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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF  
BLACKPOOL  
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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AUDIT COMMISSION**

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## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

## INTRODUCTION

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

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the education department and in other Council departments, and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 44 schools. The response rate was 84 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to seven primary, one junior, two infant, four secondary schools and two special schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the schools, and provides value for money. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools in the LEA was also considered.

## COMMENTARY

4. Blackpool became a new unitary authority in April 1998. It serves the largest seaside resort in Britain, with a mobile population committed to patterns of working that are not precisely replicated elsewhere. The town has substantial pockets of deprivation, with a prevalence of low-paid employment. To a greater extent than is the case with more conventional populations, holidays are taken outside the most popular periods, and often in school time.

5. The LEA had a difficult start. It was, and remains under-funded. It inherited too many schools causing concern and a pattern of Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision that was anomalous and too expensive. Support services were initially poorly organised and, importantly, elected members had limited experience of running education. There has, moreover, been little continuity in senior management or in the advisory service. In the circumstances, the leadership given by the director must take a great deal of the credit for what has been achieved.

6. The LEA faces an unusual and far from easy task in raising aspirations and promoting a faster rate of improvement. If it has not wholly succeeded in that task, it is not surprising given the above matters. Attainment in the schools is, in general, neither high enough nor improving fast enough. That was true before April 1998 and it is still true now.

7. The education department is now a viable organisation. The schools are aware of its imperfections; at the same time, they are clear that it is much better than what was there before. The LEA has gained their trust, partly through genuine openness in its response to their needs and partly because it has involved headteachers closely in planning and policy making. It has greatly improved the quality of service delivery, has contributed significantly to raising the quality of education in schools, and has given appropriate priority to supporting the needs of the most vulnerable pupils.

8. Most of its functions are effectively carried out, in particular so its support for the following areas:

- teaching literacy and numeracy in primary schools;
- behaviour and attendance;
- senior management in schools;
- provision of data;
- schools in special measures;
- the provision for under-fives;
- children in public care;
- pupils with no school place;
- governors;
- payroll and financial services; and
- Information and communication technology (ICT) strategy and infrastructure.

The following, however, are areas where the LEA is not effective:

- consistency of challenge in schools regarding under-performance and targets which are too low;
- support for administrative ICT;
- support for personnel issues;
- allocation of resources to support SEN and schools causing concern;
- coherence of strategic plans, including the Education Development Plan (EDP); and
- support for acquiring external funding.

9. The national agenda presses as hard on this small, new LEA as on larger, more established ones, and it is an agenda which places considerable emphasis on the capacity to plan well. This remains a central weakness and only partly attributable to the high turnover of staff. Many corporate plans are being redrafted but the implications for education are not fully considered. In particular, the LEA is rightly beginning to address issues relating to high pupil mobility but there is not a coherent, Council-wide strategy.

10. The LEA has many strengths. It is an improving LEA and is already taking action to remedy weaknesses it has identified for itself. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of recent changes in ICT administration, personnel services, the inspection and advisory service and the local management of schools (LMS) formula for funding schools. The Cabinet structure adopted by the Council for administering education is still relatively new. Some significant weaknesses remain, notably in planning. The LEA needs to take urgent action to resolve the shortage of primary places. For these reasons we conclude that the LEA's promising improvements are fragile and have not yet had a significant impact on pupils' standards of attainment. Therefore, a re-inspection is planned within two years.

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

### **Context**

11. Blackpool became a new unitary authority on 1 April 1998 having previously been part of Lancashire LEA. It is a coastal town, with leisure and tourism the main industry. The population was approximately 150,000 in 1998. The transient nature of the population is exacerbated by the seasonal demands of the tourist industry. Some schools have a mobility factor of over 40 per cent. The LEA has pockets of severe deprivation; hostels and bed and breakfasts offering permanent accommodation are concentrated in these areas.

12. The proportion of pupils in Blackpool schools eligible for free school meals is above the national average (26.4 per cent in primary schools compared to 19.0 per cent nationally, and 24.4 per cent in secondary schools compared to 16.2 per cent nationally). The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups (1.6 per cent) is very low.

13. In January 1999 the school population was 20,239 in 44 maintained schools. There are 23 primary, five junior and five infant schools. There are seven 11 - 16 and one 11 - 18 secondary schools. Six secondary schools are mixed, one is for boys only and one for girls only. The two single-sex schools admit both boys and girls into Year 7 for the first time in September 2000. There are three all-age special schools which cater for four areas of pupils' needs: moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, and physical disabilities. One hundred and sixteen pupils with SEN are educated out of Blackpool. The proportion of pupils in special schools is in line with the national average at primary level, and above it at secondary level.

14. In January 1998 3.8 per cent of pupils in primary schools had statements of special educational needs (SEN), which is above the national average of 3.1 per cent; at secondary level the LEA<sup>1</sup> figure (5.3 per cent) was well above the national average (3.9 per cent).

15. The average number of children per class is 31 with 14 per cent of pupils in classes over 30. The pupil-teacher ratio is above the national average.

16. There are 49 pre-school providers catering for approximately 95 per cent of all four-year olds.

17. In 1997 the proportion of Y11 pupils (57 per cent) staying on in full-time education was significantly below the national average of 68 per cent. In 1998, the LEA figure fell to 55 per cent.

### **Performance**

18. Attainment on entry to primary schools is below the national average. Attainment is below national averages at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4. At Key Stage 3,

Level 5 performance in all reported tests is in line with the national average but fewer pupils attain Level 6 in mathematics and science than nationally.

19. In 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining five or more grades A\* - C was 36.5 per cent compared to 47.9 per cent nationally; the increase from 1998 to 1999 was in line with that observed nationally.

The percentage of pupils at Key Stage 2 attaining Level 4 or better in English and mathematics improved by 4.7 per cent and 8.0 per cent respectively. This was below the national rate of 5.6 per cent in English and 10.0 per cent in mathematics and continues a steady relative decline over the last four years. This is demonstrated in the table below which charts the difference between the LEA and the national average.

	1996	1997	1998	1999
English	+0.8	-0.8	-4.3	-5.3
Mathematics	+2.4	-0.4	-1.6	-4.2

20. Further analysis of OFSTED reports indicates that in the seven primary schools that have been inspected twice, improvements have been made with regard to quality of education, school climate and management. Overall, progress has been greater than nationally.

21. Half the secondary schools have been inspected twice. On this limited evidence, there have been improvements in the quality of education and school management but progress in standards is more mixed.

### **Attendance and exclusion**

22. Attendance rates are below national averages in primary and secondary schools. Since the LEA was established there have been improvements at primary but not at secondary level overall.

23. Permanent exclusion rates have declined significantly in the last two years.

### **Funding**

24. Since Local Government Reorganisation, Blackpool Borough Council has spent significantly below its Education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). As a result, Blackpool schools, especially primary schools, are funded at a level below those in statistical neighbours and unitary authorities nationally.

(£M) Education SSA	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
Budget spend as % of SSA	93	94.5	97
Actual spend as % of SSA	97	97.5	-



The variation between budget and actual spending results largely from the difficulty in identifying the full cost of SEN provision after Local Government Reorganisation.

25. In 1999/2000 the primary and secondary schools received on average £110 and £41 less per pupil, respectively, than schools in similar authorities. This is despite the fact that the LEA's Education SSA is 4.7 per cent more than the average for similar authorities. The indications are that the gap in primary funding has been reduced in 2000/2001.

1999/2000	Primary ISB*/pupil	Secondary ISB/pupil
Blackpool	1567	2256
Statistical neighbours	1677	2297
All English LEAs	1733	2433

\* Individual school's budget

26. In its first year, the LEA adopted the principle that it would maintain the level of service inherited from Lancashire County Council despite the substantial change to its Education SSA. Since then it has increased its budget in excess of the increase in SSA. Although the LEA met the Government targets for passporting the SSA increase in 2000/2001, the remaining shortfall against SSA is a cause for concern, given that levels of attainment are not rising fast enough.

27. In 1999/2000 the retained element of the LEA's Local Schools' Budget (LSB) was 21 per cent but for 2000/2001 the retained proportion of the LSB fell to 18.4 per cent and is now in line with the Government's requirements. Central expenditure on statutory and regulatory duties was well below the average for statistical neighbours and all unitary authorities in 1999/00.

28. Retained expenditure on SEN is high. For 2000/2001 the budget per pupil is £260, the fifth highest in England and the highest outside London. In the light of the government's target for the delegation of 85 per cent of the LSB in 2001/2002, this is unsustainable.

29. Primary school balances are high. In four-fifths of primary schools a balance of over five per cent was carried forward into the financial year 1999/2000 and the average balance was eight per cent. As yet, the LEA has not taken effective action to encourage reduction in the overall level of primary school balances, despite the requirement in its LMS scheme to justify balances of over five per cent.

30. Three out of the eight secondary schools brought forward deficit balances in 1999/2000, although only one will carry forward a substantial deficit (£130,000) into 2000/2001. There is a three-year plan for this deficit to be cleared which in the light of increasing student numbers appears feasible.

### **Council structure**

31. The Council consists of 44 Members (24 Labour, 16 Conservative and four Liberal Democrat). From July 1999 the Council has piloted one of the alternatives

recommended for Modernising Local Government. It has adopted an Executive Committee which now has 11 members; one member has an allocated responsibility for education.

32. Five Policy Review Committees (PRCs), one of which is for Education and Cultural Services, have been set up. The Education PRC aims to scrutinise decisions of the Executive Committee, review proposals for the latter and allow elected members to undertake their representational role as councillors.

33. Few members had experience of making decisions on educational matters at the outset and, appropriately, education officers have provided in-service training, largely by raising awareness of issues prior to meetings of the Education Committee, and then subsequently, the PRC. The new arrangements are not yet fully effective. In particular, the PRC has not established itself as an independent group which provides constructive challenge to the Executive Committee.

34. The education department is headed by a director of education and cultural services with four assistant directors heading divisions for cultural services, management services, pupil support, and quality and development. There has already been a high turnover in key personnel. For each of the three divisions principally concerned with school improvement there has been a change in assistant director. This has hindered service level planning, although the everyday impact on schools has been reduced by the director and others rallying to the cause. In addition, there has been a change in principal adviser, English adviser and early years consultant, as well as significant changes within the early years service, education and social work service (ESWS), personnel and schools' library services. These changes have contributed to unsatisfactory support to individual schools for periods of time. In the LEA's formative years, recruitment and retention of key staff have been significant issues.

### **The Education Development Plan**

35. The EDP has some strengths but several important weaknesses. It is based suitably on an audit of the LEA's schools. It reflects national priorities well and identifies high pupil mobility as a particular local issue that will need to be tackled with some rigour (see Section 5).

36. The priorities set for school improvement are appropriate. They are, briefly, in priority order: literacy, numeracy, quality of teaching, attendance, behaviour, leadership and management, and schools causing concern. The activities in support of the priorities are clearly set out and there are detailed actions for implementing the plans. There are suitable references in a number of priority areas to developing the use of ICT, but there are also some omissions. In particular, there is little reference to early years, and there are insufficient details about early intervention strategies for SEN and behaviour; this has been a high priority for the LEA. Strategies for raising the standards of underachieving groups of pupils and gifted and talented pupils are too vague.

37. The EDP sets out a reasonable range of actions to improve the quality of teaching, although it is questionable whether this should be a separate priority. The

plan's criteria of success are not always sufficiently related to action, which militates against measuring progress towards achieving the priorities. This is exacerbated by overlapping priorities.

38. The performance targets listed in the EDP are very challenging. The LEA is on course to meet its numeracy target in Year 2002 at Key Stage 2 but not its literacy target. The target for GCSE higher grades implies a much faster rate of progress than that previously achieved, and the plans within the EDP do not inspire confidence that the target will be achieved. For instance, initiatives relating to numeracy and literacy in the secondary sector have been delayed a year.

39. The LEA has made very good progress in reducing exclusions and is on course to achieve targets set for improving attendance.

40. Monitoring arrangements are very good. For each of the first five priorities there is a steering group that meticulously checks that specified actions are carried out. For the first five priorities, the steering group comprises officers and teacher representatives; for the last two, this role is carried out by the senior management team. Reports from these groups are circulated widely, including to schools and to the PRC. The system provides a sound framework for evaluating progress on the implementation of the EDP. However, written reports indicate that evaluation is not sufficiently rigorous. For instance, the director's report to the PRC does not give sufficient weight to the large shortfall in the Key Stage 2 literacy results or make clear the actions that will be taken as a consequence. There is an annual report on progress to elected members, but the scrutiny by the PRC, and hence the Executive Committee, needs to be strengthened.

41. The first EDP was approved by the Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) in 1999 with conditions. A revised plan was resubmitted and approved in March 2000, but still subject to three conditions. In particular, the LEA has been required to draw up a literacy shortfall action plan. It is expected by the DfEE that further changes may be required following this inspection. The EDP is feasible and is fully costed. This report highlights the need to improve links with other major plans, improve allocation of resources to greatest need, and strengthen actions to meet targets.

42. An audit of SEN provision is included as an annex to the plan. There is insufficient detail in the plan itself to explain the strategy for raising the attainment of SEN pupils. Other supporting documentation gives more information but is not cross-referenced to other plans.

43. The Behaviour Support Plan is a useful plan, clearly written and user-friendly. Improving pupil behaviour is a priority in the EDP which is well formulated, based on an effective audit with appropriate supporting activities and sensible and achievable targets.

44. The LEA carries out customer satisfaction surveys but there has not yet been time to establish a comprehensive set of quality assurance procedures. However, in practice there is effective evaluation, including an externally funded service review in 1999. This stems from the compactness of the LEA, the ready access of officers to

schools, and the effective working of consultative groups, such as the Joint Steering Committee (JSC). This has resulted in changes in strategy for ICT administration and ESWS, for instance.

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

45. The Council is improving the allocation of resources to its education priorities but there are still weaknesses; namely, the sufficiency of overall funds, resources for primary schools, centrally retained funds for SEN and inconsistencies in meeting the needs of schools causing concern, including those with high pupil mobility. These issues are explained elsewhere in this report.

46. The LEA has completed a thorough review of the LMS formula which it inherited. Implementation of the revised programme began in April 2000. The gap in funding between the primary and secondary sectors has been identified and there is a consensus between all schools and the LEA on how this should be resolved. Included within the formula is a factor which provides additional funding for schools with high pupil mobility, although this by itself does not meet the needs of a minority of the LEA's priority schools (see section 5). However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the changes.

47. In some areas the LEA deploys its resources very well to meet need, for instance, the educational psychology service (EPS) and ESWS. The inspection and advisory service (IAS) has only just reached full complement and a sufficiently focused pattern of working is not yet established.

48. With the exception of in-service training, the LEA does not provide information to schools on other service providers, nor does it seek to provide benchmarking information to schools to help them in applying the principles of Best Value in their decisions on staffing and on the procurement of goods and services. The Best Value Performance Plan is clear, but does not include targets for 2000/2001 against a number of key performance indicators. A programme of thirteen Best Value reviews is set out in the plan. No reviews had been completed prior to the inspection. However, all but one of the reviews are scheduled for completion by the end of 2002/2003. Consequently, the LEA is satisfactorily prepared for Best Value, but it has not adequately prepared its schools.

### **Recommendations**

#### **In order that schools receive funding appropriate to their needs:**

- review the alignment and sufficiency of resources for schools and of LEA services in the light of the need to raise the standards of attainment of pupils.

#### **In order to ensure that more effective control is exercised over SEN expenditure and to secure more flexible use of resources in schools:**

- a strategy for the delegation of a greater proportion of the SEN budget should be devised and implemented.

**In order that schools deploy more effectively their delegated budgets:**

- encourage the reduction of primary school balances.

**In order to secure Best Value:**

- provide schools with clear, comparative cost information on services and on school budgets.

**In order to improve the strategic planning the LEA should:**

- strengthen the scrutiny role of the PRC and evaluation of progress in implementing the EDP;
- seek ways to improve the consistency of services to schools and review the management and recruitment of staff.

## **SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Implications of other functions**

49. The EDP sets out the strategy for school improvement. Its strengths and weaknesses are analysed in Section 1 of this report. For a young LEA, sound progress is being made in improving the quality of education in Blackpool's schools, but progress in raising standards is more mixed and there is much to do to reach year 2002 targets for GCSE and for literacy at Key Stage 2. Practical support for pupils with SEN has improved but the quality of statements is unsatisfactory. The LEA has laid good foundations at the operational level for developing good practice in promoting social inclusion.

50. Weaknesses have undermined the school improvement strategy. These have largely been remedied in traded management services, although support for ICT administration and personnel services are not yet secure. Schools report that they receive more funding since the unitary authority was established, but they are still not funded at the levels required.

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

51. The LEA's monitoring of, support for, and intervention in its schools are satisfactory overall. The LEA has clearly defined monitoring, challenge and intervention. The principles are well understood by the schools but not the way in which resources are allocated. There is inconsistency, however, in the degree of challenge to schools and not all monitoring visits to schools are necessary.

52. The (IAS) is one of three teams in the LEA's Quality and Development Division. It works closely with the other two which coordinate professional development, and research and analysis. Supported by headteachers, the LEA initially adopted a lean central staffing structure in order to maximise funding for schools. Subsequently, it became clear that this decision had led to gaps in provision. This, together with staff turnover, has meant that the LEA only reached its full complement just prior to the inspection. The team is now adequate in size to help schools to improve in key areas. All of the IAS time is rightly allocated to EDP priorities. Specialist curriculum coverage is reasonably broad, and gaps in expertise are appropriately filled by secondments, part-time consultancy and the deployment of staff from higher education.

53. Advisers are competent and well-motivated. Their contribution to school improvement is well regarded by headteachers, particularly in secondary and special schools. They work efficiently, and their written records of visits to schools show a good understanding of their characteristics and development needs. The link advisers know their schools well, but their effectiveness in challenging under-performance and low targets varies from good to unsatisfactory. The LEA has gone to some lengths to provide support in the absence of full-time staff, including the deployment of an experienced headteacher to support schools causing concern.

54. In its first two years the LEA clearly sought to gain the acceptance of its schools. This has been achieved through good consultation procedures and co-operative working with schools. There are two visits per term to each school which may have been justified initially, but not now, given the good data on each school; this means that the IAS is not deployed as effectively as it might be. The school visits revealed some confusion among headteachers as to the levels of IAS support to which they are entitled when there is cause for concern.

55. The IAS has been very stretched to meet the demands placed on it and has worked very hard to meet the need. The new assistant director, however, has identified the absence of a formal performance management system and training based on an audit of need. The effectiveness of the service is being actively reviewed.

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

56. The LEA provides a comprehensive, high quality set of data to its primary and secondary schools. The data provided highlights strengths and weaknesses in each school's performance and sets it in a local and national context. The service is highly valued by schools, although the anonymity of the data does reduce the potential for disseminating good practice.

57. The use of data by the LEA is more uneven. It is used well to monitor the work of schools and identify schools causing concern. This has not always been followed-up rigorously to ensure resources are targeted to areas of greatest need, but practice is improving. The LEA collects data for those pupils supported for English as an additional language, but this is only one sub-group of pupils from minority ethnic groupings. It is not able, therefore, to evaluate whether the needs of all groups are being met.

58. In the schools visited, the provision of data for target-setting was sound. However, about a fifth of the schools visited adopt too cautious an approach and there is inconsistency in the challenge from the LEA link adviser when this occurs. This results in the aggregated schools' targets being less than the LEA target. The EDP states that all schools were asked to raise their targets in the year 2000 by five per cent. This was an unrealistic request at such short notice and there was consequently little positive response by the schools. Some LEA targets for 2001 have been revised and the LEA is now planning to revisit some schools where the targets are judged to be too low.

### **Support for literacy**

59. Support for the teaching of literacy and the LEA's implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in primary schools are sound. This was not the case initially, when too few schools were supported, given the high proportion causing concern. Support for secondary schools is too limited, but a programme is being developed.

60. At Key Stage 1, reading standards are below national averages, and writing standards are well below. The percentage of pupils attaining Level 4 at Key Stage 2

is also below the national average. Between 1996 and 1999 standards rose in the primary schools, but at a slower rate than nationally. In order for the LEA to meet its Key Stage 2 literacy target for 2002, the percentage of pupils reaching Level 4 will have to rise by 19 points. This is a very challenging task. As a consequence the LEA was required by the DfEE to produce a Shortfall Literacy Action Plan in March 2000.

61. OFSTED visits to monitor the implementation of the NLS have acknowledged the progress being made but revealed a number of weaknesses. There was a lack of challenge in setting suitably ambitious targets and link advisers needed training to ensure that their monitoring and reporting were consistent from school to school. Some of the reporting-back from the NLS staff to schools lacked the precision needed for the advice to be of full use. The School Library Service gave inadequate assistance to schools. Only four schools had been selected for intensive support in the first year of the NLS. These weaknesses were, to some extent, attributable to staff turnover.

62. The LEA has worked hard, and largely successfully, to resolve these problems. Some schools have been persuaded to raise their targets and link advisers have had training on lesson evaluation. An additional consultant is being funded and the number of schools receiving intensive support has been doubled to eight. In all but one of those schools visited, the increase in support led to significant improvements. In the school where improvement had been insufficient, this was due largely to the inability of the school to respond to good external assistance. Lines of management accountability within the LEA's NLS scheme are clear.

63. The improvements noted above are reflected in the Audit Commission school survey where support for literacy is rated highly.

### **Support for Numeracy**

64. Support for the teaching of numeracy at primary level is sound and some aspects, such as the provision of on-site guidance to schools, are good. Support for secondary schools is at an early stage but a programme of support is being devised.

65. Standards in mathematics are below national averages at Key Stages 1 and 2. At Key Stage 3 they are above national averages. Although the LEA's rate of improvement between 1998 and 1999 was only eight per cent compared with a national rate of ten per cent, it is in line to meet its targets for pupils achieving level 4 at Key Stage 2 in 2002. The LEA would be helped significantly here by improving the results of girls at this key stage. They are well below the average for girls nationally, and there is considerable scope for improvement.

66. There is sufficient support in the primary sector, with six schools being given intensive support and a further 15 receiving help at a less intensive level. The selection of schools has been based on fair criteria, including an analysis of performance data. An extra consultant has been appointed in order to improve support for primary schools.



67. The school survey showed that headteachers in primary, secondary and special schools rate highly the LEA's support for numeracy. The school visits confirmed this in the primary and special schools. In particular, those schools receiving intensive support have made solid progress in teaching numeracy. In schools visited which had been involved for a number of years through a pilot scheme, there is clear evidence of a rise in standards. The conference run for secondary staff was regarded as stimulating, but more time will be needed for the effects of the numeracy project to show at this level.

68. The quality of training for primary schools is sound. However, as with literacy, some schools set unambitious targets and the difficulty of disseminating training in very large primary schools, with only one mathematics co-ordinator, is a serious concern. Progress appears to have been made by the National Numeracy Strategy staff, however, and increasing efforts are being made to focus support onto individual class teachers, especially those in greatest need.

### **Support for ICT**

69. The LEA has been very successful in creating a good infrastructure and implementing the National Grid for Learning (NGfL), but support for ICT across the curriculum has been a weakness.

70. The LEA provides good support for NGfL and has made rapid progress in developing a communications infrastructure, recommended hardware, and high quality software chosen for its relevance to schools. All schools are connected to the local grid for learning and the Internet, and the LEA aims for all to gain fast broadband connections within the current year. All schools have had ICT consultancy and all have ICT development plans. Ninety six per cent of primary teachers and 33 per cent of secondary teachers have received some LEA-organised ICT training. The planning and management of the strategy are major strengths of the LEA.

71. LEA support for using ICT in the curriculum has been limited but this has been acknowledged and the LEA has helped schools to identify effective training. The LEA's knowledge of pupils' standards of attainment is limited, although recent inspection reports indicate that the progress made by both primary and secondary pupils is better than it is nationally. The provision of advisory staff is now sufficient to support the LEA's ambitious development plans. The LEA has rightly begun to focus increasingly on the curriculum, the effectiveness of teaching and standards of pupils' ICT capability.

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

72. Currently, one primary school is in special measures and two primary schools have been identified as having serious weaknesses. A further four primary, and one secondary school, are on the LEA's central register of schools causing concern. Approximately one-sixth of the schools were causing concern in 1998 and so, appropriately, they are afforded a high priority in the EDP.

73. The LEA provided effective support to a secondary school that was already in special measures and this contributed to its good progress and subsequent removal from this category. There is a similar success story for a primary school that was classified as having serious weaknesses. The support for other schools causing concern is more mixed and varies from good to unsatisfactory.

74. The LEA has evolved a sound structure for dealing with schools causing concern. It has a good knowledge of its schools through monitoring, and this is used to identify schools potentially causing concern. The principal adviser then coordinates a case conference involving finance officers. There is a written report and a course of action is decided. Confidential reports on progress are then reviewed regularly by the senior management team. A weakness is that the action plan for a school does not specify the additional resources allocated to the school; in two schools the degree of support was less than needed, partly due to changeovers or pressures on link adviser support.

### **Support for governors**

75. The LEA provides very effective support for governors through the governor services team, officers and inspectors. Governors and headteachers are right to value these services highly.

76. There is a clear mission statement that covers the recruitment and retention of governors and the provision of training, advice, guidance and clerking, together with the strengthening of communications between governors and the LEA. The levels of service are readily accessible through a clear service level agreement (SLA), bought-into by virtually all of the schools. The current proposal to transfer the governor services team from the LEA's management services division to its quality and development division would make it easier for the team to draw on the expertise of the IAS. A current weakness is that there is inconsistency in reporting practice by link advisers to governors.

77. Guidance on the conduct of governors' meetings is authoritative and well regarded. The clerking service is also rated highly and the LEA rightly tries to provide a continuity of officers for each school. An excellent governors' handbook concisely outlines the nature of the governing body's role. The LEA gains a good insight into the thinking of governors, and their effectiveness, from the various consultation procedures in place.

78. Training courses and conferences are well planned, delivered and evaluated. When inspection reports have revealed weaknesses in governance, the LEA has been assiduous in targeting a variety of training and guidance to bring about improvement. Governors believe that the LEA has succeeded in making the training accessible and well focused on local needs.

### **Support for school management**

79. LEA support for school management is sound. The LEA intervenes decisively and appropriately on management issues when the need arises. This is based particularly on the knowledge acquired by the link advisers as they carry out their

work in the schools. The LEA is developing its self-review strategy. Data provided by the LEA are used by schools to set targets but it is not clear how these data are also used to inform planning, or what the LEA role in the process has been.

80. All schools have sent delegates to courses on self-review run jointly by the LEA and a private contractor. School senior managers, who were in particular need of such training, were guided towards it by link advisers. The courses are very highly regarded by headteachers. It is too early to judge their overall impact but in some schools where management is already effective there have been clear benefits, for example, in sharpening up the evaluation of teaching, the tracking of pupils' progress and in long-term planning. In other schools visited, however, there had been less impact and a minority of headteachers will require further LEA guidance in order fully to exploit the benefits of this training.

81. There is no documented induction programme, but in practice, recently appointed headteachers have received sound support. Senior staff who have participated in headteachers' and deputy headteachers' management development programmes rate them highly. Conferences for headteachers and deputy headteachers cover issues of clear relevance to the securing of school improvement. Support for senior management, therefore, is adequately comprehensive and sound in quality. Support for middle managers is sound too. Accredited programmes are run in conjunction with a local university for middle managers in secondary schools, and for primary school co-ordinators; these are valued by the schools.

82. Given its small size, the LEA has wisely provided a modest range of training courses. A complementary strategy has been to provide schools with information about training by alternative providers, and this is valued by the schools. The LEA successfully supports regular meetings of primary subject coordinators, but this is more random for heads of departments in secondary schools. A consequence of a 'lean' IAS is that the LEA has not always had the resources to target underachieving subject departments in secondary schools.

83. No headteacher was appraised in the last academic year while government guidance was awaited. The support for newly qualified teachers is good.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to raise standards:**

- improve the support for the teaching of literacy and numeracy in secondary schools;
- take steps to help schools to use ICT to teach other subjects; and promote dissemination of good practice between schools, and from outside the LEA;
- clarify and implement strategies for improving in-service training in large primary schools.

**In order to improve the effectiveness of management, steps should be taken to:**

- ensure that centrally funded IAS visits to schools are fully in line with the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success;
- improve the effectiveness of the IAS in challenging under-performance and targets for improvement;
- establish a programme of appraisal for headteachers.

## **SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

### **Corporate planning**

84. This is a young LEA and many plans are still in draft form. There is an interim Corporate Plan for 1999-2000 and a draft plan for 2000-2005. This sets out the corporate vision and core values and articulates how the Council will contribute to the Community Plan (2000-2005). The latter is also out for consultation and includes six priorities, one specific to education, namely 'Lifelong Learning'.

85. It has been a significant challenge for a new unitary authority to respond to a very demanding requirement by central government to produce an extensive range of plans. This has been exacerbated by turnover of key personnel in the education directorate. Deadlines have been met but some plans, such as the EDP and the Early Years and Childcare Development Plan, did not initially meet specifications and revisions have been necessary.

86. At this stage of development of the authority there is a lack of coherence between over-arching plans and those already in existence. For instance, the Community Plan contains targets for attainment which are inconsistent with those set out in the EDP; the Lifelong Learning Plan makes no reference to Early Years targets; and there are no targets in any of the LEA plans seen for improving the staying-on rate at 16 plus, which is currently very low.

87. Education merits only a brief mention in the Corporate Plan. The Council has been successful in bidding for external funds from the Single Regeneration Budget but this has not involved the schools sector significantly and opportunities have been missed. An application to set up an Education Action Zone (EAZ) was formulated with the principal aim of making better provision for high pupil mobility. It was not successful and contained little evidence of a co-ordinated strategy involving several agencies (see Section 5). At the operational level the schools report that liaison with Social Services and the Health Authority is very good and effective. The widely held view in schools is that education is a high priority with the Council but this needs to be more clearly reflected in funding and corporate initiatives.

88. There is a sound management team for the education service, but it has only recently reached full complement after a period of instability. Members are well supported by officers and advice is generally sound, but there are instances when implications for policy and resources should have been more clearly highlighted. Reciprocally, members are supportive of officers and make timely decisions.

89. There is no consistently applied performance management strategy. An effective system has been established in the EPS and is well under way in the ESWS; however, in several other services, including the IAS, procedures are still being developed.

90. Consultation with schools (headteachers, governors and teachers) is very good across the spectrum of educational issues and this is confirmed in the school survey. Schools perceive the LEA as being very responsive and feel they are enabled

effectively to contribute to decision making. The strength of the partnership is exemplified by the consultation procedures and subsequent adoption of a revised LMS funding formula. The LEA has been successful in cultivating a harmonious approach with the headteachers of primary, secondary and special schools, even on thorny issues such as funding.

91. A key advisory group is the JSC which comprises headteachers and officers. Three divisions in the education department have an advisory group, and there are groups monitoring the progress of the EDP and specific current issues. The extra workloads are readily accepted by the headteachers because of the importance they attach to a working relationship with the LEA and the positive outcomes that ensue. It is an extensive, time-consuming structure but one that meets the needs very well of a developing LEA. However, the demands on schools will need to be monitored. The LEA strategy of rotating membership helps to spread the load.

92. The Council regards the Education Forum, which comprises a range of groups, including the teaching unions, as a key consultative group. The Forum's effectiveness is less apparent since the change to a Cabinet structure, and its role needs to be reaffirmed and consolidated.

### **Management services**

93. Overall, after a poor start in certain areas, there has been a substantial improvement in traded management services, but there are still some weaknesses. These services are provided through a set of SLAs, some of which offer a range of service options. The SLAs vary in quality and generally do not set service standards other than response times. For some services, for example personnel, costings are still rudimentary.

94. Focus groups for major traded services involving representatives from schools have recently been established, and these are used to evaluate the quality of services provided and to identify areas for improvement. Where weaknesses in service provision have been identified, the LEA has taken swift remedial action.

95. Financial advice to schools is good. Schools may choose from three levels of service, the full service providing advice on budget planning, budget reconciliation and monitoring reports to governors. All but one school purchase at least the minimum level of service. Detailed support and guidance material provided to schools is comprehensive and clear.

96. The LEA does not provide sufficient co-ordinated advice and guidance to schools on gaining access to external funding.

97. Payroll services are now sound after a very poor start. The LEA started with inadequate systems and, as a result, many casual and part-time staff did not receive monthly payments in 1998/1999. Management action has resulted in recent improvement and error rates compare favourably with unitary authority benchmarks. Schools report that the service is more responsive since the designation of named contacts.

98. Personnel support to schools is improving steadily after a poor start but cannot be judged to be satisfactory until the LEA has sufficient education personnel expertise to offer schools a secure service. Work on the revision of policy and procedures was poor, as was casework support, and contracts for new staff were not issued within the required period.

99. A new service manager took up post in the autumn term 1999. SLA documentation was completely revised for 2000/2001 and a new 'mini-team' structure established to provide coherent support to schools. The priority order for major policy revision has been agreed with headteachers, and work on policy and procedures has much improved. Whilst the issuing of contracts is generally administered more effectively, there is still some evidence of delay in issuing contracts for part-time staff.

100. The day-to-day support for schools' administrative ICT is poor. In April 1999 the LEA terminated its arrangement with Lancashire County Council for the provision of support in schools. As a small LEA, Blackpool could not deploy the range of expertise necessary to provide training and support, and schools were largely left to fend for themselves. This weakness was recognised and external consultants have produced recommendations that have just been put into place, but it is too early to judge their impact. The schools, however, are confident that the new arrangements will produce the required level of support.

101. Support for computer hardware is satisfactory. The LEA's bulk purchasing contract has delivered reliable equipment at reasonable cost, and a new contract with a local commercial supplier will provide cover for maintenance at times of peak demand.

102. The LEA has not yet taken advantage of its excellent NGfL infrastructure to promote electronic transfer of data. The necessary protocols are being developed to allow file transfers, and data exchange is the top priority for the Schools ICT Admin user group, but e-mail is under-used.

103. Support for buildings' maintenance, offered through an SLA, is satisfactory. Schools are generally in a good state of repair. The LEA offers a flexible service package with four levels. The service is well regarded by schools who feel that it has continued to improve, although there is some dissatisfaction with the approach taken to charging.

104. The LEA offers a three-level package to schools for out-of-hours security. This is an innovative service which evolved from the Borough Council's car park security services. Schools value the service, which many report has significantly reduced out-of-hours vandalism on school premises.

105. The LEA's legal service has significant expertise in education law and is regarded by schools as very effective.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the quality of strategic planning:**

- ensure there is coherence between major plans;
- devise and implement performance management procedures;
- build on current initiatives to formulate a coherent, Council-wide strategy to tackle issues arising from high pupil mobility.

### **In order that the schools receive effective support:**

- increase the level of professional expertise in personnel services;
- monitor the effectiveness of the new arrangement for supporting administrative ICT.

### **In order that the effectiveness of data collection and communication between LEA and schools be improved:**

- make better use of the ICT infrastructure for electronic data transfer.



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

### **Strategy**

106. The LEA completed an outline review of its special educational needs (SEN) provision promptly on becoming a unitary authority. The more obvious and readily addressed shortfalls and anomalies in SEN support provision were dealt with promptly and effectively. Where support services were judged to be functioning poorly, they were re-organised and brought under central management. The LEA has a clear vision of the model of provision it seeks to provide, and is consulting with the schools. As yet, however, there is no agreed overall strategic plan which draws together the many strands of development.

107. An appropriate SEN policy document has been produced following good consultation with schools and other interested parties. The LEA audited its SEN provision in detail, so that the degree of mismatch with its requirements was clearly established. Initiatives, such as the establishment of additional resourced facilities for special needs in mainstream schools, were agreed and moved into the planning stage without delay. The willingness of mainstream schools to house units for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties reflects well on schools' sense of ownership of the policy, and their relationships with the LEA.

108. A consultation document taking the first step towards the agreement of the future pattern of special education provision and, in particular, the pattern of special schools, was in draft at the time of the inspection. This means that the LEA is late in establishing the target toward which the many initiatives are striving. It would have been appropriate for the EDP action plans to make more specific reference to the developmental requirements within the SEN provision, additional to that provided in Annex 4. An SEN Action Plan has been produced setting out processes of review and development, but most targets are expressed in terms of review rather than outcome.

109. Evidence from the School Survey indicates that primary schools rate the LEA's planning and implementation of SEN strategy better than satisfactory, and that the other two phases rate it as at least good. Evidence from school visits provided an almost identical picture. It is clear, too, that evident weaknesses in provision have been tackled effectively and development continues.

110. The proportion of pupils with statements of SEN is high. The LEA's aim to reduce reliance on statements is therefore appropriate, but is served in the Action Plan only by a general intention to enhance early intervention and in the Pupil Service Division Business Plan by funding pupils at Stage 3. There are no targets for the reduction in number of statements in the SEN Action plan or Pupil Support Division Business Plan. A useful development is the establishment of the panel for statutory assessments.

111. The LEA's commitment to inclusion of pupils with SEN in primary and secondary schools is manifest in policy and practice. Sixty-three per cent of pupils with statements of SEN are on the rolls of primary and secondary schools. The

importance of inclusion is underlined by the allocation of some resources, which combined with other support and encouragement, are enabling effective links to be forged between schools across the phases. The school survey and visits to schools confirm that this area of development attracts significant approval from schools generally.

112. A comprehensive programme for development of the quality and deployment of the service has been drawn up and is proceeding. The quality of support provided by all centrally deployed services is good and highly regarded. However, the large team of special needs support assistants is not always well deployed and this contributes to the high cost of providing a statement.

113. The quality of planning varies from poor (the statementing team's Action Plan, lacking targets and outcomes) to good (the SSA Co-ordination Business Plan with its clear 'Success Performance Indicators' which relate to outcomes, including measures of pupils' enhanced attainment).

### **Statutory obligations**

114. The LEA meets its statutory obligations with respect to SEN. Statements of SEN are produced in a timely manner; over 90 per cent are produced within the recommended 18 week period. They are also regularly redrafted when pupils' needs or provision change significantly. However, most of the large sample examined were found to be of unsatisfactory quality because their commentaries on pupils' needs and on the suitable provision to meet them are too brief, and general to be of real value. Visits to schools provided some evidence of recent improvement, but it was clear that the weaknesses found in the content of statements is reflected in the quality of individual education plans.

115. Annual reviews of pupils' needs are carried out in timely fashion, but few schools set a suitable range of clear and quantifiable targets for pupils in annual reviews and in their individual education plans. The LEA has not addressed this weakness. New pro formas for the annual review process have been drafted by the LEA, but these do not offer sufficient guidance to ensure that clear targets are set and reviewed.

116. The LEA has produced clear and helpful guidance for parents of pupils with SEN, both in terms of introductory booklets and readable, detailed explanations of statutory processes. An effective partnership scheme has been established with parents.

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

117. A significant feature of the LEA's overall expenditure is the amount allocated to meet SEN (£260 per pupil compared with the unitary average of £152). Support for individual pupils provides satisfactory value for money because of the good quality of the support. However, as reported in Section 1, the level of funding is not sustainable, and therefore not satisfactory.

118. Support services, the EPS and the advisory team provide a good range and quality of support through formal and informal in-service training to enhance schools' abilities to meet SEN. A positive development has been the greater emphasis given to early intervention. The support services have produced a good range of written guidelines, supplemented by individual support where needed, for primary and secondary schools with respect to meeting SEN. A booklet for schools on the roles and deployment of centrally funded SSAs promotes good practice.

119. A great number of opportunities are provided for special and mainstream heads, deputies and special educational needs co-ordinators to meet together, and there are many advisory panels associated with SEN provision. These all have a valuable additional function in supporting the exchange of expertise and a good degree of insight into the functions of the LEA for all schools.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the management of SEN:**

- delegate more funding to schools and, in the light of this, make improvements to the way in which schools' expenditure for SEN is monitored;
- establish appropriate timescales for the development and implementation of strategic priorities, including targets for the reduction in the number of statements;
- provide better guidance to schools to improve the quality of statements and individual education plans, and monitor progress.

## **SECTION 5: ACCESS**

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

120. The LEA has taken vigorous and effective action to tackle the major school planning issues it inherited in the secondary phase, and now has a secure grasp on the forecasting of pupil numbers.

121. The School Organisation Plan (SOP) outlines a clear and sensible strategy to meet a forecast rise in secondary numbers of 15.8 per cent from 1999 to 2003, by which time the secondary-aged population will be nine per cent above the current physical capacity of LEA schools. This strategy is based upon allowing popular schools to expand, and reducing capacity in two schools which currently have a high level of surplus accommodation. In addition, from September 2000 the LEA's two remaining single-sex schools will become co-educational. This has already resulted in a threefold increase in parental preference for the previously under-subscribed single sex boys' high school. The LEA has secured finance for this substantial building programme.

122. The SOP is not sufficiently clear about the strategy for primary provision and this now requires urgent action. Currently, 64 per cent of primary schools have rolls above their recorded physical capacity. Whilst the primary population is set to decline by 2.1 per cent over the next three years, this will not eliminate the problem of overcrowding. The shortage of primary places helps explain why the LEA has the highest average Key Stage 2 classes in England: 31.4 compared to the national average of 28.3.

123. The LEA plans to start detailed consultation on its strategy for primary places in the summer. It has secured funding for an extra 296 primary places. It experienced difficulty in convincing the DfEE of the need for extra places and this has undoubtedly delayed the primary school building programme and caused concern in a number of primary schools.

124. The LEA's plan for 'Reducing Infant Class Sizes' is satisfactory and seeks, wherever possible, to provide for the expansion of popular schools. Progress on the plan is satisfactory and Blackpool has fewer Key Stage 1 pupils in classes of over 30 than the national average. The LEA has secured from the DfEE the additional capital it requires to fulfil the class size requirement.

### **Admissions**

125. The administration of admissions is sound generally, but the difficult issue of non-routine admissions is not yet satisfactorily resolved.

126. The LEA inherited a high level of admission appeals – approaching 30 per cent for both primary and secondary phases. Through its school planning measures in the secondary phase, policy changes and clearer communication with parents in general, the number of appeals for routine admissions has been reduced by a half, which is a substantial achievement. For the last completed year, 94 per cent of

parents achieved their first preference, although this relatively high figure is partly explained by the high percentage of parental appeals upheld, which is a source of frustration to a significant minority of primary schools.

127. Admission guidance for parents is attractively produced and generally clear.

### **Asset management planning**

128. The LEA has met the requirements of the asset management planning process. The condition surveys were conducted effectively and schools report a high degree of satisfaction with their accuracy. In order to provide sufficient data on 'suitability', the LEA has engaged two consultants and this work is currently in progress.

129. The management of building projects is satisfactory overall. Although there have been some difficulties with elements of the secondary capital programme, including slippage and poor quality work on a major project, these have been resolved through the rapid intervention of the director who takes a close interest in capital works. The director has also successfully negotiated with schools in cases where the capital allocation was felt insufficient to meet need.

130. The LEA has given good support to one Private/Public Sector Partnership scheme to provide sports facilities at a high school.

131. The approach to bidding for New Deal for Schools funding improved as the programme progressed. Diocesan representatives report a high level of satisfaction with the way bids were compiled and with the operation of the LEA in general.

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

132. The LEA makes effective provision for pupils receiving home tuition because of illness or pregnancy. The learning support service ensures that the progress and development of almost 40 pupils educated at home by their parents are monitored systematically, with reports to the ESWS as appropriate.

133. Provision for excluded pupils is sound at secondary level. There is one Pupil Referral Unit which caters well for Key Stage 3 pupils. For Year 11 pupils there is effective liaison with a Further Education College, but the lack of a permanent base affects adversely the programme for Year 10 pupils. The LEA is well placed to provide full time education to excluded pupils by the year 2001.

134. There have been acknowledged weaknesses at primary level but plans are well advanced to remedy these. For instance, from September 2000 a Special Education Resource Facility for Key Stage 2 pupils will start at a designated primary school followed by similar provision for Key Stage 1.

### **Attendance**

135. Attendance rates are below the national averages and the LEA has rightly made improving attendance a high priority. It is pursuing this aim vigorously. There has been some success with individual schools, but overall rates are proving difficult

to move and authorised and unauthorised absences are too high. The difficulties are heightened by factors associated with the tourist industry and by high pupil mobility.

136. Support provided by the ESWS is generally good and rated highly by the schools; inconsistencies in the quality of support have occurred in a minority of schools due to staff shortages. The service is strongly led and well deployed according to need. Targets for improvement are agreed with schools and are regularly monitored with termly written reports to schools. There is a helpful and effective contribution to the Social Inclusion project. Service links with the work of the youth offending team, the social services and the police are close and effective. The ESWS is more expensive than the average for unitary LEAs but, in difficult circumstances, is providing good value for money.

### **Behaviour support**

137. The LEA has effective arrangements for behaviour support. The number of permanent exclusions halved in the last full academic year.

138. The Behaviour Support Service (BSS) is the main provider. It is well managed and well deployed. Primary pupils who are subject to fixed term exclusions receive small group tuition followed by good support to ease reintegration. Other behaviour support is provided through support teachers and assistants. Schools report this support to be good. The service also provides valued advice for teachers and other school staff on behaviour management and behaviour modification. This is complemented by a sound range of in-service training courses.

139. The effectiveness of support is enhanced by the ESWS pupil tracking system. The Blackpool exclusions register and admissions group, which has inter-agency membership, is also effective. A further useful innovation is the allocation of a responsibility to a teacher within BSS for monitoring all exclusion processes and assisting parents and pupils.

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

140. The LEA discharges its functions for child protection effectively. In the school survey, primary schools rated arrangements, guidance, support and training for child protection as never less than satisfactory, and a majority as good. Secondary schools rated them good or better and special schools very good. The LEA also takes appropriate steps to meet its statutory obligations for health and safety through an effective structure of advice and monitoring, overseen by administrative and committee mechanisms.

### **Children in public care**

141. Blackpool has 269 children of statutory school age in public care. This is high and about twice the nationally expected rate. Liaison between the education and social services is good at all levels. Information on attainment is collected, acted upon, monitored and reviewed. This is supported by visits to schools and judgements in the school survey. It is further evidenced by appropriate cross-referencing between major plans, such as the Quality Protects Management Action

Plan and the Children's Services Plan, which were produced by Social Services, and the EDP and BSP.

### **Pupil mobility**

142. The LEA has researched the effect of pupil mobility on standards of achievement and attendance across the LEA. The proportion of non-routine admissions in 1998 was high; ten per cent in the primary sector and six per cent in the secondary. The analysis highlights the fact that the adverse impact on a significant minority of schools is very pronounced, not only on standards attained by the transient pupils, but also those attained by other pupils in the school. It adds significantly to the difficulty of setting meaningful and realistic targets. There are constant disruptions to normal classroom routines and the extra administration saps the energies of the school.

143. From a low base when it took over as a unitary authority, the LEA has assimilated good data and has used this to take action. The LMS formula has been adjusted to provide extra funding for schools with high mobility. Standards Fund money was also used in 1998/1999 to enable five primary schools and two secondary schools to appoint attendance officers. In practice they were used extensively by schools to target transient pupils, and handle relevant, very time-consuming administrative procedures. Subsequently, the secondary schools have been able to continue under the school inclusion initiative supported by a central LEA project team. The money allocated to the primaries is relatively insignificant and this worthy initiative has, at least temporarily, considerably slowed down in this sector. A working party is now considering the way forward.

144. The LEA has identified this local issue and is pursuing it with much greater vigour than was the case prior to its establishment. There are already signs of improvement. In particular, there is a highly effective system for identifying newcomers and signing off leavers from the LEA, and an impressive tracking mechanism for pupils moving within Blackpool.

145. There is not yet, however, a fully coherent strategy. The LEA did submit a bid for an EAZ based on all LEA schools. The proposal was innovative and attempted to meet a real need, but there were weaknesses in the plan. It was not sufficiently targeted at schools in greatest need, nor were intended outcomes identified. The submission was weak on details of inter-agency working and of how other corporate initiatives impinged on the issue; for instance, housing policy, given that many of the transient pupils are categorised as homeless.

### **Minority ethnic children**

146. LEA support for the small numbers of minority ethnic pupils is inadequate. The LEA has incomplete data on the attainment of such pupils and not all those with needs are receiving support. There is good provision for Traveller children secured through a SLA with Lancashire County Council.

147. The LEA has issued sound advice on the reporting of racial incidents but this needs updating in the light of the Macpherson report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

### **Social exclusion**

148. The LEA has placed a high priority on tackling social exclusion and developing socially inclusive policies and practices across the education service. This is especially so in the area of SEN and provision for the most vulnerable pupils. With one exception, minority ethnic pupils, the LEA has identified clearly the numbers and kinds of pupils at risk of social exclusion and has developed comprehensive systems to ensure not only that no pupil is lost from sight, but also that appropriate and timely support is accessible. The Blackpool Out of School Register and Admissions panel has played an increasingly important part in these developments. A social inclusion plan was put out to consultation in June 1999. This sets challenges, including challenges for the education department. It identifies the problem, raises issues and identifies actions for consideration, but as yet, there is no agreed strategy incorporating education.

### **Recommendations**

**In order that overcrowding in primary schools be reduced, and a higher percentage of parental first preferences met without recourse to appeal:**

- develop a primary school planning strategy which takes account of the high level of transience in the pupil population.

**In order that support for minority ethnic children meets needs:**

- update the advice on the recording and reporting of racial incidents in light of the McPherson report of the Inquiry into the Death of Stephen Lawrence;
- improve support for minority ethnic pupils based on analysis of need.



## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **The LEA strategy for school improvement**

#### **In order that schools receive funding appropriate to their needs:**

- review the alignment and sufficiency of resources for schools and of LEA services in the light of the need to raise the standards of attainment of pupils.

#### **In order to ensure that more effective control is exercised over SEN expenditure and to secure more flexible use of resources in schools:**

- a strategy for the delegation of a greater proportion of the SEN budget should be devised and implemented.

#### **In order that schools deploy more effectively their delegated budgets:**

- encourage the reduction of primary school balances.

#### **In order to secure Best Value:**

- provide schools with clear, comparative cost information on services and on school budgets.

#### **In order to improve the strategic planning the LEA should:**

- strengthen the scrutiny role of the PRC and evaluation of progress in implementing the EDP;
- seek ways to improve the consistency of services to schools and review the management and recruitment of staff.

### **School improvement**

#### **In order to raise standards:**

- improve the support for the teaching of literacy and numeracy in secondary schools;
- take steps to help schools to use ICT to teach other subjects; and promote dissemination of good practice between schools, and from outside the LEA;
- clarify and implement strategies for improving in-service training in large primary schools.

#### **In order to improve the effectiveness of management, steps should be taken to:**

- ensure that centrally funded IAS visits to schools are fully in line with the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success;
- improve the effectiveness of the IAS in challenging under-performance and targets for improvement;

- establish a programme of appraisal for headteachers.

### **iii. Strategic management**

#### **In order to improve the quality of strategic planning:**

- ensure there is coherence between major plans;
- devise and implement performance management procedures;
- build on current initiatives to formulate a coherent, Council-wide strategy to tackle issues arising from high pupil mobility.

#### **In order that the schools receive effective support:**

- increase the level of professional expertise in personnel services;
- monitor the effectiveness of the new arrangement for supporting administrative ICT.

#### **In order that the effectiveness of data collection and communication between LEA and schools be improved:**

- make better use of the ICT infrastructure for electronic data transfer .

### **iv. Special education provision**

#### **In order to improve the management of SEN:**

- delegate more funding to schools and, in the light of this, make improvements to the way in which schools' expenditure for SEN is monitored;
- establish appropriate timescales for the development and implementation of strategic priorities, including targets for the reduction in the number of statements;
- provide better guidance to schools to improve the quality of statements and individual education plans, and monitor progress.

### **v. Access**

#### **In order that overcrowding in primary schools be reduced, and a higher percentage of parental first preferences met without recourse to appeal:**

- develop a primary school planning strategy which takes account of the high level of transience in the pupil population.

#### **In order that support for minority ethnic children meets needs:**

- update the advice on the recording and reporting of racial incidents in light of the McPherson report of the Inquiry into the Death of Stephen Lawrence;
- improve support for minority ethnic pupils based on analysis of need.

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