities with the exception of the development of middle managers.

92. Evidence from OFSTED inspections shows that the quality of management and efficiency in Liverpool schools is below that found nationally, although it compares favourably with the LEAs that are the city's statistical neighbours. The quality of primary management is better than that in secondary schools. The results of the school survey, made in May 2000, showed low levels of satisfaction with support for senior and middle managers and for self-evaluation. The LEA believes that schools would now be more supportive because of improved relations and recent innovations; this was confirmed during the inspection by our discussions with groups of headteachers and governors.

93. The previous report described support for governors as sound. Since then, the LEA has made a major effort to recruit governors and the proportion of vacancies has been reduced to 2.8 per cent.

94. A significant improvement in support for school management stems from the enhanced role of the assigned officers (AOs) who each have fewer schools to support and monitor. In response to the recommendation of the last report, the SEB now has a better balance of phase and management expertise. AOs have been trained in development planning. The LEA had limited success in persuading headteachers to participate in the national Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) but there has been a significant increase in applications recently. Similarly, only a handful of teachers have successfully completed the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), but the LEA's efforts at awareness-raising have resulted in renewed interest. New headteachers are now well served by a comprehensive induction programme.

95. The LEA's programme of appraisal for headteachers functioned until July 2000, when it was superseded by the national system of performance management. The LEA has provided central and school-based training in performance management for all headteachers and the programme of training for governors is continuing. Performance management is the focus of two secondments this year, and three members of the LEA's staff have gained accreditation as performance management consultants in order to be able to advise schools.

96. The LEA accepts that support for middle management has been of inconsistent quality and often weak. A start has been made to improve this aspect and management training is to be offered to middle managers this term through cooperation between the headteachers' associations, an external provider and the LEA.

97. School self-evaluation has been given a high priority by the LEA in the past year. However, at this early stage, there is a lack of clarity among schools and officers about whether the AOs' role is to support schools' self-evaluations or to moderate them. In our view it is the latter that would challenge schools to improve.

98. An appropriate electronic school profile has been devised in collaboration with headteachers and successfully piloted in schools. The profile, which has been well received by schools, is part of the 'High Sights!' programme, which also includes guidelines for development planning. This guidance is an effective response to a recommendation of the previous report.

Support for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)

99. The LEA's provision for NQTs was recently inspected by HMI separately from this re-inspection. The authority has made considerable progress in fulfilling its role and is meeting its statutory responsibilities. The procedures used to confirm that NQTs have achieved the induction standards are rigorous, albeit costly. Schools visited valued the authority's work in validating their judgements and school mentors appreciated as a good model the SEOs' oral and written feedback to NQTs. This feedback focuses well on the national induction standards. Primary NQTs, however, are much more satisfied with the quality of the LEA's induction training than secondary NQTs.

In-service training

100. The previous inspection found that the LEA's in-service training programme was not sufficiently well matched to the needs of teachers and varied greatly in quality. The report recommended that a comprehensive rationale and framework should be produced for any proposed in-service training offered to schools. The LEA has made satisfactory progress in implementing this recommendation.

101. A suitable framework for in-service training has been established in that the LEA has carried out an audit of needs and is in the process of arranging and delivering the provision to meet those needs, although some developments are at an early stage. The main features of the provision are support for NQTs, management development and curriculum support. Evaluations of the training organised by the LEA over the past three terms have been very positive, with 85 per cent of respondents rating it excellent or good.

102. The new rationale for in-service training is comprehensive and is explained in the contract, which makes a commitment to raise the quality of teaching by supporting schools in meeting the continuing professional development needs of teachers. The LEA states that it will: ensure that good training opportunities are

available; offer secondments for professional development and spreading excellent practice; advise schools on professional development programmes; offer input into professional development programmes; advise on other providers of in-service training; and organise a programme of management development. A satisfactory start has been made on putting this rationale into practice.

Identification and dissemination of good practice (EDP Priority 7)

103. It is appropriate that the identification and dissemination of good practice is a Priority in the EDP. However, the Priority lacks coherence and the links between its four activities are tenuous. Sensibly, the LEA intends to improve the focus of this Priority in its next revision of the EDP.

104. In the survey, the schools rated the steps taken by the LEA to disseminate good practice as less than satisfactory. The LEA has not successfully implemented the key activity in the Priority, which is to develop a strategy for the systematic identification and dissemination of good practice. However, it is increasingly establishing productive links locally, nationally and internationally in its quest for improvement.

105. The contract commits the LEA to the identification and dissemination of good practice in teaching. There have been several positive developments, mainly concerning Excellence in Liverpool but also including teacher and headteacher secondments and school improvement projects. However, they currently lack a co-ordinated strategy to give them coherence.

Raising achievement at 16-plus (EDP Priority 8)

106. The actions in this EDP Priority are appropriate, and are underway or already completed. The LEA has created a senior officer post responsible for 14-19s within the school effectiveness branch (SEB), and the post-16 objectives of the SEB secondary team include improving participation rates, the levels of students' attainment, and course completion rates. An appropriate policy statement was adopted last year, which now informs 16-plus provision and the re-organisation of provision. OFSTED, the Further Education Funding Council, and the Training Skills Council have undertaken an area-wide inspection of 16-plus provision in Liverpool and a neighbouring LEA at the same time as this inspection. Evidence from that inspection shows that the majority of schools already provided most features of the policy statement, but in some cases link programmes operating through new consortia have helped to extend the curriculum range.

107. The outcomes of the LEA's work are not yet apparent in generally increased levels of attainment (provisional average point scores in A-levels in 2000 were lower than 1999, although GNVQ attainment was an improvement on 1999). However, provisional indications are that enrolment rates for Y12 have risen this year. Although there are several factors underpinning that development, the work of the LEA and its partners in providing better careers guidance may have played a part. The atmosphere of partnership has engendered stronger links between the community college and sixth forms, with the LEA facilitating that by, for example, extending the time limits on students' bus passes, to enable them to attend twilight

courses at the college. The area-wide inspection found that most existing careers education and guidance programmes in the schools are satisfactory.

108. The Liverpool Schools Consortium (LSC) has run training courses for subject teachers. This body, which is jointly supported by schools and the LEA, and has as its principal focus support to sixth form teachers, has also promoted networking sessions for teachers, and work on Curriculum 2000. LSC activity also encompasses new courses for teachers on Key Skills for 16-19 year-olds and the majority of schools have found this helpful. The LSC is also creating training links with higher education institutions. The work of the LSC (now part of the SEB) is well regarded by teachers, and the more structured support now provided by SEOs is proving helpful.

Music service

109. The previous inspection found that the music service had not consistently met its obligations to schools, some of which had withdrawn their custom. Since then the music service has been inspected by HMI, separately from this return inspection. The report found that the quality of provision overall is now good. Virtually all of the teaching observed was satisfactory or better and 70 per cent was good or better. The quality assurance system was found to be excellent. The service is well led and is managed effectively.

Excellence in Cities

110. The Excellence in Liverpool (EiL) initiative is a key element in the LEA's strategy for achieving greater school effectiveness. Its introduction came at a time of turbulence for the LEA. It is still at an early stage of development and educational outcomes, therefore, are not yet evident. However, overall, a very promising start has been made, particularly given the background of change in the LEA.

111. Some of the EiL developments, such as the siting of city learning centres and learning support units, have been complex and have involved major allocations of funding. Furthermore, the gifted and talented strand of work is a challenging initiative because it raises new policy issues for some schools. Considerable efforts have been made by the LEA to consult with schools from the development stage of EiL onward. Planning for the work across the different strands has been thorough and well considered, and close reference is made to the LEA's EDP priorities. Linkage with the work of other initiatives such as the two Education Action Zones is clearly mapped, as are links with external providers. The EiL project manager is closely involved with the work of ELLS management. However, the strategic and operational links between other EiL staff and the school effectiveness officers is less defined and currently relies too heavily on individual contact.

112. Sound progress has been made in developing the gifted and talented strand from early one-off enrichment projects to an understanding of the need to concentrate effort and resources into longer-term work designed to improve classroom effectiveness. In particular, good progress has been made in compiling a useful database. A decision has been made to appoint coordinators, the majority of

whom are not senior members of staff. Vigilance needs to be exercised to ensure that school senior managers give the coordinators effective support.

113. There are plans for four city learning centres. The strategy for locating these is reasonable, despite the complex issues involved. However, there is currently a lack of clarity in schools about the availability of funding for the proposed extended hours and for transport costs for partner schools. In addition, there is frustration at the delays in ICT linkage to ensure virtual access for partner schools. Roles and responsibilities in using the centres are not yet entirely clear.

114. Six learning support units are planned for the city, of which five are operational. The criteria for siting the units were sound. A proposed methodology has been agreed by the six LSU headteachers covering criteria for access, the curriculum and suggested models for provision, but detailed issues remain which require further consultation by the authority and rapid resolution.

115. The learning mentor strand of EiL represents substantial provision for pupil support, and the LEA has agreed to fund an additional three mentors to add to the three originally planned for special schools. This work is at an early stage of development but it has been methodically planned and implemented, and is supported by appropriate training. Nevertheless, the links with the work of other agencies supporting young people are not yet entirely clear, understandably, given the speed of recent developments. The LEA still has a major role to play in planning these links.

116. There are six specialist schools, offering a range of expertise with the potential to contribute significantly to disseminating good practice across the authority. The sense of some separation felt by the first specialist schools is beginning to dissipate as schools become more confident about the partnership which EiL offers. There are nine Beacon schools, some of which are very recently approved. There are sensitivities inherent in Beacon status but there are some early signs that Beacon schools are beginning to identify the different ways in which they can help to support and disseminate good practice, and other schools are beginning to see what Beacon schools can offer them.

117. There will be three mini-Education Action Zones with one already operational. The LEA's planning is thorough, business partners have been identified and a clear methodology has been agreed using the experience of the two existing EAZs.

Recommendations

In order to raise expectations the school effectiveness branch should, in discussion with headteachers and governors, modify the formula for generating indicative school targets so that it is more fully based on pupils' prior attainment.

In order to be more consistent with the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success the school effectiveness branch should reconsider its current assumption that, as a matter of course, all schools have an entitlement to regular visiting in addition to whatever may be needed for target setting.

In order to give further support to schools in using ICT to raise standards, the school effectiveness branch should revise the draft ICT strategy document to make it more coherent with the EDP activities, and should improve communications with schools to ensure that they are kept better informed of developments.

In order to maximise the benefits accruing from Excellence in Liverpool, education and lifelong learning service senior managers and EiL management should develop better systems for integrating the work of EiL with that of senior effectiveness officers.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

118. The previous inspection identified weaknesses in the authority's policy and practices for the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN). The report recommended that the LEA produce a revised comprehensive plan with quantifiable timescales and targets, outlining the LEA's proposed support for pupils with SEN, including the future role of special schools. It recommended that it should be integrated and costed into its overall strategy and the EDP.

119. New senior staff have been responsible for producing a special educational needs strategy document, which was issued in May 2000. The authority used seconded headteachers to assist in the process of developing the strategy and to consult widely with parents, teachers and other professionals concerned with the provision of education for pupils with SEN. As a consequence, the strategy has been very well received. It is a five-year plan which includes ten strategic objectives which have subsequently been translated into detailed action plans; these are costed with timescales and targets in relation to ten six-monthly blocks of time. This has provided a firm base for future planning. However, neither the strategy document nor the EDP makes any specific reference to the role and place of special schools within the LEA's overall plan, and this requires urgent attention.

120. The first set of targets has already been achieved. This includes a draft proposal for the future provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and the issuing of clear service specifications for each of the authority's support services, as well as the production of additional guidelines on assessment and annual reviews. Work has already begun on the second block of objectives and there is every indication that the authority will continue to make progress in moving the SEN agenda forward, although it may have to adapt its current plans in response to the views of stakeholders.

121. The proportion of draft statements of SEN prepared within the statutory period of 18 weeks is far too low (41.3 per cent for 1999-2000). The LEA recognises this and is taking action to reduce the backlog of cases; an additional member of staff has been appointed for this work. The authority is also committed to increasing the number of established educational psychologist posts. The new service specification and proposed service level agreements for the psychological service should contribute to shortening the time taken to complete statutory assessments.

122. The LEA is making every effort to coordinate its activities in relation to the provision to be made for, and the support to be offered to, pupils with SEN. However, while much has already been done to ensure that there is a common understanding of principle and practice concerning the inclusion of pupils with SEN in the LEA's resourced schools, there is still considerable variation of attitude and practice across the authority. The new strategy has not yet had time to take effect and important changes concerning the allocation of funds to schools, the development of centres of expertise and the review of the use of support assistants, which are fundamental to the effectiveness of the new proposals, have yet to be put into place. Increased funding for special schools to enable them to develop outreach and supportive functions has been approved but has not yet had time to translate into effective practice.

123. Similarly, the monitoring and evaluation procedures that have been proposed have yet to identify how much progress has been made in raising pupils' standards of achievement. The various surveys undertaken concerning support for meeting the needs of pupils with SEN indicate that progress has been made in improving provision, but this has been slow and from a very low baseline of acceptability. It is likely to take a year or more for the new strategy initiatives to show much effect in schools and possibly longer than this before real gains in pupils' performance are recorded.

Recommendations

To improve the quality of support provided for pupils with special educational needs, the education and lifelong learning service should:

- *improve its rate of preparing draft statements of SEN within the statutory 18 weeks by setting challenging annual targets;*
- *make clearer in its documentation what the role of special schools will be within the proposed concept of centres of expertise, and clarify how the changes will be brought about; and*
- *ensure that the monitoring and evaluation arrangements have clear criteria for identifying progress, and are focused as far as possible on the raising of standards of pupils with SEN.*

ACCESS

The provision of school places and school admissions

124. The previous inspection found that although the LEA had plans for reorganising primary school provision, there was likely to be a need for a further reduction of primary places and also for rationalisation of secondary places.

125. The report recommended that the LEA should undertake a forecast of surplus places in primary schools, and take appropriate action, and that it should consider amalgamating separate infant and junior schools existing on the same site. Satisfactory action has been taken on these recommendations. Birth rates have been appropriately analysed, taking into account cross-border movement, increasing educational inclusion, and new housing developments. The likely decline in primary numbers has been calculated, and it is envisaged that action to address the decline up to 2010 will take place in three phases. Elected members have sanctioned the first phase, which will, subject to consultation, include the amalgamation of a series of infant and junior schools. Twenty schools will be affected, leaving only a handful of separate infant and junior schools on same sites after 2002. This first phase of action will result in 1,900 places being removed. Officers are now working on detailed proposals for the second and third phases. The overall effect of this reorganisation would be that no more than 10 per cent of places in schools will be surplus by 2010.

126. The report also recommended that the LEA address the mismatches in demand and supply of secondary places, and consider the viability of some small secondary schools. Progress on this recommendation has been unsatisfactory. While the latest capacity figures show an average of 3.5 per cent surplus places across Liverpool secondary schools, there are substantial differences between individual schools. One school has 27 per cent surplus places, while another has more than 24 per cent over-capacity.

127. The authority faces a difficult task in seeking to balance its quite proper policy of assisting community regeneration by maintaining suitable secondary provision in particular areas, with the need to support and respond to parental preference. The latter has had a significant and adverse effect on pupil numbers in some of the inner city schools. Falling rolls over the next five years promise to exacerbate the problem. The School Organisation Plan appropriately summarises the need to take action, and officers have undertaken the necessary initial work to develop options. However, broader issues have impeded progress.

128. During the current year Liverpool has emerged as a possible location for a City Academy. The prospect of additional provision in an inner city area introduces a new factor into strategies to rationalise provision. This development is beyond the council's sole control in the short term, but heightens the necessity for it to be in a position to move very quickly and coherently to rationalise provision as soon as possible.

129. The problems are exacerbated by the current community secondary schools admissions policy, which is unsatisfactory and ineffective. The policy allows pupils

who live within a particular area, and whose parents express a preference, to have a guaranteed place at a school. There is a high level of successful appeals, mainly to schools which are already over-capacity, which may well be linked to the inability of this admissions policy to make a convincing case against an individual admission.

130. The council has failed to deal successfully with the difficulties it creates, although it has recognised the issues. A new policy was considered by elected members last academic year, but was withdrawn after opposition from some parents and because members considered they had insufficient time and options to consider the issue properly. Work is now underway on a revised policy, and members are to be offered options in November, with public consultation taking place soon afterwards.

Post-16 reorganisation

131. The previous report noted the small size of many sixth forms and recommended that the LEA take decisions on the implementation of a re-organisation of 16-plus provision. Members decided to implement a re-organisation, which took place in September 2000. This established three formal consortia, involving six schools. Informal collaboration involving a further six schools began at the same time. In addition, two schools previously having sixth forms have now been designated 11-16 schools. The aims of this action have been to offer a potentially wider curriculum to students, and to brigade, as appropriate, the best teaching of subjects on to one school site in a consortium.

132. The area-wide inspection showed that most Liverpool sixth forms are now of an adequate size for the provision offered and there has been an increase in numbers in some of the smaller sixth forms. In a minority of cases the sixth form is subsidising the main school, but in only a very few cases does the converse apply. The inspection also showed that while the consortia experienced a few teething problems on inception, and there are still some matters such as joint time-tabling to be resolved, in general terms the evidence currently available suggests that the new pattern of provision is reasonably appropriate. However, it will need to be kept under review in terms of curriculum entitlement and financing.

133. It is too early to establish whether the reorganisation will deliver improved attainment at 16-plus, but the LEA, having taken the decision to re-organise, is supporting that action appropriately. A senior executive officer was appointed in April 2000 to monitor and enhance the effectiveness of the range of collaborative activity. Four inspectors have been assigned to the three consortia, and to an informal collaboration. Monitoring visits by those officers and the LSC will result in a report to elected members this term. Plainly, the activities and progress on EDP Priority 8 materially advance the work of the range of the collaborative ventures. Bearing that work in mind, the LEA has met this recommendation.

Support for attendance

134. When originally inspected, the LEA was failing, particularly in the secondary phase, adequately to support schools' efforts to raise attendance. The main reason for this was the inconsistent work of the education welfare service (EWS) which,

though one of the largest services in the country, was not always providing adequate support or guidance. Education welfare officers (EWOs) followed differing working practices and procedures, the service lacked clear standards, and schools saw its work as primarily *ad hoc* and sometimes inadequate when most needed. Staff turnover was too frequent and the service had not done enough to minimise the disruption this caused to schools. The report therefore recommended that the LEA put systems in place to monitor support to schools and ensure that the work of EWOs is consistent, well-targeted and of a consistently high quality.

135. A great deal of work has been done on this recommendation, although results are not yet conclusive. Attendance is gradually rising in Liverpool schools and there has been some good practice. In our view, progress is at least satisfactory overall, but we note that, on the evidence both of the Audit Commission survey and the polls commissioned by the LEA, headteachers, particularly in the secondary schools, are not yet convinced of the overall effectiveness of the service. By contrast, the views of schools on the work carried out by their own EWO, as surveyed by the service itself, are much more uniformly favourable and a stark contrast to the frequently acid views expressed less than two years ago. A report by District Audit, issued in August 2000, also found that there had been a considerable improvement both in the management of the service and in the support provided.

136. The service has been extensively restructured and renamed. It is now called the pupil attendance and education welfare service (PAEWS) – and the change of name indicates a change of function – and is managed within the social inclusion unit of education and lifelong learning service. PAEWS is still a large service, but it has been extensively pruned, not least at the supervisory level, where its establishment has fallen by 33 per cent. The service retains some functions in respect of child protection and exclusions, but the bulk of its time is now spent in supporting a high level of attendance, a beneficial narrowing of focus.

137. These arrangements are still relatively new and need more time to settle down. The evidence of documentation, of interviews and of the response of schools, all suggest some uncertainty as to the precise operation of the new system. For example, the service functions listed for EWOs do not match those set out in the draft SLA to schools. The draft SLA was drawn up in consultation with schools. It reflects a decision, agreed by them, to make the service more ‘customer-focused’. The service is now described as ‘a centrally managed but school-focused service with each school being a stakeholder in service development and delivery’. What precisely this means is defined, for each school, in the annual strategic agreement, in which the school agrees with the service what priorities should be pursued for the coming year.

138. Each school has delegated to it an allocation of time based on an appropriate formula which accords most weight to identified need. Schools are involved in the determination of standards of service and referral criteria, and these are centrally monitored. Nevertheless, in practice, headteachers have relatively little autonomy. They cannot, for example, change their EWO. However, there is said to be little pressure for further delegation, either of responsibility or funding.

139. The management arrangements for the service appear to be working, but the evidence is by no means conclusive. The absence of a principal education welfare officer (PEWO) is, on the face of it, a weakness, but the involvement of the divisional heads in the planning of the social inclusion unit at least partly compensates for it, as does the developing linkage with the school effectiveness branch. Certainly, there were examples of effective transfer of information to enable the SEB to challenge schools where high rates of absence were related to inadequate provision.

140. Crucial to this are the provision and use of management information, and in this respect, as across all other aspects of provision for social inclusion, the development of the individual pupil database has been beneficial. The importance of analysis of patterns of non-attendance and a recognition of its significance for a number of aspects of school provision are now much more securely embedded in the LEA than before, and this is making possible joint working based on information.

141. The divisional heads, and other managers in the service, exercise close supervision of the work of EWOs – a supervision that gains in credibility from the fact that managers are themselves regularly in the field supporting staff in particularly challenging, sometimes dangerous, assignments. Formal supervisions occur at least once every six weeks, supplemented by joint working, and daily contact of an informal kind. At present, performance management in the service lacks a framework of sufficiently tightly defined competencies, although the SLA specifies detailed outputs and performance standards.

142. The LEA launched an attendance initiative last year which involved it with a number of external agencies and the media in a campaign, the slogan of which was 'it's cool to be in school'. It is inevitably hard to identify specific outcomes: the campaign not only highlighted the problem, however, but also helped to signal the commitment of the LEA to this area of work.

Strategy for ethnic minority support

143. The authority has recently taken significant steps forward in planning provision to raise the attainment of young people from ethnic minority groups. A strategic working group including officers from the education support branch and the SEB has been established to identify pupils' needs and to coordinate work on the ground, and a new post has been created within the SEB. At present, the LEA lacks reliable evidence about the attainment and exclusion from school of different groups, but it has wisely initiated a project to establish a more sophisticated system of self-identification of ethnicity than existed hitherto which will lead to the proper accumulation and analysis of data. Appropriate action is in hand to link the work of the minority support team and the literacy team. The provision of educational support to asylum seekers is being strengthened. Overall, this range of activity represents a sound attempt by the authority to provide an improved strategic response to the needs of ethnic minority groups.

Social exclusion (EDP Priority 4)

144. Actions taken to improve attendance support have already accomplished part of this Priority. However, beyond that, the action taken by the LEA on other aspects

of social inclusion goes further than was planned in the EDP and is much the better for that as this Priority was poorly conceived and defined originally.

145. Provision for the most vulnerable pupils is much more focused than ever before in Liverpool. Central funding has played a part here: all interviewees spoke of what had been accomplished with social inclusion pupil support (SIPS) funding and of what had been achieved through EiL. This has been accomplished by targeting quite large sums to specific needs, with a very clear idea of anticipated outcomes and a determination to check that they did in fact emerge. The LEA appears to have been better than most at converting a set of initiatives into a strategy, and at the heart of that, as yet embryonic, success in improving information and the will to use it to underpin discriminating intervention.

146. For example, the LEA has had some success, and appears to be on the brink of a major achievement, in reducing permanent exclusions through the use of two strategies. It has extended the continuum of possible interventions so that alternatives to exclusions are available which are palatable to schools. Also, it now employs officers whose role it is to act as advocates for the vulnerable, so that systems work as they are intended to.

147. In relation to behaviour, there has been a change in emphasis from provision for excluded pupils to provision intended to prevent exclusion. That change is accelerating, to the point where the LEA has decided to revise its exclusions target drastically downwards. The key to that achievement has been the appointment of two reintegration officers, whose role is to secure appropriate placements for young people at risk of falling out of the system. This is enabling the already existing pupil referral units, in conjunction with SIPS and the learning mentors, to begin to function as a support for continued integration within the mainstream. Consistent with that shift, the review of provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties proposes to extend the continuum of support to pupils currently educated in segregated provision, often at great expense, outside the city.

148. Whether this proposal works remains to be seen, but it combines a coherent strategy with a mechanism for making it work in the interests of individual pupils. At the same time, what are currently rather disparate sorts of provision are being brought together in a common purpose. For example, in Liverpool as elsewhere, black pupils are at increased risk of exclusion. Provision for pupils at risk has been made for some years in the voluntary sector, funded by the LEA, but without a formal SLA. That provision, the Elimu centre, is now to be brought into a more formal relationship with the LEA.

149. Liverpool has 1,162 children in public care – a very high proportion. About half of those children are in Liverpool schools. Others are scattered across Merseyside, largely as a result of the geographical distribution of the authority's residential care homes. The LEA has recently collected attainment data for those who are pupils in Liverpool schools, but (and not for want of effort) not for the rest. These data have already led to speedy action. For example, the realisation that the attendance of these pupils averaged only about 33 per cent, led to social inclusion pupil support-funded action which has doubled it. However, the database is not yet complete, nor can data at this stage be transferred electronically between the education and the

social services databases. Despite evident efforts by ELLS to improve provision for vulnerable children, schools still judge liaison between education and social services to be poor, although officers are by no means so consistently critical.

150. Overall, the picture in relation to this EDP Priority is one of promise rather than mature achievement. There are signs of coherence, clear thinking and encouraging outcomes. However, schools' criticisms on the fundamental issue of joint working with social services are a matter of concern.

Response to the report on the Stephen Lawrence inquiry

151. In general, the LEA is making a good response to racism. The report of the 1999 inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence (the Macpherson report) recommended that LEAs should establish procedures for reporting racist incidents. The LEA has been operating a racist incident reporting form since 1993 and has recently revised that form, subject to consultation. The draft form is appropriate, and should be easy to use. Returns from the earlier version of the form were analysed by the LEA resulting in reports to elected members on the frequency and location of racist incidents.

152. That work, and other work with partners, such as Churches' Action for Racial Equality, led to the development of a strategy for opposing racism in schools, thus reflecting another recommendation of the inquiry report. One aspect of this involves training for teachers, NQTs and governors on such issues as the significance of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, the place of race equality in the curriculum, and the development of good practice. Another aspect involves the production by the LEA of curriculum materials to promote the study of diversity through the curriculum, using local examples.

153. The proportion of minority ethnic school staff in Liverpool is low in comparison with the minority ethnic population of Liverpool. While local access courses exist, the LEA has not gone far enough in encouraging more candidates from minority ethnic groups.

Recommendations

In order to improve the management of secondary school places, the city council should develop strategies for the rationalisation of small secondary schools which are closely aligned to the outcome of the City Academy development. In conjunction with this, urgent attention should be given to the revision of secondary admission arrangements.

In order to ensure that the improvements in attendance support are sustained, education and lifelong learning service senior management should keep under review the current arrangements for management of the pupil attendance and education welfare service.

In order to ensure that provision for vulnerable children is of good quality, the city council should mount a cross-cutting Best Value review of its services for these children within two years.

In order to increase the numbers of teachers from minority ethnic groups, the strategy and resources branch should consider how it could contribute to making current access courses more effective in attracting candidates from minority ethnic groups.

In order to raise expectations the school effectiveness branch should, in discussion with headteachers and governors, modify the formula for generating indicative school targets so that it is more fully based on pupils' prior attainment.

In order to be more consistent with the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success the school effectiveness branch should reconsider its current assumption that, as a matter of course, all schools have an entitlement to regular visiting in addition to whatever may be needed for target setting.

In order to give further support to schools in using ICT to raise standards, the school effectiveness branch should revise the draft ICT strategy document to make it more coherent with the EDP activities, and should improve communications with schools to ensure that they are kept better informed of developments.

In order to maximise the benefits accruing from Excellence in Liverpool, education and lifelong learning service senior managers and EIL management should develop better systems for integrating the work of EIL with that of senior effectiveness officers.

APPENDIX

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to make it a more useful working document, a further review should be made of the EDP. This should ensure that activities are defined with consistent clarity and with reference to a reliable audit of need. It should ensure that success criteria are consistently quantified where that is feasible. Priority 4 (Promoting Social Inclusion) and Priority 7 (Identifying and Disseminating Good Practice) should both be overhauled and made more coherent.

In order to ensure maximum coherence between the LEA's work and that of the Education Action Zones, the school effectiveness branch should work with zone officers to align the various monitoring and evaluation systems in use.

In order to increase the transparency of the delegation of funds, to promote greater autonomy by schools, and to test the effectiveness of the service, the arrangements for the delegation of school meals to primary and special schools should be reviewed and a Best Value review programmed within the next year.

In order further to improve performance management, ELLS senior management should articulate clearly the links between performance management, objective-setting, and appraisal.

In order to encourage the tackling of the backlog of maintenance, ELLS should ensure that schools can more readily identify their buildings' repairs and maintenance responsibilities within the Asset Management Plan, and the strategy for the monitoring of school balances should be linked accordingly.

To improve the quality of support provided for pupils with special educational needs, the education and lifelong learning service should:

- improve its rate of preparing draft statements of SEN within the statutory 18 weeks by setting challenging annual targets;*
- make clearer in its documentation what the role of special schools will be within the proposed concept of centres of expertise, and clarify how the changes will be brought about; and*

ensure that the monitoring and evaluation arrangements have clear criteria for identifying progress, and are focused as far as possible on the raising of standards of pupils with SEN.

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