**Wolverhampton**

**Local Education Authority**

**Inspection Report**

**Date of Inspection: May 2004**

**Reporting Inspector: Brian Sharples HMI**

A report from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in conjunction with the Audit Commission (AC) under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

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## Basic information

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|---|---|
| Name of LEA: | Wolverhampton Local Education Authority |
| LEA number: | 336 |
| Address of LEA: | Wolverhampton City Council<br>Civic Centre<br>St. Peter's Square<br>Wolverhampton<br>WV1 1RR |
| Reporting Inspector: | Brian Sharples HMI |
| Date of Inspection: | May 2004 |

# Summary

## Introduction

Wolverhampton is a city which has experienced many changes over the last 20 years. There has been a decline in its manufacturing base and a small decline in its population. It is ranked as the 35th most deprived authority in England. The average unemployment rate is around 6%, well above national rates, but this masks some very diverse levels of unemployment in the various wards across the city. Wolverhampton is a place of great ethnic and cultural diversity with a good history of integration. Over a fifth of the population considers themselves as being of minority ethnic heritage origin. Within this context, the city has responded well to meet the challenges it faces. Great emphasis is placed on the value of lifelong learning and social inclusion. A very real challenge is the raising of skill levels in the local workforce to meet the demands of both traditional and new industries. The city is successfully developing a comprehensive Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy aimed at reducing the disparities in opportunity and quality of life across Wolverhampton's varied local neighbourhoods.

Standards of attainment in the schools across the local education authority (LEA) are below average overall. In 2003, performance in the three core subjects at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and for students achieving one or more A*-G grades in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), were all below national averages. The performance at five or more A*-C grades in the GCSE improved and was in line with the national average. When compared to statistical neighbours[1], schools consistently perform at least in line and or better across Key Stages 3 and 4, with a varied picture across Key Stages 1 and 2.

There have been some significant changes both within the council and the education and learning service since the previous inspection. The council's system of committees has now been replaced by an executive structure which comprises a cabinet of 10 councillors, including the council leader and deputy leader. The previous nine council departments have been replaced by five broad service groups. Each service group is led by a director. The council has reorganised its decision-making processes to reflect the five broad service areas. As part of this restructuring, lifelong learning education services are now organised in three new directorates: strategy and resources, access and inclusion, and quality and improvement.

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[1] Wolverhampton LEA's statistical neighbours are: Walsall, Coventry, Sandwell, Bolton, City of Derby, Oldham, Salford, Southampton, Rochdale and Middlesbrough.

**Main findings**

**Summary:** Wolverhampton is a highly satisfactory LEA.  Progress in addressing the great majority of recommendations from the previous inspection has been highly satisfactory, with the most notable improvements in the support for special educational needs (SEN) and information and communication technology (ICT).  Elected members and all officers provide strong leadership and commitment to raising standards across the city.  The strategy for school improvement is good and is underpinned by a strong ethos of partnership working.  Schools have greater confidence in the LEA and work effectively with officers through the school improvement partnership.  Support for early years education is very good.   The LEA knows well its strengths and weaknesses and is rightly investigating why it has more success in raising standards in secondary rather than primary schools. Its response in addressing some areas of concern, such as the support for looked after children and arrangements for performance management has been slow.  However, recent structural changes and staffing appointments contribute greatly to the judgement that the capacity for further improvement is good.

| Areas of strength | Areas of weakness/for development |
|---|---|
| **Corporate leadership of education** | |
| • Leadership by elected members and senior officers<br>• Clear strategic plans that link well together<br>• Good financial management and targeting of resources to priorities<br>• Very good strategy and structures to support early years childcare and education | • Underdeveloped performance management arrangements |
| **Strategy for education and its implementation** | |
| • Strategy for school improvement<br>• The school improvement partnership<br>• The LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools, and assessing and supporting those most in need | • Unrealistically high LEA targets, and the gap between these and aggregated schools targets<br>• Attainment  in Key Stages 1 and 2 |
| **Support to improve education in schools** | |
| • Support for school leadership, management and governance including school self-evaluation<br>• Support to raise standards at Key Stage 3<br>• Financial services to support school management<br>• The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement | • Lack of a clear policy and guidance for primary schools to support their work with gifted and talented pupils |
| **Support for special educational needs** | |
| • Progress in implementing the strategy for SEN and in supporting schools in their work with pupils with SEN<br>• Support for parents | • Insufficiently ambitious targets for the reduction of statements |
| **Support for social inclusion** | |
| • Support for behaviour in schools<br>• Monitoring and evaluating schools' promotion of social inclusion | • Provision for, and the attainment of, children looked after by the council<br>• Attendance in primary schools |

**Recommendations**

| **Key recommendations.** |
|---|
| **Promoting continuous improvement:** ensure that success criteria in all LEA service, business and improvement plans are specific and measurable. |
| **Strategy for social inclusion:** the council clarify its role in relation to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership in leading the development of more integrated service provision for vulnerable children and young people. |
| **Child protection:** accelerate the development of an agreed set of threshold criteria in conjunction with other agencies. |
| **Looked after children:** create a single development plan which integrates the actions and initiatives to improve the attainment of looked after children. |

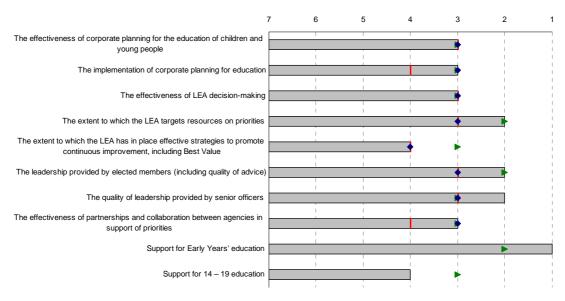| **Other recommendations** |
|---|
| **Corporate leadership of education** |
| |
| **Strategy for education and its implementation** |
| |
| **Support to improve education in schools** |
| **Gifted and talented:** develop a policy and guidelines for the work of primary schools with gifted and talented pupils to match that available for secondary schools. |
| **Support for special educational needs** |
| **Strategy for SEN:** set more ambitious targets for the reduction of statements and the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. |
| **Support for social inclusion** |
| **Support for attendance:** specify and publish criteria for allocating resources to schools and a framework for setting attendance targets with schools. |

## Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

**Summary table of judgements**

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people | | | | | | | |
| The implementation of corporate planning for education | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of LEA decision-making | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value | | | | | | | |
| The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice) | | | | | | | |
| The quality of leadership provided by senior officers | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities | | | | | | | |
| Support for Early Years' education | | | | | | | |
| Support for 14 – 19 education | | | | | | | |

The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

**Corporate planning for education and its implementation**

1.      Corporate planning remains highly satisfactory.  The implementation of planning has improved since the previous inspection and is now also highly satisfactory.

2.      The leadership provided by elected members is good.  There are close working relationships between councillors and senior officers. Effective partnership work between the council and the local strategic partnership has resulted in a good community strategy and corporate plan which have perfectly aligned priorities.  Corporate priorities are ambitious but achievable and affordable.  These, in turn, are reflected in the strategic planning across the education service.  The 'strategic plan for education' is a key bridging document between corporate planning and education service planning and is the forerunner to the LEA's single education plan.

3.      The council's medium-term financial planning is sound and includes a three-year commitment to pass on fully annual funding increases to schools.  Annual budget-making is timely and a result of good consultation.  Additional resources have been targeted effectively on educational priorities, for example through the use of Neighbourhood Renewal funding to enhance the ICT provision of broadband connectivity for schools.

4.      Since the previous inspection the council has introduced a cabinet structure which is proving to be effective in improving its leadership and decision-making.  Decisions are timely and carried out after thorough consultation and there is an effective system for

determining when decisions are made on specific issues and by whom.  The council is able to make difficult decisions, for example as shown recently in the reduction of school places through the amalgamation of four schools.

5.       A strong ethos of partnership working exists across the authority.  Since the previous inspection, the work between schools and the LEA has developed particularly well.  This is typified through the school improvement partnership and its board and well-developed management of school improvement and associated resources.

6.       The council places a high priority on the regeneration of Wolverhampton and the crucial role that lifelong learning and social inclusion have to play in the process.  This agenda has provided a focus for some effective inter-agency work between directorates, services and wider external partnerships.  A good example of this co-operative, multi-agency work can be seen in the development of the 'learning quarter' in the city centre, providing access to lifelong learning for various age groups across the city.

7.       However, systems for monitoring performance against plans and targets, both within and across the council, lack a consistent structure.  This has meant that the quality of monitoring and reporting on the work of different services is still variable and lacks a consistent approach.  There is also no standardised performance management system in place across the authority, which has resulted in inconsistent monitoring and appraisal of service performance.  The cabinet has recently carried out a review of its own structures and taken the decision to reorganise the way cabinet, scrutiny and overview boards function and to implement a formal performance management system.  The work of the cabinet and scrutiny panel for education and lifelong learning has improved and elected members are generally kept well informed by officers of progress on all educational matters.  However, it is too early to see any significant impact as a result of these new structures.

**Targeting of resources**

8.       Wolverhampton's targeting of resources to priorities has improved and is now good. Education has been a strategic priority for many years and spending has always exceeded government guidelines[2] although this has declined from over 104% in 2000-01 to just over 101% in the current year.  The authority is good at acquiring additional external funding to support its key developments, notably in early years, in areas of deprivation and, most recently, in the £9.0m of Private Finance Initiative credits for its innovative joint 14-19 virtual workspace project with another LEA.

9.       Financial management within the education service is good.  The allocation of resources is a transparent and inclusive process, with schools as key partners in the decision-making process.  The school improvement partnership board (SIPB) is particularly effective in directing Standards Fund resources to areas of greatest need.  Recent decisions have sensibly included targeting funds to Key Stage 1, looked after children and schools with high pupil mobility.  Similar use is made of area panels to direct special educational needs monies.

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[2] Government guidelines as set out in the Standard Spending Assessment for education up to 2002-03 and the Formula Spending Share from 2003-04.

10.      There is, however, insufficient formal analysis of the value for money achieved through the current pattern of resource allocation.  Although there is an annual review of the funding formula, a full needs-led analysis has not been undertaken to ensure that this mechanism operates at maximum effectiveness.

**Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value**

11.      The authority's strategies to promote continuous improvement are satisfactory, but some weaknesses are only belatedly being addressed.  The LEA's self-assessment for this inspection was substantially accurate, with clear evidence that it understands the majority of its strengths and weaknesses.

12.      The impact of Best Value reviews to date has been variable.  While some have been effective, for example on ICT and SEN, not all have provided sufficient challenge.  A number of improvement plans lack quantified outcomes and have not led to significant progress for example in the case of looked after children.  Progress on improvement plans, although monitored by officers, is not always effectively reported to elected members.

13.      While corporate plans are appropriately linked to education department plans, the quality of service and business planning is variable.  The school improvement service produces effective plans, including the Education Development Plan (EDP), which is regularly reviewed and monitored.  However, plans in a number of other service areas are not sufficiently specific and measurable in terms of outcomes.  Although employee development interviews lead to an analysis of training needs, there is currently no consistent competency-based appraisal for staff.  Individual targets are set in some cases, but this is not universal and monitoring and review of these is not systematic.  As a consequence, the LEA is unable to demonstrate that its resources and capacity are being fully harnessed and utilised.

14.      Until recently, the development of a corporate performance management system has lacked pace.  The council has, however, now introduced a range of improvements including the use of European Foundation for Quality Management assessments, a corporate performance board, cluster co-ordinators to collate performance information and new performance management software. Plans are in place to extend a recent pilot performance appraisal framework across the council during 2004/05.  Although these developments are not fully embedded, given the range of initiatives underway the capacity to improve performance management is good.

*Recommendation*

- Ensure that success criteria in all LEA service, business and improvement plans are specific and measurable.

**Leadership by elected members and advice given to them**

15.      Leadership by elected members has improved and is now good.  The modernisation agenda has been well implemented and, along with a recent review of working practice, has led to sharper leadership and more effective scrutiny.

16.     Good working relationships exist between elected members and officers.  Elected members have a clear shared vision and a corporate commitment to education priorities.  The corporate plan recognises the value of high quality education and training and its impact on people's lives.  There is a sound structure for decision-making which includes appropriately delegated powers to the director of lifelong learning.  Good working links exist between the director and portfolio holder for education who receives regular updates on educational matters.

17.     Members have recently reviewed their performance and the working structures across the council.  This has resulted in a restructuring of operational procedures for cabinet and scrutiny panels.  The lifelong learning scrutiny panel, in addition to its monitoring and scrutiny of policy decisions, also conducts its own thematic enquiries into issues of concern: for example it has recently completed two good enquiries into ICT and SEN provision.  The work of the education service is reported regularly through the scrutiny panel and also to the lifelong learning cabinet team.  Members have a high profile within education across the city.  They regularly visit schools, are members of school governing bodies and are active on many partnership boards.

**Leadership by senior officers**

18.     At the time of the previous inspection leadership by senior officers was highly satisfactory.  Although this area received no focussed fieldwork during the inspection, the evidence from other areas of work and contact with officers throughout the inspection, demonstrates that leadership is now good.

**Strategic partnerships**

19.     Support for partnership work and collaboration between agencies has improved and is now highly satisfactory.  This improvement has been brought about by a common ethos across the city of open sharing of information, increased collaboration between schools and a genuine concern to give every child the best start in life.  There is a good understanding and sharing of educational objectives by all key partners.  The council recognises the importance of collaboration in order to improve the attainment of children and meet its wider social inclusion agenda.

20.      Since the previous inspection partnership with the police has improved, as demonstrated through truancy sweeps and Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) activities.  The lifelong learning service continues to build links with the social care service and housing and health service.  However, at an operational level schools continue to report unsatisfactory communications with social services.

21.     The local strategic partnership (LSP) is well established and comprises a wide range of stakeholders from across the Wolverhampton community, including representation from minority ethnic groups.  Seven thematic partnership boards work to the LSP and have successfully supported and developed partnerships across services and external agencies.  Other significant partnerships include Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP), Black Country School Improvement Partnership, the Education Action Zone (EAZ) and Sure Start initiatives.  However, the strategic relationship between the Children

and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) and the council is insufficiently developed.

22.      The LSP and thematic boards have effective strategic and operational plans in place. However, systems for performance review are still developing and there is limited evidence of rigorous examination by the LSP to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of partnership plans and activities.

23.      The LEA has successfully developed a strong partnership with its schools.  This is best seen through its highly effective work with the SIPB.   The board has a broad membership including councillors, headteachers, union and association representatives and senior officers.  It plays a major role in the effective deployment of human and financial resources to deliver strategic and operational priorities.

**Support for Early Years**

24.      Support for early years is a key priority for the council and is very good.  The LEA has a coherent and comprehensive strategy for improving the range and quality of childcare and early years' provision.  There is a wide range of strategic and operational plans which are well aligned and clearly understood by all stakeholders and partners.  Good systems are in place to ensure the impact of planning is regularly monitored and evaluated.  Some of the targets identified in the EYDCP plan have been exceeded.  For example, all three- and four-year-olds have access to an education place, with a take up of 85%.

25.      The EYDCP is very effective and makes a good contribution to the council's strategic vision for integrated childcare services.  Good working arrangements exist between the partnership and the LEA, resulting in good communication and effective decision-making.  Members of the partnership have been actively involved in a range of consultation and planning forums, including initiatives such as Sure Start and Neighbourhood Nurseries.

26.      Multi-agency work is effective and joint funding is used well to support a number of successful and innovative projects such as the creation of a Neighbourhood Nursery in the grounds of a local Sikh Gurdwara.

27.      There has been an increase in the range of available childcare places.  Plans for the development of children's centres linked to a number of LEA nursery schools are all advanced and are appropriately located among disadvantaged communities.  Services for young children requiring additional SEN support are well integrated, and there are particularly good links within the LEA inclusion services.  The LEA rightly intends to provide a greater range of out-of-school places in disadvantaged areas and to improve further the inclusion of children with SEN.

28.      There has been an increase in non-maintained childcare and education settings receiving a satisfactory or better Ofsted report.  In 2003, 100% of these were judged to be good or better, with 24% of these judged to be very good.  The quality of training available to early years staff in non-maintained settings is a major strength.  Training courses are well planned and well supported across private, voluntary and maintained settings.  The LEA provides good support to all settings for the use of the Foundation Stage profile.  Officers

have developed a comprehensive document to assist with the transfer of children from all settings into reception classes.
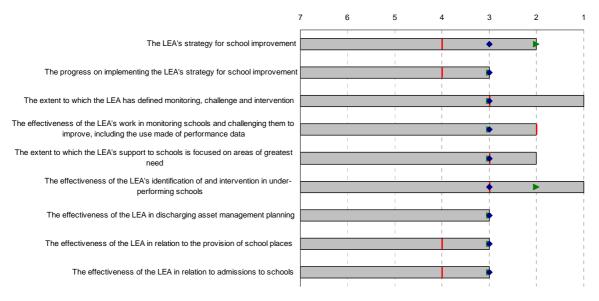
## Support for 14-19 education

29.      This aspect of the authority's work is satisfactory.  Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stages 4 and 5 are below the national average.  There has been recent improvement in some key indicators, notably the proportion of students at the end of Key Stage 4 who gain five or more A\*-C GCSE grades and the performance in Advanced Vocational courses is above national averages.  However, the proportion achieving two or more GCE A/AS levels shows no marked improvement and the overall post-16 participation rate across the city is below that nationally.

30.      In order to improve both standards and participation rates, the LEA has worked with key partners and schools to produce a draft strategy for 14-19 education across the city.  This interfaces well with the recently approved area-wide action plan and draws together the wide range of 14-19 initiatives which presently exist across the city, including the post-16 consortium arrangements operated by secondary schools for some years.  This consortium approach has been particularly effective in providing a good range of advanced level provision and extended curriculum choice for students.

31.      A major part of the strategy is a pathfinder initiative[3] which has several innovative features, including a major focus on a common curriculum framework designed to raise standards and post-16 participation rates.  It enables curriculum combinations to be built for individual students, drawing on the full range of resources of the city's schools, Wolverhampton College, business partnerships and training providers.  A commitment to a common timetable structure has been secured by all partners.  Plans are well advanced for transport provision for students to move between locations and for a computer-based system for individual learning planning.

32.      During the last two years many partners, including the Wolverhampton local learning partnership, the Black Country Learning and Skills Council and the Education Business Partnership, have laid some good foundations for the development of 14-19 education across the city.  The impact of these initiatives is not yet fully evident, but the quality of this work and existing partnership arrangements indicates that there is good capacity for improvement against key indicators.

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[3] This initiative is endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) as one of the 25 Phase One 14-19 Pathfinders

## Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

### Summary table of judgements

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement

The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data

The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need

The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in under-performing schools

The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning

The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places

The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools

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### The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

33.      At the time of the previous inspection the strategy for school improvement and its implementation were satisfactory.  Recommendations from the previous inspection have been acted upon and the strategy is now good.  The implementation of the strategy is highly satisfactory.

34.      The strategy is fully consistent with those for SEN and social inclusion.  The EDP is good: it stems from a sound audit, is regularly reviewed and has clear links between priorities, activities and success criteria.  Interactions with related initiatives such as Excellence in Cities (EiC) and the EAZ are clear.

35.      The central element in the strategy is the SIPB.  This board embodies a collective responsibility for the education of all children in the city shared by all schools and the LEA.  All schools are subscribing members and contribute a proportion of their budget to the overall funding to support the partnership.  The board determines priorities for the use of these funds together with the LEA's budget for school improvement.  This has enabled additional appointments to be made to the staff of the quality and improvement directorate (QID) to provide support and challenge in areas that the SIPB identifies as important.  Appointments include three primary link inspectors with headship experience, an ICT headteacher consultant, an SEN adviser and a co-ordinator to manage the developing 14-19 strategy.  The key position of the SIPB in the LEA's strategy emphasises the importance attached to school

autonomy and the concept of partnership between schools and LEA.  This fully complies with the LEA-Schools Code of Practice.

36.      Consultation and discussion on the LEA's priorities and policies for school improvement are very thorough.  The LEA involves a wide audience in the process, including the SIPB, area cluster meetings, headteachers and governors.

37.      Many of the performance targets, particularly at Key Stage 2, are unrealistically high in relation to performance over recent years.  Although most targets have little prospect of being reached, there is clear evidence that they have had a positive influence on aspirations and have contributed to the improvements that have taken place.[4]

38.      The LEA is taking steps to explore further the reasons for the below average standards of achievement, particularly in primary schools, and to develop additional forms of response.  The LEA is also seeking to identify the factors that enable some schools to meet or exceed their targets, with a view to disseminating the outcomes to others.  The improvement of attendance in many primary schools is recognised as a key issue and all link inspectors discuss progress towards attendance targets during their visits to schools.

39.      The LEA has made highly satisfactory progress in implementing its school improvement strategy.  Many activities set out in the action plans are completed and others are moving ahead in line with the set timescales.  All aspects of the strategy are carefully and regularly monitored by the school monitoring and review team (SMART), reporting to the senior management board and to elected members.

40.      Other aspects of school improvement are meeting with considerable success.  The reduced number of schools found to need special measures or with serious weaknesses, and identified by the LEA itself as causing concern, has reduced significantly and reflects the very successful monitoring of schools and targeting of effective support where needed.  The proportion of recent Ofsted inspections, which have found the quality of leadership and management and of teaching and learning to be good or very good, has increased considerably and in excess of the national rate.  The good use made of school profiles to identify strengths and weaknesses and the effective support given to school self-evaluation are further evidence of the positive impact of the LEA's strategy.

**The LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support**

41.      The LEA's definition of monitoring and challenge, and its strategies for intervention and support have improved and are now good.  The definition of these central functions of the school improvement strategy is very good.  There has been extensive discussion of the

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[4] LEA attainment targets are negotiated between the DfES and the LEA, based on proposals made by the DfES. Wolverhampton's were subsequently extended beyond those initially agreed through the local public service agreement. ( LPSA)

processes with headteachers and governors; these are well understood by schools. Performance data and management information from a range of services are reviewed regularly by the SMART group of officers and are used to ensure that schools' needs are identified accurately. The LEA takes appropriate steps to intervene when necessary and allocates resources in relation to needs.

42.     Monitoring follows clear procedures and visits to schools by link inspectors and other members of the QID are challenging. These visits are followed by helpful evaluative reports to the school and to governors. Improvements have been made that have kept pace with increased national expectations about the quality and use made of performance data, resulting in targets for individual pupils which are securely based on their prior attainment. The LEA's performance data framework ensures that schools receive a comprehensive set of data, with analyses and commentary for a wide range of groups of pupils, including those at various stages of the Code of Practice for SEN, together with appropriate benchmarks and guidance on use.

43.     The pooled contributions from schools, managed through the SIPB, have not only increased their entitlement to support, but have also enabled the LEA to enhance considerably the range of support available. Partnerships, including EiC and EAZ, are used very effectively to focus additional resources on areas with greatest need.

**Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools**

44.     There has been significant improvement in the effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools and it is now very good. At the time of the previous inspection, nine schools were in special measures and a further three had serious weaknesses. No school has moved from serious weaknesses to special measures in the last year; none has been placed in special measures in that time; and only one has been found to have serious weaknesses. Support to the one school, which has been in special measures for more than a year, has been good and the LEA expects it to be removed from the category in the near future.

**Admissions to schools**

45.     Admissions are well managed in both primary and secondary sectors. The council provides a highly satisfactory service, which demonstrates strong commitment to equity and transparency when placing pupils.

46.     Good partnership is exemplified through an active admissions forum which is fully involved in the improvement of arrangements, including the introduction of co-ordinated arrangements between admissions authorities. These are on track to be delivered within the statutory timeframe. Allocation of in-year transfers of secondary-age pupils through a stakeholder group, which comprises a range of LEA officers and headteachers, contributes effectively to the LEA's very low rate of permanent exclusions through managed moves and to reducing pupil mobility.

47.      Information for parents is clear and helpful.  Children with statements of SEN and other vulnerable pupils are allocated priority in oversubscribed schools.  However, looked after children are not always identified and so do not always receive the priority intended. There are comparatively few appeals and the process is managed efficiently.

48.      Previously, the council's admission arrangements required a clear first preference, which resulted in parents claiming multiple first preferences in applications to a number of admissions authorities.  The LEA has introduced a system of equal ranking this year.  This enables parents, who are not offered their first choice of school, to secure a highly ranked alternative placement.  It also ensures that all children are able to receive induction in the term prior to taking up their place.

# Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

## Summary table of judgements

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Support to school leadership and management, including schools' approaches to continuous improvement

Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2

Support for information and communication technology

Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3

Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children

Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils

Support to school governors

The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

The planning and provision of services to support school management

The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management

The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management

The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management

The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management

The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management

The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services

The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services

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## Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

49.      Support for school leadership and management has improved and is now good.  The development of school self-evaluation is well supported, and good training is provided for headteachers, senior and middle managers and governors.

50.      The school profile and other self-evaluation measures help schools to identify their needs.  Their participation in the school improvement partnership provides the opportunity for them to share in deciding what additional services and support they require.  However, schools do not automatically assume that the LEA's services will provide the best value for money and, through the SIPB and the headteacher associations, the quality of services is kept under review.  The possibility of alternative procurement from other sources is regularly explored.  The LEA matches this by expecting schools to contribute to regular evaluations of the quality and impact of whatever school improvement support they have received.

51.     The LEA has built up a good database of best practice through link inspectors and the school profiles and this is supplemented by ensuring that both officers and headteachers have up-to-date knowledge about developments, both nationally and internationally. The recently–introduced model of common closure days for staff development in secondary schools is beginning to contribute to the exchange of good practice. However, although link inspectors have a good knowledge of the strengths of their own schools, there is no overall consistent way of enabling schools to know where good practice exists across the LEA.

52.     Schools needing support or intervention to improve the quality of leadership and management are identified carefully and Ofsted school inspections show significant improvements in schools in all phases. Elected members receive regular reports on the quality of leadership and management and they are closely involved with school managers in a variety of contexts.

**Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2**

53.     This remains highly satisfactory. The literacy and numeracy strategies have been implemented effectively and the LEA's teams of consultants are well-qualified and experienced. They continue to provide effective support to schools. Schools are identified for intensive support on the basis of their attainment record and their strengths, weaknesses and needs; many are receiving such support for the second or third time. More recently, support for 25% of primary schools has been supplemented through the Primary Leadership Programme, and the Intensifying Support Programme is targeting 10 of the lowest attaining primary schools. Support is carefully differentiated according to the particular needs of the school and the work of the consultants has become more flexible as the strategies have moved forward. School co-ordinators are well supported, network groups meet regularly, and good use is made of leading teachers.

54.     Detailed analyses are made of the attainment and progress of various groups of pupils. Strategy leaders and consultants have worked imaginatively with schools on activities such as the improvement of boys writing and the written work of minority ethnic pupils. Nevertheless, standards of attainment are below the national levels. Key Stage 1 attainment in writing matched the national trend in the years up to 2002, but declined alongside reading and mathematics in 2003. Improvement in attainment at Key Stage 2 has been somewhat better, showing similar trends to that nationally and in similar authorities. Given the levels of attainment in Key Stages 1 and 2, the LEA is undertaking an inquiry which will include input from external experts to explore the reasons and recommend ways of responding.

55.     Work is now moving into the implementation of the Primary Strategy. The senior primary inspector leads the Primary Strategy and a review and redefining of the work of the consultants has been undertaken.

**Support for information and communication technology (ICT)**

56.     At the time of the previous inspection, support for curriculum ICT was poor. Good progress has been made and support is now highly satisfactory. The LEA has created an effective central support team of support officers, advisers and consultants which advises and monitors schools. It has improved communication and consultation with schools, created an

ICT planning group and introduced sound systems for procurement of hardware and software. The ICT education strategy is clear and is allied with the corporate ICT strategy. There is also a detailed action plan which integrates well with the EDP priorities.

57.      Support for ICT is well led and managed. The LEA monitors effectively the quality of teaching and learning and standards of attainment in ICT across all schools through Ofsted inspection reports and officer visits. Schools are also being encouraged to use a self-evaluation matrix to review ICT provision.

58.      The LEA has met almost all of its national targets for ICT. The computer-to-pupil ratios set for 2004 will be met. E-learning credit funding is devolved fairly to schools and well supported by a brokered service for procurement of software. Broadband provision exists in all schools and exceeds the recommended connectivity rate. This year's performance target for Key Stage 3 of 68% Level 5 and above is realistic and achievable. Since the last inspection, standards in ICT have risen across the city by approximately 5% at Key Stage 3 and 19% at Key Stage 4.

59.      The curriculum support team has made a highly satisfactory start in supporting Key Stage 2-3 transition, the application of ICT across the curriculum, and in developing systems for recording and assessing ICT in both primary and secondary schools. There is good capacity to consolidate and develop these areas further.

**Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3**

60.      Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3 is good. The strategy is clearly set out within the EDP, is well understood by schools, and integrates well with individual school planning. There has been a steady improvement in standards in the three core subjects with marked gains in 2003. Despite these positive improvements, standards in all core subjects remain below national averages and targets for 2004 are unlikely to be met.

61.      Schools receive good quality performance data from the LEA and these, together with their own data, enable schools to track performance effectively and set targets for individuals and groups of students. The transfer of data in supporting the transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 is good on the LEA's part. However, the process is not efficient when data are transferred from out-of-city primary schools or neighbouring LEAs to Wolverhampton schools and this is detrimental to the transition process. The LEA is working with schools and neighbouring LEAs to improve this situation.

62.      There is close working between the Key Stage 3 consultants and those for the Primary Strategy. The LEA is facilitating and developing work to improve the transition between Key Stage 2 and 3. Additionally, some good work is taking place within the specialist schools, EiC and the summer schools programme.

63.      The LEA knows its schools well and support is well targeted to need, mainly through a highly valued team of strategy consultants. Clear improvement contracts are agreed between each school and the LEA, which outline the consultants' work, the focus of support and targets for improvement. The support and monitoring of the impact of this work are good.

64.      Good systems exist for sharing and disseminating good practice, including co-ordinator network meetings, leading teachers, consultant visits and the secondary deputy headteacher network.  There is also some targeting of support at highly performing and effective schools in order to extend models of good practice.

**Support for gifted and talented pupils**

65.      Support for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory overall.  It is much stronger at secondary level, where it is a major part of the EiC initiative, than at primary level.  All schools set targets for higher levels of attainment, but the proportion of pupils attaining these levels is significantly lower than national averages at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.  However, they are in line with the averages attained in similar LEAs.

66.      Through EiC, detailed audits have been made of secondary schools' provision and an effective database of the individual achievements has been prepared.  All secondary schools have at least one co-ordinator, most with senior management responsibility, and all secondary co-ordinators have undergone national training.  Secondary schools have written policies, mostly based on EiC guidelines.  Some make extensive use of early examination entry, though this practice is not consistently used across the LEA.

67.      The LEA's support for this work in primary schools is weaker and consists principally of encouragement and support for individual schools' initiatives.  The LEA has only recently prepared for consultation with schools a draft policy statement for supporting pupils in primary schools.  Some primary schools have identified a co-ordinator and few have a written policy statement.

68.      A good range of summer schools for gifted and talented pupils is organised, through EiC, the EAZ and by individual schools.  Some schools are beginning to nominate students for the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth.  The LEA is raising the profile of gifted and talented pupils across the city and supports several valuable opportunities for pupils, in particular in music, sport, the arts and science.

*Recommendation*

- Develop a policy and guidelines for the work of primary schools with gifted and talented pupils to match that available for secondary schools.

**The supply and quality of teachers**

69.      Support for the supply and quality of teachers is highly satisfactory.  There is a clear strategy for recruitment and retention as a priority within the EDP.  The appointment of two officers to the posts of recruitment strategy manager and adviser for continuing professional development (CPD) has improved the quality of support and provision in this area.  Teacher vacancies decreased in 2002/03 by 20% on average across the city and recruitment increased by 5%.  The LEA has effective systems for collecting and analysing data on vacancy patterns, by school type, subject and geographical location.  These data are used effectively to predict future needs and to inform short- to long-term strategies.

70.      The LEA uses local and national initiatives well to ensure a supply of teachers to Wolverhampton schools, including membership of Black Country supply pool, the creation of a pool of primary newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) and the promotion of the graduate teaching programme, particularly in shortage subjects.   There is a comprehensive and cohesive CPD programme available for all school staff and governors.   In addition to centrally-organised training, the LEA supports and encourages staff to map out their individual professional development routes.  Many of the LEA courses are awarded modular accreditation by Wolverhampton University towards further degrees.

71.      The LEA provides good quality induction programmes and support for NQTs and new headteachers.  Training packages are well matched to the needs of staff across the city and receive good evaluations.  However, there was a higher rate of cancelled courses in 2003 than nationally.  This and the comparatively low percentage of NQTs continuing to work for a second year in the authority are constantly evaluated and the central team is developing new strategies to address these issues.

72.      The LEA supports actively the national agenda on remodelling the school workforce and a project group has produced an LEA strategy.  Much of the work is focussed on school clusters, each of which receives funding to develop a good range of collaborative projects.

**Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management**

73.      The planning and provision, effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management are highly satisfactory.   All services provide satisfactory or better support.   Service level agreements generally contain a variety of packages and are provided in good time before the start of the financial year.   Ordering and invoicing are suitably co-ordinated.   There is a clear focus on providing good quality service provision which is responsive to schools' views and needs.  A user group provides an effective channel for consultation and undertakes monitoring and evaluation which have led to improvements.

74.      There has, however, been insufficient challenge to the council as the provider of services in many areas and limited development to help schools become more informed purchasers of services.  This is now being addressed by a new corporate procurement officer who is developing a toolkit for schools.  Although there are some examples of services analysing benchmarking data or value for money, this is not universal.  The progress and impact of new developments in support services in line with the Best Value review improvement plan, have not been reported to elected members.  As a consequence, they are not in a position to monitor improvement.

75.      Financial services to schools are good.  They have evolved in recent years to offer a wide range of responsive services which schools value highly.  There is good support for setting, modelling, management and reconciling budgets.  Although this support is not yet provided electronically, there are plans to implement this in a year's time. Meanwhile, there are few errors and schools are satisfied with the system.  Information is reliable, including that from payroll.

76.      There are a number of schools in budget deficit, notably in the secondary sector, but, in many cases, this is part of a planned strategy to improve pupils' attainment in challenging
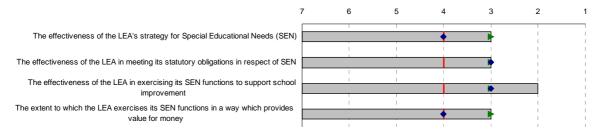
circumstances.  The LEA provides good financial support to these schools.  All schools with licensed deficits in recent years have fulfilled their financial recovery plans successfully.  The LEA also monitors and challenges appropriately surplus balances.

**Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement**

77.      As a result of key improvements this is now good.  The QID is highly valued and respected by schools.  It is effective in monitoring and supporting schools and in challenging them to improve further.  While attainment indicators show a varied picture, the improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and of leadership and management in schools are evidence of the contribution made to school improvement.  The SIPB, together with the senior management board of the lifelong learning education service group, subject the quality and the cost of the QID's work to regular scrutiny and evaluation.  Most services supporting school improvement are highly satisfactory or better and some are good or very good.  The costs of services, before the additional funding provided by schools' contributions to SIPB, are lower than those of statistical neighbours.

78.      The planning and provision of school improvement services are now good.  The leadership of the QID is effective and, for the most part, is quick to take decisions to remedy deficiencies and improve the quality of the service.  There are clear priorities for improvement, guided by well-defined aims and objectives for the service and in response to suggestions and recommendations from the SIPB, which serves in practice as a governing body for the QID.  However, some important features of school improvement are less satisfactory and are not receiving sufficient attention.  Significant among these is the unsatisfactory support for schools in their work with looked after children and the lack of impact on attendance, particularly in primary schools.

79.      Performance management of services concerned with the support of school improvement is thorough.  Service leaders are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of their teams.  The service planning of QID is good.  Strategies are coherent and are supported by well-judged action plans.  Development needs are identified and form the basis for regular audits of the balance of expertise and experience in the team.  There is a good match between service and schools needs and personnel deployment.  Where gaps have been identified, prompt action has been taken to remedy the situation.

# Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

**Summary table of judgements**

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for Special Educational Needs (SEN) | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money | | | | | | | |

The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year.  1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

**The strategy for SEN**

80.      The recommendations of the previous report have been fully addressed and the LEA's strategy for SEN is now highly satisfactory.  The strategic development plan for SEN is balanced and comprehensive and is being implemented well.  The number of pupils with statements of SEN is falling and the proportion of pupils who are educated in mainstream schools is rising.  The LEA's capacity for further improvement is highly satisfactory.

81.      The development and implementation of the LEA's strategy for SEN have been led well by both officers and elected members.  The establishment of an SEN commission, chaired by the leader of the council, provided the platform for the subsequent development of a balanced and interlinked set of policies and guidance.  This sets out clearly the council's approach to educational and social inclusion.  Monitoring of progress by elected members has been diligent and reports have been well timed.  However, reports to elected members provide limited analysis of attainment and outcomes for pupils with SEN.

82.      Strategic plans fully reflect corporate priorities for social inclusion and are coherent with the priorities and activities included in the EDP and behaviour support plans.  Planning for SEN benefits from sound financial underpinning.  The LEA is committed to maintaining existing levels of expenditure on SEN.  Resources released by the reduction of statements of SEN are redeployed well to support early intervention and inclusive practice in mainstream schools.  The LEA has made additional funding available, where necessary, to facilitate the transition of pupils from specialist provision to mainstream schools.

83.      Strategic development for SEN has built upon the good relationships between the LEA, schools and other partners.  Consultation and the involvement of mainstream headteachers and staff have been well managed and effective in securing commitment to the SEN strategy.  The excellent work of the parent partnership service has been particularly important in ensuring the active involvement of parents in strategic developments. Headteachers and governors of special schools have been enthusiastic partners during the development process.  Their contribution not only led to a clear vision for the future role of

these schools, but their professional expertise has been used well to develop activities and plans.

84.      The LEA has established secure foundations for future progress.  Targets for improvement are clear and objective, but too modest in some cases.  The targets for the number of statements for SEN, for example, are set to fall by some 10% per annum.  This figure does not reflect true challenge or ambition.  Given the progress to date, the LEA and schools have the capacity to meet more ambitious targets without compromising the best interests of the children concerned.

*Recommendation*

- Set more ambitious targets for the reduction of statements and the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

## Statutory obligations

85.      The LEA's performance in meeting its statutory obligations is now highly satisfactory.  Special needs administration is more efficient and the proportion of statements completed within statutory timescales is in line with that found nationally.  Nevertheless, delays in receiving medical advice and continuing staffing difficulties in the education psychology service still limit the speed of assessment.

86.      Restructuring special needs administration on an area basis has improved the coherence across, and responsiveness of SEN support services to, the needs of schools. Multi-disciplinary area SEN panels, including educational psychologists, SEN co-ordinators and learning support teachers closely monitor allocations of support for pupils at half-termly meetings.  The monitoring of annual reviews by area teams is systematic and rigorous, and the attendance of educational psychologists at reviews is well targeted.  The recent establishment of statutory assessment moderating panels has strengthened the effectiveness of moderation.  There are examples of effective joint work with social services and primary care trusts at a management and operational level.  However, with the exception of joint commissioning of support for students with the most complex needs, such collaboration has not yet led to the pooling of budgets.

87.      The LEA's parent partnership service is excellent.  It provides parents with a comprehensive and highly regarded range of training and guidance.  Its mediation with parents considering appealing against SEN decisions is almost always successful.

## SEN functions to support school improvement

88.      The LEA has responded well to recommendations of the previous inspection and performance is now good, as is the capacity for further improvement.

89.      Multi–disciplinary area teams have a comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date knowledge of the strengths, weaknesses and needs of schools.  Rigorous monitoring of annual reviews and school individual education plans underpins effective service development and targeting of support.  A detailed SEN handbook includes comprehensive

guidance for schools and provides the basis for structured self-evaluation and schools now have the opportunity to work towards a quality standard for SEN and educational inclusion. Training, especially for SEN co-ordinators, is well organised, highly regarded and effective.
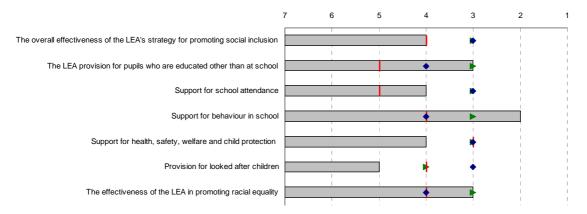
90.     Link inspectors use data based on pupils' prior attainment effectively in challenging schools during monitoring visits. They work closely with area team staff to focus attention on schools causing concern. The potential of value-added data is now being exploited to provide more incisive analyses of pupils' attainment. The management and deployment of SEN services have improved and schools can now obtain the support they need from the LEA or a range of external providers.


**Value for money**

91.     The LEA secures highly satisfactory value for money in its support for SEN. The effectiveness of its financial management and the quality of its monitoring has improved. LEA officers continue to exercise tight control over SEN expenditure. Special educational needs budgets are rarely overspent and, despite a relatively high proportion of pupils with statements of SEN, SEN spending is in line with the national average.

92.     Funding for mainstream schools is allocated on an objective, fair and transparent formula. The recently-introduced matrix funding formula was developed jointly with special schools and provides a sound approach to the funding of the support for pupils with complex needs. The LEA was relatively late in delegating to schools the funding for pupils with statements, but it has been successful in obtaining the agreement of all schools to pass delegated funding back to the area panels. These panels increasingly fund earlier intervention and prevention activities within schools. With its improving monitoring of support and of pupils' progress and outcomes, officers have a more robust basis for evaluating value for money. However, the monitoring of the use of resources by schools is not yet sufficiently well developed.

# Section 5: Support for social inclusion

## Summary table of judgements

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion

The LEA provision for pupils who are educated other than at school

Support for school attendance

Support for behaviour in school

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

Provision for looked after children

The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality

The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year.  1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

## The strategy for social inclusion

93.      The LEA's strategy to promote social inclusion continues to be satisfactory.  There has been good progress in improving support for the most vulnerable groups.  The leadership shown by officers and elected members in most aspects of promoting social inclusion is good.  They have a clear understanding of future challenges but have yet to translate this into detailed multi-agency planning in order to implement more integrated service provision.  Nevertheless, the LEA has highly satisfactory capacity to improve.

94.      Elected members show continued commitment to social inclusion which is central to corporate aims and objectives.  Strategic planning in most areas is good and has benefited from sound policy and well-aligned medium-term financial plans.  It is particularly good for SEN and behaviour and there are coherent programmes for development across both areas.  However, analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the council's support for social inclusion has not always been accurate.  Officers and elected members were slow to recognise and respond to weaknesses in the support for looked after children and for improving attendance.  The LEA has also only recently identified the underlying weaknesses in arrangements governing referrals for support from social workers.

95.      The implementation of plans has been particularly effective at a strategic and operational level by LEA officers and multi-disciplinary area teams respectively.  A comprehensive continuum of provision has recently been established to provide full-time education for all pupils out of school.  The LEA has been effective in promoting inclusive practice within schools.  The BIP has considerably enhanced the LEA's work in the most challenging areas of the city.  In particular, the activities of the Behaviour and Education Support Teams (BEST) are valued by schools and are building the confidence and competence of schools in tackling a range of social inclusion issues.

96.      The LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion has been successful in improving some outcomes, for example exclusions and secondary attendance.  However, the attainment of looked after children and primary school attendance have not shown improvement. Leadership in both these areas has recently been strengthened and there is now at least highly satisfactory capacity for improvement.  Systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality and impact of services to support vulnerable children in schools are effective; for example, prior attainment analyses and value-added data are used in monitoring the progress of pupils with SEN.  There is effective joint working between link inspectors and those involved in the promotion of social inclusion in schools.

97.      The council and its partners have a clear and shared understanding of the challenges they face in responding to the emerging government priorities for children's services.  The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and associated sub-groups, has the support of all main agencies.  Its strategy for inter-agency work for 2003–2006 is comprehensive and incisive.  It identifies key weaknesses which need to be addressed if better use of data and more integrated multi-agency working are to be achieved.  However, neither the partnership nor the council have yet developed a detailed co-ordinated plan to implement the necessary improvements.  Weaknesses in joint work at a strategic level are inhibiting progress in this area.  The large membership of the CYPSP makes it an unwieldy decision-making forum and the respective roles of the CYPSP and the council in providing strategic leadership for further developments are not clear.

*Recommendation*

- The council clarify its role in relation to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership in leading the development of more integrated service provision for vulnerable children and young people.

**Provision for pupils educated other than at school**

98.      At the time of the previous inspection provision for pupils who are educated other than at school was unsatisfactory.  The LEA has made good progress and provision is now highly satisfactory with good capacity for further improvement.

99.      Improvements in the provision are largely due to good leadership by LEA officers at all levels.  The BSP for 2001-2004 sets out a coherent, ambitious but realistic plan for improvement, with a well-balanced and expanded continuum of provision.  The LEA has developed innovative projects with other partners to provide a range of alternative education provision for pupils at Key Stage 4.  Some of these projects have achieved over 80% success rate in placing young people in post-16 education, training or employment.  However, there have been delays in expanding the provision and the LEA has only very recently been able to provide full-time education for pupils excluded for fixed-term periods beyond 15 days. Monitoring of the quality of provision is thorough and comprehensive.

100.    A specialist teacher in the learning support team and a senior education social worker (ESW) monitor and support effectively the provision made where parents have chosen to educate their children at home.  Children who, through illness, are in hospital or at home receive sound tuition through one of the pupil referral units (PRU).  Through the work

of the pregnant school girls' reintegration officer, the LEA has had considerable success in maintaining young mothers' engagement in education with over 50% returning to mainstream schools and the remainder receiving support through the PRU.

101.     The LEA has secured the commitment of headteachers to its policy of early intervention, prevention and reintegration of pupils with challenging behaviour. A social inclusion advisory and placement panel of secondary headteachers considers cases of individual pupils. The panel is increasingly successful in preventing exclusion and promoting managed moves and reintegration. This is contributing to the LEA's success in reducing permanent exclusions and recent reductions in fixed-term exclusions.

## Support for attendance

102.     The LEA has been slow to implement the recommendations in the previous inspection report concerning attendance. However, support is now satisfactory and the capacity to improve further is highly satisfactory.

103.     The LEA has a strategic policy statement on behaviour and attendance, backed up by action planning in the BSP delivery plan. Improved attendance is identified as a target within the EDP. Secondary attendance has improved and is in line with national levels and those of statistical neighbours. Some key initiatives, for example EiC and BIP, as well as the Key Stage 3 consultants for behaviour and attendance, have resulted in better co-ordination in some areas of the city. However, in the primary sector there has been insufficient improvement.

104.     Link inspectors are involved in regular support and challenge as part of schools' termly reviews. Meetings of attendance co-ordinators provide additional support and there are plans to appoint a headteacher consultant. However, although attendance is now monitored weekly and annual targets are set with all schools, the mechanism for arriving at these targets has not yet been consistent or systematic.

105.     The LEA makes good use of its legal powers in truancy sweeps and successful prosecutions. Effective multi-agency work is developing in those areas where the BEST projects operate. Some innovative work has targeted vulnerable groups. Most schools are highly satisfied with the ESW service and the commitment and enthusiasm of individual ESW staff are recognised. However, criteria for allocating ESW support are not clear to all schools nor do they systematically target needs. Progress to date has been impeded by the lack of consistent leadership and management for the service. A new post of team leader was created in October 2003 but interim management arrangements have been in place since that time. The LEA will require the recently-appointed team leader to conduct an urgent review of the basis for all allocation of ESW resources.

*Recommendation*

- Specify and publish criteria for allocating ESW resources to schools and a framework for setting attendance targets with schools.

**Support for behaviour**

106.    The LEA's support for behaviour is now good.  Since the previous inspection there has been good progress and the level of permanent exclusions is now below that found nationally and in similar authorities.

107.    The BSP for 2001-2004 sets out the basis for an effective programme of support that is well linked with the EiC initiative and the LEA's Key Stage 3 behaviour and attendance strategy.  Its implementation has been led well by LEA officers.  Support for behaviour has been further enhanced by the implementation, in 2002, of a BIP for the areas of highest need in the city.  Initiatives, including the establishment of nurture groups in primary schools and the deployment of additional learning support assistants, have complemented the existing arrangements to support behaviour in schools.  The activity of the multi-agency BEST teams has built upon existing foundations of effective multi-agency working by area teams.  They provide better co-ordinated support to schools, pupils and families for one third of the city.  Their work is particularly well regarded by schools where their effectiveness in building the capacity of schools to tackle challenging behaviour is being reflected in reduced levels of exclusions.

108.    Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are a particular strength.  Information on the quality of support for behaviour is shared with link inspectors.  A well-structured evaluation process for assessing the quality of in-school support for behaviour is increasingly being used to identify underlying problems and to target LEA support.  Within the BIP areas, behaviour and attendance audits provide a very thorough analysis of schools' strengths and weaknesses.  However, reports to elected members make only limited use of this extensive range of information.

**Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection**

109.    Support for health and safety, welfare and child protection is now satisfactory.

110.    Guidelines for schools on child protection procedures and protocols are comprehensive and clear.  They set out the expectations of schools and the LEA and generally provide a sound basis for effective school policies and practice.  Training for designated child protection officers is well organised and valued by participants. Monitoring of attendance at training is rigorous and appropriate action is taken in cases of non-attendance.  Six monthly checks by LEA officers ensure that schools have fully-trained designated teachers in place.  Monitoring of the quality of child protection procedures is undertaken annually by link inspectors.

111.    Officers of the LEA play an active role in the Area Child Protection Committee and relevant sub-groups and there is much effective joint work between officers within the lifelong learning services directorate group and other partners within and outside the council.  However, headteachers complain that the response of social workers to referrals from schools is variable.  In part, this is due to some unrealistic expectations of social workers.  It also reflects a more widespread misunderstanding among the agencies involved in the care of vulnerable children of the thresholds for intervention.  The council is working with other agencies to develop an agreed set of multi-agency criteria for thresholds.  In the meantime,

procedures in schools and the LEA continue to ensure that all cases where children and young people are at significant risk receive a high priority.

*Recommendation*

- Accelerate the development of an agreed set of threshold criteria in conjunction with other agencies.

### Provision for looked after children

112.    The LEA's support for looked after children was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection.  Since then the strategies for improving outcomes for this group of vulnerable children and young people have been ineffective and the support for their education is currently unsatisfactory.  However, in recent months leadership has improved and progress has been made in addressing weaknesses indicating that capacity for further improvement is good.

113.    The care of its looked after children is an explicit feature of the council's policy for improving social inclusion.  Nevertheless, until last year officers did not challenge the consistently low standards of attainment by looked after children.  Serious weaknesses in the educational support for this vulnerable group were identified.  Only 30% of looked after children had personal education plans; there was limited training provision for designated teachers; the council's monitoring systems were unable to identify the performance of looked after children; and some aspects of communication between social workers and education officers were unreliable.  The LEA's officers have responded to these problems with determination and urgency.  For example, some 80% of looked after children now have a personal education plan and monitoring systems are now in place.  Improvement has accelerated since the appointment of an effective new manager at the start of 2004.  However, the various actions and activities to support improving attainment have yet to be integrated and set out coherently within a single development plan for looked after children.

*Recommendation*

- Create a single development plan which integrates the actions and initiatives to improve the attainment of looked after children.

## Appendix A

**Record of Judgement Recording Statements**

| Name of LEA : | Wolverhampton Local Education Authority |
|---|---|
| LEA number: | 336 |
| Reporting Inspector: | Brian Sharples HMI |
| Date of Inspection: | May 2004 |

| No | Required Inspection Judgement | Grade | Fieldwork* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Context of the LEA** | | |
| 1 | The socio-economic context of the LEA | 5 | |
| | **Overall judgements** | | |
| 0.1 | The progress made by the LEA overall | 3 | |
| 0.2 | Overall effectiveness of the LEA | 3 | |
| 0.3 | The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection | 2 | |
| | **Section 1: Corporate strategy and LEA leadership** | | |
| 1.1 | The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people | 3 | |
| 1.2 | The implementation of corporate planning for education | 3 | |
| 1.3 | The effectiveness of LEA decision-making | 3 | NF |
| 1.4 | The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities | 2 | |
| 1.5 | The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value | 4 | |
| 1.6 | The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice) | 2 | |
| 1.7 | The quality of leadership provided by senior officers | 2 | NF |

| 1.8 | The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities | 3 | |
|------|------|------|------|
| 1.9 | Support for Early Years education | 1 | |
| 1.10 | Support for 14 – 19 education | 4 | |
| | **Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation** | | |
| 2.1 | The LEA's strategy for school improvement | 2 | |
| 2.2 | The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement | 3 | |
| 2.3 | The performance of schools | 5 | |
| 2.4 | The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention | 1 | |
| 2.5 | The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data | 2 | |
| 2.6 | The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need | 2 | |
| 2.7 | The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools | 1 | |
| 2.8 | The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning | 3 | NF |
| 2.9 | The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places | 3 | NF |
| 2.10 | The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools | 3 | |
| | **Section 3: Support to school leadership and management, including schools' efforts to support continuous improvement** | | |
| 3.1 | Support to school leadership and management, including support for schools' approaches to continuous improvement | 2 | |
| 3.2 | Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2 | 3 | |

| 3.3 | Support for information and communication technology | 3 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3.4 | Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3 | 2 | |
| 3.5 | Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children | 3 | |
| 3.6 | Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils | 4 | |
| 3.7 | Support for school governors | 2 | NF |
| 3.8 | The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers | 3 | |
| 3.9 | The planning and provision of services to support school management | 3 | |
| 3.9a | The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management | 2 | |
| 3.9b | The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management | 3 | NF |
| 3.9c | The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management | 3 | NF |
| 3.9d | The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management | 3 | NF |
| 3.10 | The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management | 3 | |
| 3.11 | The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services | 2 | |
| 3.12 | The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services | 2 | |
| | **Section 4: Support for special educational needs** | | |
| 4.1 | The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs | 3 | |
| 4.2 | The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN | 3 | |

| 4.3 | The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement | 2 | |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|----|
| 4.4 | The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money | 3 | |
| | **Section 5: Support for social inclusion** | | |
| 5.1 | The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion | 4 | |
| 5.2 | The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place | 3 | |
| 5.3 | Support for school attendance | 4 | |
| 5.4 | Support for behaviour in schools | 2 | |
| 5.5 | Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection | 4 | |
| 5.6 | Provision for looked after children | 5 | |
| 5.7 | The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality | 3 | NF |

*\*NF' under fieldwork means that no fieldwork was conducted on this function during this inspection.*

***JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 7-point scale:***
Grade 1: Very good; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3:  Highly satisfactory; Grade 4: Satisfactory;
Grade 5: Unsatisfactory; Grade 6: Poor; Grade 7: Very poor

[***Note***: in the case of JRS 1: socio-economic context of the LEA and JRS 2.3: performance of schools, grades relate to comparisons against national averages: Grades 1-2: Well above; Grade 3: Above; Grade 4: In line; Grade 5: Below; Grades 6-7: Well below]

## Appendix B

**Context of the inspection**

This inspection of Wolverhampton LEA was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

This report provides a commentary on the inspection findings, including:

- the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in April 2000;

- the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;

- the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;

- recommendations on areas for improvement.

The summary is followed by more detailed judgements on the LEA's performance of its individual functions, which sets the recommendations for improvement into context.

All functions of the LEA have been inspected and judgements reached on how effectively they are performed. Not all functions were subject to detailed fieldwork, but in all cases inspectors reached their judgements through an evaluation of a range of material. This included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, data (some of which were provided by the LEA), school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports, and audit reports. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA and a questionnaire seeking the views of all schools on aspects of the work of the LEA. In those areas subject to fieldwork, discussions were held with LEA officers and elected members, headteachers, teachers and governors, staff in other departments of the local authority, diocesan representatives, and other agencies and LEA partners.

The functions that were not subject to detailed fieldwork in this inspection were:

- decision-making;

- leadership by senior officers;

- asset management planning;

- providing school places;

- support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children;

- support for school governors;

- the planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management;

- the planning and provision of property services in supporting school management;

- the planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management;

- promoting racial equality.

Inspection judgements are made against criteria that can be found on the Ofsted website. For each inspected function of the LEA an inspection team agrees a numerical grade. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are to be found in Appendix A. These numerical grades must be considered in the light of the full report. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment profile for the education service.

## Context of the LEA

Since the previous inspection, Wolverhampton has been granted city status. Situated in the northwest of the West Midlands conurbation, the city is an important regional centre for industry, commerce and culture. However, the economic base of the city has changed dramatically over the last two decades. Hundreds of small- and medium-sized companies have now emerged, for example in technology based industries. The challenge now facing the city is the raising of skills levels in the local workforce to meet the demands of both traditional and new industries.

Wolverhampton's population of approximately 239,000 has gradually declined by around 5% over the last decade. Over a fifth (22.2%) of the population consider themselves as being of a minority ethnic heritage: this is more than twice the national average. Of the 49,498 young people aged 0-15 years in the city, 16.8% are of South Asian origin the majority being of Indian descent. Dual heritage children and young people make up 7.9% of the 0-15 year old population, and 4.8% describe themselves as Black Caribbean/Black African. The minority ethnic population in schools is 34.5% in both primary and secondary schools which is above national averages and those of statistical neighbours.

The indices of multiple deprivation for Wolverhampton show that 8 out of the 20 wards are ranked within the most deprived 10% of wards nationally, and all but one fall in the most disadvantaged 50%. Wolverhampton ranks as the 35th most deprived authority in England out of 150.

 The number of pupils in mainstream primary schools with a statement for special needs is 2.4% in primary schools, which is in line with national averages. In secondary schools it is 5.0% which is currently above national averages and those of statistical neighbours. The percentage of pupils attending special schools is above national averages. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in maintained primary (27.6%) and secondary schools (21.1%) is in line with statistical neighbours but above national averages.

Wolverhampton has 115 schools: 7 nursery, 83 primary, 18 secondary and 7 special schools. In addition to the 7 special schools, 28 mainstream schools currently accommodate pupils with statements of special education needs in resource base provision. There are four pupil referral units.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment for education, published in December 2003, gave the education service two stars (lower) for current performance and rated its capacity to sustain improvement as secure.

**The performance of schools**

The performance of schools in Wolverhampton is generally below average. The overall pattern of improvement in most key stages over the last four years has been in line with national rates. However, the performance at each key stage year on year has not been consistent.

At Key Stage 1 performance at Level 2 and above in national tests is well below the average found nationally in reading and writing and below average in mathematics. Apart from mathematics, performance is also below that in statistical neighbours. At Key Stage 2 performance at Level 4 and above is below national averages in all subjects and below statistical neighbours in mathematics.

At Key Stage 3 performance in all subjects is improving at a faster rate than that nationally. However, performance at Level 5 and above in the core subjects remains below national averages but in line with statistical neighbours.

At Key Stage 4 the proportion of students gaining one or more A*-G grades at General GCSE and the average points score is below national averages and that of statistical neighbours. The number gaining five or more GCSE A*-C grades is in line with national averages and above those of statistical neighbours and rates of improvement have risen.

LEA's targets for 2004 are challenging and fall between one and ten percentage points of the aggregated targets from schools. The LEA has two additional stretch targets under a LPSA. The LEA did not meet any of its 2003 core subject performance targets in Key Stages 2, 3 or 4 and has to recover between two and thirteen percentage points across the Key Stages to meet the targets for 2004. In some cases this is unrealistic and targets are unlikely to be achieved.

Attendance rates in primary schools are well below, and in secondary schools are below, the national averages. Unauthorised absence is in line with national rates in both primary and secondary schools. Exclusions are in line in primaries and below in secondary schools when compared to national rates.

## Funding data for the LEA

| SCHOOLS BUDGET | Wolverhampton | Statistical neighbours average | Metropolitan Average | ENGLAND AVERAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil |
| **Individual schools budget** | **2,680** | **2,637** | **2,623** | **2,708** |
| Standards fund delegated | 85 | 66 | 59 | 61 |
| Education for under fives | 55 | 67 | 62 | 96 |
| Strategic management | 22 | 34 | 33 | 29 |
| Special educational needs | 47 | 102 | 109 | 120 |
| Grants | 58 | 70 | 76 | 53 |
| Access | 95 | 64 | 53 | 55 |
| Capital expenditure from revenue | 0 | 29 | 18 | 24 |
| **TOTAL SCHOOLS BUDGET** | **3,044** | **3,069** | **3,031** | **3,145** |
| **Schools formula spending share** | **2,809** | **2,874** | **2,812** | **2,904** |

*Source:  DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04*

| LEA BUDGET | Wolverhampton | Statistical neighbours average | Metropolitan Average | ENGLAND AVERAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil |
| Strategic management | 158 | 108 | 115 | 95 |
| Specific Grants | 25 | 11 | 12 | 16 |
| Special educational needs | 30 | 30 | 25 | 32 |
| School improvement | 30 | 35 | 34 | 36 |
| Access | 95 | 97 | 102 | 133 |
| Capital expenditure from revenue | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Youth and Community | 134 | 73 | 70 | 74 |
| **TOTAL LEA BUDGET** | **472** | **357** | **362** | **388** |

*Source:  DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04*

*Note:*

*All figures are net*

*Averages quoted are mean averages; the original DfES Comparative Tables quote median average figures, not the mean average.*

**Notes**