

Walsall

Local Education Authority

Inspection Report

Date of Inspection: October 2004

Reporting Inspector: Kevin Jane HMI

© Crown copyright 2004. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

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

A further copy of this report can be obtained from the respective local education authority.

Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Contents

	Page
Basic information	v
Summary	1
Introduction	1
Main findings	2
Recommendations	3
Section 1: Corporate leadership of education	4
Summary table of judgements	4
Corporate planning for education and its implementation	4
Decision-making	5
Targeting of resources	6
Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	7
Leadership by elected members and advice given to them	8
Leadership by senior officers	8
Strategic partnerships	8
Support for Early Years	9
Support for 14-19 education	10
Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation	11
Summary table of judgements	11
The strategy for school improvement and its implementation	11
The LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support	12
Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools	13
Providing school places	14
Section 3: Support to improve education in schools	15
Summary table of judgements	15
Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement	15
Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2	16
Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3	17
Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children	17

Support for gifted and talented pupils	18
Support for school governors	18
The supply and quality of teachers	19
Planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management.	19
Planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory services.	22
Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)	23
Summary table of judgements	23
The strategy for SEN	23
Statutory obligations	24
SEN functions to support school improvement	25
Value for money	25
Section 5: Support for social inclusion	27
Summary table of judgements	27
The strategy for social inclusion	27
Provision for pupils educated other than at school	28
Support for attendance	29
Support for behaviour	29
Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	30
Provision for looked after children	30
Promoting racial equality	31
Appendix A	33
Record of Judgement Recording Statements	33
Appendix B	37
Context of the inspection	37
Context of the LEA	38
The performance of schools	38
Funding data for the LEA	40

Basic information

Name of LEA:	Walsall Local Education Authority
LEA number:	335
Address of LEA:	Council House Lichfield Street Walsall WS1 1TZ
Reporting Inspector:	Kevin Jane HMI
Date of Inspection:	October 2004

Summary

Introduction

The Metropolitan Borough of Walsall in the Black Country is a mixture of urban, suburban and rural communities. The population has declined in the last ten years. The percentage of the school population from minority ethnic groups is well above the national average. Although there are areas of affluence, there is considerable deprivation. Rates of unemployment, teenage pregnancy and crime are all above the national averages and very low levels of post-16 qualifications present challenges to the council and schools.

Standards of attainment in schools, at all key stages, are consistently below national averages although against similar authorities¹ the picture is more mixed. Nevertheless, there has been a steady rise in standards over the last four years although not fast enough to make a significant difference to the gap with national averages.

As a result of the last Ofsted inspection, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills directed that all education services should be outsourced to address the weaknesses in the performance of the LEA. The council has now entered into a contract with Serco Ltd, which, as Education Walsall, serves as the council's education department.² In restructuring education services, there have been some new appointments and redefinition of roles for existing staff. There have also been some significant changes within the council. It adopted a leader and cabinet constitutional arrangement in May 2002 and, following local elections in May 2004, a new administration was formed with the Conservatives in overall control.

¹ The Metropolitan Borough of Walsall LEA's statistical neighbours are : Bolton, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Oldham, Tameside, Kirklees, Stoke on Trent, Rochdale, City of Derby, City of Bristol.

² Throughout this report the term 'officer' refers to those employees of Serco Ltd, who as Education Walsall, are regarded as 'managers' by the council.

Main findings

Summary: Walsall local education authority (LEA) is now highly satisfactory. There has been good progress in a short time and, in partnership with the council, Education Walsall has transformed the majority of education functions to a position where all are satisfactory or better. There is now a sense of common purpose amongst elected members, officers and schools. All are committed to improving the education service. The trust, support and confidence of schools have been fully restored as a result of good leadership by senior officers. The strategy for improving education is good and there are emerging strengths in the strategy for pupils with special educational needs and the promotion of social inclusion. There is a commitment to continuous improvement based on partnership work, robust approaches to monitoring, evaluation and performance management. There is a close correlation between the LEA's own evaluation and the outcomes of this inspection. The LEA knows that much remains to be done. Some plans and intentions, while focused and appropriate, have been articulated only recently and are not fully implemented. Attainment at all key stages requires improvement and further efforts are needed if the LEA is to meet its own aspirations to make all schools excellent. The progress made to date indicates that the LEA has good capacity for further improvement.

Areas of strength	Areas of weakness/for development
Corporate leadership of education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership of senior officers • Schools confidence in and support for corporate and educational leadership • Arrangements for consultation and decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency and quality of team planning
Strategy for education and its implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy for school improvement • Definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention • Intervention in underperforming schools • Effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of attainment consistently remain below national averages in all key stages • The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning • Development of school autonomy • High level of surplus pupil places in primary schools in particular.
Support to improve education in schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for information and communication technology • Support for school governors • Assuring the supply and quality of teachers • Planning and provision of personnel services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision for gifted and talented children • Limited information to schools on service standards • Information for schools about alternative service providers
Support for special educational needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy for SEN and inclusion • The role of special schools in outreach work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of impact of the SEN strategy on pupils' learning and achievement
Support for social inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision for, and attainment of, looked after children • Co-operative multi-agency working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of racial incidents

Recommendations

Key recommendations

The strategy for school improvement and its implementation: Further build and promote schools' capacity to manage and improve themselves and reduce their dependence on the LEA.

Asset management planning: Produce and implement a properly funded plan to improve the condition of school buildings with measurable targets to reduce the backlog of repairs.

Other recommendations

Corporate leadership of education

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value: Ensure that all team plans are consistent in quality, include resource allocations and have clear success criteria.

Strategy for education and its implementation

Providing school places: Finalise and implement a strategy to reduce surplus capacity in primary schools, taking full account of the condition and suitability of school buildings.

Support to improve education in schools

Support for gifted and talented pupils: Establish and implement an action plan to expand the support for gifted and talented pupils to all schools.

Planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management

- Provide schools with service standards and performance information on the management support services they receive from Education Walsall and the council.
- Develop, in partnership with schools and other service providers, an extended range of suppliers from whom these services can be procured.
- Provide schools with improved access to information and communication on the LEA's website.

Support for special educational needs

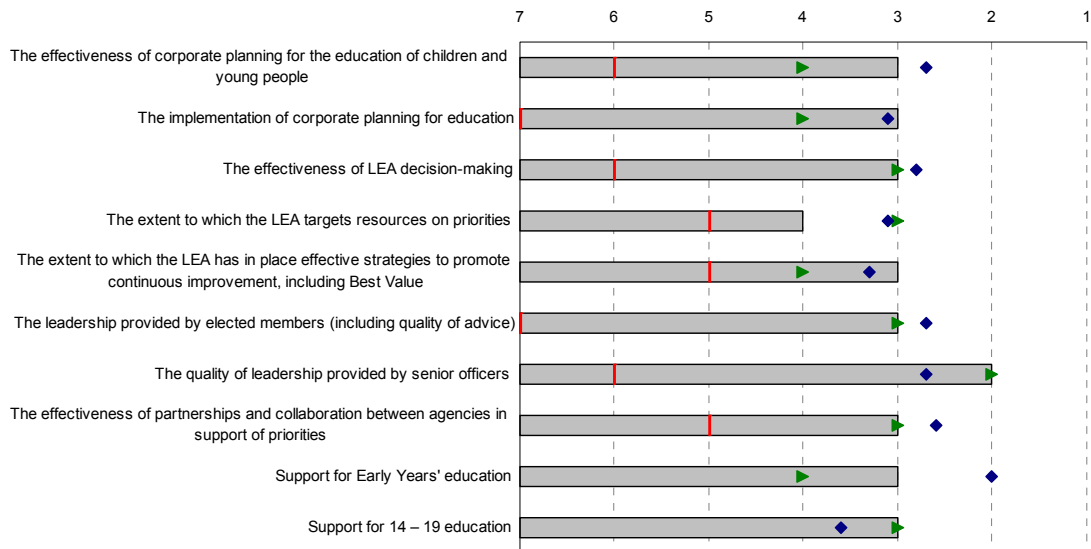
Support for social inclusion

Provision for pupils educated other than at school: Develop and implement an LEA-wide system of managed moves for pupils.

Promoting racial equality: Ensure that all schools return racial incident reports in the specified timescale and that racial incidents are reported formally to elected members.

Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

Summary table of judgements



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. In the last inspection, corporate leadership and management of education were matters of serious concern. Corporate planning was poor and the implementation of corporate plans for education was very poor. There has been significant progress since that time and corporate planning and its implementation are now highly satisfactory.

2. The council has published an agreed, clearly defined and suitably ambitious vision for the next five years based on wide consultation. Education is at the heart of the vision and the key priority to 'make our schools great' includes four pledges for which councillors have lead responsibility for the current year. Each pledge was derived directly from major scrutiny or cabinet reports and reflects key objectives in the strategic plans of Education Walsall. There is widespread understanding and support for the vision and priorities. Financial planning ensures that the pledges are, in the main, affordable and formal reports on progress are made every six months. Current reports demonstrate that implementation is within the budget allocated and meets the planned deadlines.

3. A clear planning framework has been established stating the relationship between the vision, strategic planning, service planning and individual performance planning. It is succinct and understood by all partners. In determining the strategic choices for the next financial year, the council and senior officers have recognised the need to align more explicitly the vision and pledges with the key plans and

service plans of Education Walsall in order to bring about better coherence to planning. Work is already in hand to achieve this.

4. A number of important factors account for the significant progress made in Walsall since the last inspection. A learning executive group has been established and acts as the strategic group for ensuring that corporate and key partner contributions are co-ordinated. In addition, the Walsall Education Board (WEB) is an effective group that includes councillors, key partners and stakeholders and performs the important function of monitoring the strategic, and successful, partnership that exists between Education Walsall and the council. Clarity on respective roles and responsibilities, improved decision-making processes and good leadership by senior officers has brought about improvements in education service delivery, which was previously fragile. A steady rise in attainment and attendance and a reduction in schools causing concern demonstrate the progress made. There is a determination to bring about further, necessary improvement. Importantly, the trust and confidence of schools in the leadership of councillors and senior officers have been restored. Improved consultation and involvement in decision-making by schools and partners have led to a sense of common purpose which makes the capacity for further improvement highly promising.

5. Approaches to partnership work, monitoring and evaluation of service provision and performance management have improved and are contributing well to a culture of increased effectiveness and high expectations. Moreover, there has been no reluctance in taking difficult decisions. Effective communication and consultation have done much to maintain the support and commitment of schools who are no longer cautious in their optimism. This is a significant achievement.

Decision-making

6. At the time of the last inspection the authority did not take decisions effectively. There was a significant backlog of tasks competing for urgent attention and the scrutiny function was weak. Rapid progress has been made in this area and decision-making is now highly satisfactory.

7. The process includes detailed consultation with stakeholders. Consultation with headteacher focus groups, monthly monitoring meetings with the cabinet member, policy advice from the Walsall Education Board, early consideration of cabinet decisions by the scrutiny and performance panel and regular briefings with opposition elected members all contribute to more effective and transparent decision-making. In particular, an elected member development programme has been established and the scrutiny function has been re-designated as a scrutiny and performance panel with an agreed annual forward plan. The panel has addressed and contributed to improvement in matters related to looked after children, the 14-19 strategy, attendance and behaviour.

8. The secure partnership between Education Walsall and the council has ensured that the council operates with similar decision-making processes to a council without formal intervention. Respective roles and delegated responsibilities are

clearly understood enabling Education Walsall to make rapid decisions where necessary. The council has taken difficult decisions within the last two years such as school closures, the creation of the federated school, review of the funding formula and the recently developed strategy for special educational needs (SEN) and inclusion. All are evidence of the council taking a more strategic and timely approach to decision-making than was the case two years ago.

Targeting of resources

9. This was previously unsatisfactory. Substantial progress has been made; financial decisions are taken much more openly, and the allocation of resources to priorities is now satisfactory.

10. Capital and revenue spending on education in 2004-05 fully reflects the council's pledge to increase investment in schools. All additional revenue funding has been passed on to schools and a further £1 million has been added to the budget with the explicit aim of raising standards in primary schools. Increases in the School Formula Funding Share (SFFS) have been limited under current DfES funding arrangements, so that the schools' budget per pupil remains lower than the average for similar authorities. However, the gap has narrowed significantly in comparison with 2003-04. The council has been successful in attracting additional revenue such as Neighbourhood Renewal Funding. It has been far less successful in attracting additional capital funding to reduce the high level of maintenance backlog in schools and to support the rationalisation of primary and special school provision.

11. As a result of thorough review, Education Walsall has re-aligned the use of retained funding to support its priorities and those of schools. This has resulted in improved resources to deal with behaviour support and reductions in the amounts budgeted for strategic management. In total, the budgets for central functions are a little lower than in similar authorities. Staff supported from centrally-controlled budgets are deployed effectively to support those schools most in need. Budget monitoring by the council and Education Walsall is rigorous.

12. In contrast to 2003-04, the current budget delegated to schools forms a higher proportion of the schools budget than the national average and that for similar authorities. The Schools Forum has taken a prominent role in reviewing the school funding formula. Though not yet complete, the work undertaken so far has brought far greater clarity and simplicity to aspects such as the delegation of funding for SEN and premises. Schools are now much more positive about the educational rationale behind the school funding formula. Plans are already in place to review the effectiveness of the formula changes at the end of the financial year.

13. The level of reserves held in schools' budgets fell during 2003-04 to a little over 6% of the budget allocation. A small minority of primary schools and about a quarter of secondary schools carried forward deficits into 2004-05. However, about 40% of primary schools carried forward significant surpluses. Officers monitor and challenge effectively the quality of resource management in schools. Appropriately, Education Walsall requires those schools with significant balances to justify their

positions. At least two-thirds of the schools with large surpluses have clear plans for the use of their reserves, with many setting aside revenue funding to pay for building projects.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

14. This function was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Since then, much has been done to improve performance management, and it is now highly satisfactory. The council and Education Walsall have forged an effective partnership based on shared values and objectives. Though a detailed contract underpins the partnership, the document forms only a safety net and is not used mechanistically as a basis for monitoring and performance. It is indicative of the strength of this partnership that both parties have agreed that all bonuses and penalties relating to the meeting of contractual targets should be re-invested in the education service. This arrangement has already led to the provision of lap-top computers for looked after children, for example.

15. There is a strong culture of continuous improvement within Education Walsall. Its newly revised People Strategy links the performance of individual staff directly to the achievement of objectives and to improvements in performance indicators. There is a clear planning framework and review cycle, though there is some variability in the quality of team plans, some containing too little reference to resource requirements and success criteria. Managers review performance regularly, reporting a wide range of national and local performance indicators to senior managers, to elected members and the Walsall Education Board. The new climate of trust within the authority has enabled much wider sharing of data and information between schools and with elected members. The information is well used to analyse performance and to set new objectives as necessary.

16. A Best Value review (BVR) of the council's provision for looked after children has resulted in significant improvement. Schools' concern about the catering service has contributed effectively to a review of the service. Education Walsall has itself conducted a range of reviews that have adopted best value principles to tackle areas of its work where performance has caused concern. In aspects of SEN provision, for example, consultants have provided a good degree of external challenge and the reviews have resulted in significant service improvements. Schools complete annual best value statements to an agreed format that encourages them to challenge their own performance and to use, self-critically, the wide range of benchmark information provided for them.

Recommendation

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that all team plans are consistent in quality, include resource allocations and have clear success criteria. |
|---|

Leadership by elected members and advice given to them

17. Elected members now provide highly satisfactory leadership where previously it was poor. Councillors and senior officers of the council and Education Walsall have more effective working relationships, a shared sense of purpose and agreement about the priorities for improving the quality of education and social inclusion. Education is central to the council's five-year vision for the borough. Continuity has been maintained following recent local elections although some councillors responsible for education are new to their posts. Nevertheless, there is widespread support and understanding of the priority for education and the four pledges for the current year. Consequently, schools have increased confidence in elected members and no longer see them as an impediment to progress.

18. Elected members are represented on the Walsall Education Board and are appropriately informed about the progress of the strategic objectives. Key policy decisions are also subject to planned and regular discussions at cabinet, scrutiny and overview committee and the Walsall Education Board. In this way, elected members make decisions in accordance with the direction of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and are able to monitor all aspects of performance.

Leadership by senior officers

19. At the time of the last inspection officers had to deal with extreme political interference and were making slow progress in improving services. The leadership of education services has been transformed over the last two years and it is now good.

20. Central to the success is the strong and effective partnership between the most senior officers of the council and those of Education Walsall. Respective roles and responsibilities are clearly understood by schools and key partners. Through the work of an able senior team, a shared commitment to school improvement and inclusion has been established and communicated effectively. Officers have invested considerable efforts in building relationships with schools and have achieved a good balance between support and challenge. Trust and confidence have been fully restored; officers and politicians listen to the views of schools, involve them in decision-making, and consult and communicate effectively. A clear strategy for school improvement and inclusion has been established which is informed by comprehensive data. This is contributing to a sense of common purpose now present in the borough and is evident in the steady rise in attainment, attendance and in the reduction in the number of schools in formal categories of concern.

Strategic partnerships

21. Since the last inspection a clear framework for partnership arrangements has been defined. It is well co-ordinated and informed by the objectives of the Walsall strategic partnership. The framework has ensured that strategic and operational partnerships are now highly satisfactory.

22. Senior education officers have clear cross-cutting responsibilities in key partnership groups, ensuring that there is education representation in, for example, health and social care, the economic forum, the safer Walsall partnership and community engagement. At this level, a learning executive group monitors the work of the Walsall Education Board, the 14-19 strategic forum, the lifelong learning alliance and, through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, the Early Years and Childcare Partnership. This arrangement avoids duplication of effort, resources are better deployed and progress monitored more efficiently.

23. Partnerships at operational levels, particularly in relation to school-based partnerships, have benefited from the commitment made by senior officers. Schools value the opportunity and encouragement to take a lead role in the dissemination of best practice and supporting each other, especially in schools causing concern. In addition, the use of specialist colleges, Beacon schools, the Excellence Cluster, behaviour and attendance project groups and literacy initiatives has contributed to demonstrable improvements in attendance, attainment and the performance of schools.

Support for Early Years

24. Good progress has been made and the support for early years is now highly satisfactory. This function was not inspected fully during the last inspection. Since that time, five Sure Start programmes have been established and support has been subject to an extensive review by Education Walsall. Support for early years is prioritised in the Education Development Plan (EDP) and the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan; it is also one of the council's key pledges for education in the vision for Walsall. Planning has secured a good understanding between officers, partners and stakeholders about the priorities. The budget reflects the priorities and, together with good leadership, accounts for the highly satisfactory progress being made against targets. The Early Years Partnership is well supported by Education Walsall and respective roles and responsibilities are clear and understood.

25. Comprehensive data about the range and type of provision in each ward have been developed, which are used to ensure a better balance of providers and settings, particularly in the more deprived wards. Information for parents, overseen by the parent forum, is both clear and informative. Additionally, guidance is available for prospective providers, including a wide range of training opportunities.

26. Good quality guidance has been developed and published for all settings to support curriculum planning, profiling, assessment and self-evaluation. Monitoring by school improvement advisers shows that it is beginning to be used in most maintained settings. However, no settings have yet been accredited with quality assurance schemes and only half the number of settings targeted for accreditation are working towards it. Arrangements to support young children with SEN are well established through the multi-agency working in the *'team around the child'* initiative.

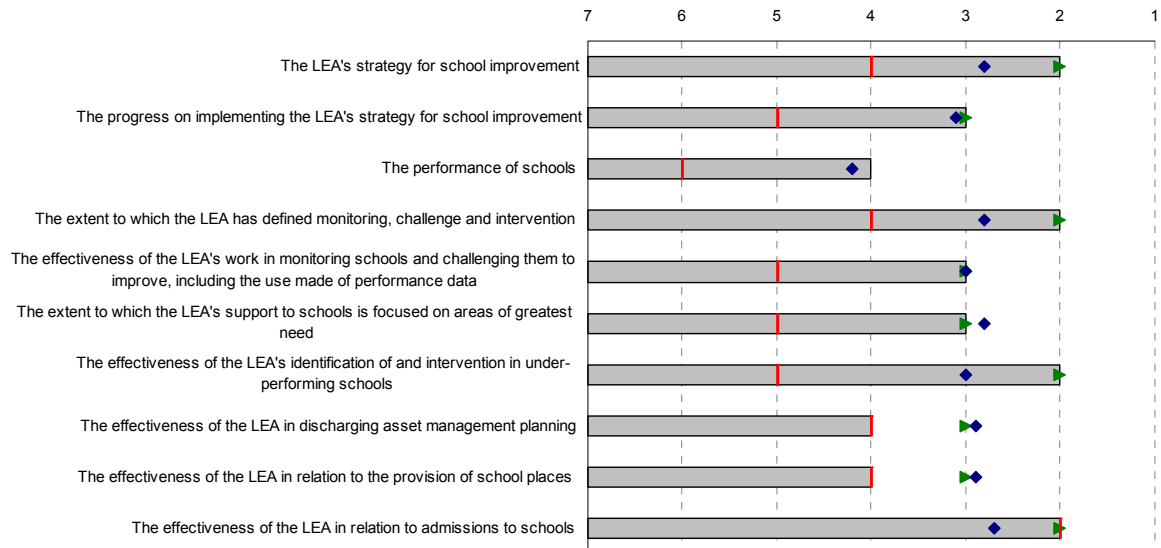
Support for 14-19 education

27. The support for 14-19 education is highly satisfactory. Education Walsall has taken the lead in developing the local action plan and has set out a clear and shared vision for improving 14-19 education, which is understood by schools and other partners. A newly-appointed 14-19 strategy manager is responsible for its implementation and he is well supported by senior officers and others in the 14-19 strategic partnership. The partnership has established a climate of co-operation in which schools, other external agencies, training providers, the local learning and skills council, and a college of further education work together to widen choice and improve participation. Schools and other providers work together well to find local solutions.

28. Challenging targets have been set for the reduction in the number of 16-year-old school leavers not involved in employment, education or training. Schools have been well supported in developing their Key Stage 4 curriculum to meet the needs of different groups of pupils and there are sound plans to increase the range and number of level 2 and level 3 courses available. No schools achieved fewer than 25% A*-C grades at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or equivalent in 2004 although standards of attainment remain below national averages. GCE A level and other Level 3 course results are broadly average. While the 14-19 action plan is in the early stages of its implementation, its good quality means that the LEA is well-placed to bring about the necessary further improvement.

Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

Summary table of judgements



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 school improvement and its implementation

29. The strategy for school improvement is good and its implementation is highly satisfactory. The main strength of the improvement since the last inspection is that support for social inclusion and for the curriculum, teaching and learning, have been successfully brought together. Increasingly, these separate elements are becoming mutually reinforcing. The strategy builds effectively on the greatly improved relations between Education Walsall and the schools.

30. The general principles of the strategy are sound and set out clearly. They are based on the objective of closing the gap with national attainment and the belief that schools are the chief agents of their own improvement. Attainment has improved, and the school improvement priorities, selected on the basis of good data analysis and up-to-date knowledge of the schools, reflect Education Walsall's commitment to raising standards. To date, however, the gap has not closed significantly and the ambitious attainment targets which have been missed for the last two years are unlikely to be met in 2006. However, there has been striking success in work with underperforming schools, based on knowledge of the schools which enables support to be deployed effectively and there are currently no schools requiring special measures

31. Each school receives a basic allocation of three days of monitoring and support a year from its school improvement adviser (SIA). Although this basic

allocation is relatively large, it is justified by the scale of improvement required and the success of such intervention. It is likely to remain necessary until schools' independence of Education Walsall becomes stronger. New procedures for the deployment of support are to be implemented soon and these have the potential to strengthen school autonomy. A school-focussed team, comprising support from the SIA and other services is to be allocated to each school. This development is too new to be properly assessed.

32. Building on the planned introduction of new and more rigorous school self-evaluation, Education Walsall intends to involve the schools more extensively in the assessment of their own needs for support, and this is likely to strengthen them as agents of their own improvement. At present, too few are able to take on fully the responsibility for their own improvement as envisaged in the strategy. These changes are intended to reinforce the joint working of school improvement and social inclusion services. They provide a good foundation for the expansion of the Excellence Cluster, which currently serves a part of the borough and which is scheduled to expand to the rest of the borough next year. The strength of the work to date has been in bringing different elements of support for pupils together, for example in the use of learning mentors.

33. School admissions arrangements are good and contribute to the strategy for education by their smooth working, and particularly through their success in the reintegration of excluded pupils. However, there is room for improvement in both asset management planning and the provision of school places, both of which have weaknesses in their strategic, and particularly financial, planning.

34. Taken as a whole, the strategy for school improvement is strong. There is clear evidence of improvement since the last inspection and some evidence of the outcomes of that improvement in the growing success of the education system. There is good reason to have confidence in the capacity of the LEA, in partnership with Education Walsall, to make further improvement in the implementation of the strategy.

Recommendation

- Further build and promote schools' capacity to manage and improve themselves and reduce their dependence on the LEA.

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

35. The arrangements for monitoring, challenge, intervention, and support in schools, have improved and are now good. Schools understand the arrangements well. Each school is assigned to one of four categories, ranging from those which need least support to those requiring most, because they have been identified by Ofsted or by Education Walsall officers as causing particular concern. The system for categorising them is robust because it is based partially on objective measures, such as attainment, and partly on the specific circumstances of the school, for

example a significant change in the intake of pupils. Headteachers know and have agreed with the categories in which their schools have been placed. They also believe that relationships with advisers have improved to the point that they are now prepared to accept challenge by them in a way that would not have been possible before.

36. Monitoring and challenging schools, combined with the use of data, are highly satisfactory. Education Walsall knows its schools well and, with higher quality data provision, is beginning to improve the process of setting targets. This year, for the first time, schools will be able to set targets on an individual pupil basis and make more informative comparisons and predictions by using externally produced and validated analyses. These improvements have the potential to build a stronger link between the target-setting process and schools' planning for their own improvement. This link has been weak in many schools until now.

37. Better use of data has improved the deployment of support to where it is most needed. This is now done in a highly effective way, for example in a recent initiative to improve the initial teaching of literacy. In addition to the support deployed under Education Walsall's system of categories, other sources of advice are made available as necessary in order to sustain schools through a period of improvement, for example, in coming out of the category of concern.

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

38. The work to improve schools causing concern has become strikingly more effective. It was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection and is now good. There were nine schools either requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses at the time of the last inspection. There are now only two. This success is due to systematic and determined work and the SIAs' knowledge of the schools, which has enabled the early identification of problems. The project teams set up when a school is identified as causing concern have used a broad range of support and intervention, including the removal of delegated powers. Headteachers view the processes favourably, though they judge that the planning of a school's exit from the category of concern is not made sufficiently explicit.

Asset management planning

39. This was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Since then, although many aspects of asset management have improved, there has been only limited progress in reducing the backlog of repairs to school buildings. Asset management planning is satisfactory overall.

40. The previous inspection recommended urgent improvement to the poor condition of the borough's schools. The backlog is still among the highest 25% of LEAs in England and many of the repairs need urgent action. There is clear ambition to improve school buildings. The condition and capacity of all school buildings has

been assessed and there are plans to determine their suitability more thoroughly. Clear criteria, which schools understand, establish priorities for capital projects.

41. The council has actively explored a variety of sources to raise the funds to address the maintenance backlog and it has had some success, for example, in attracting targeted capital. Other funding sources have been identified but further decisions remain to be taken before the necessary resources are secured.

Recommendation

- Produce and implement a properly funded plan to improve the condition of school buildings with measurable targets to reduce the backlog of repairs.

Providing school places

42. This function remains satisfactory. The council has adjusted its secondary provision to meet changes in demand, including the provision of additional accommodation in some schools to reduce overcrowding and to cater for increasing numbers of post-16 students. Consultation is underway to reduce the number of special schools as part of the LEA's strategy for SEN and inclusion.

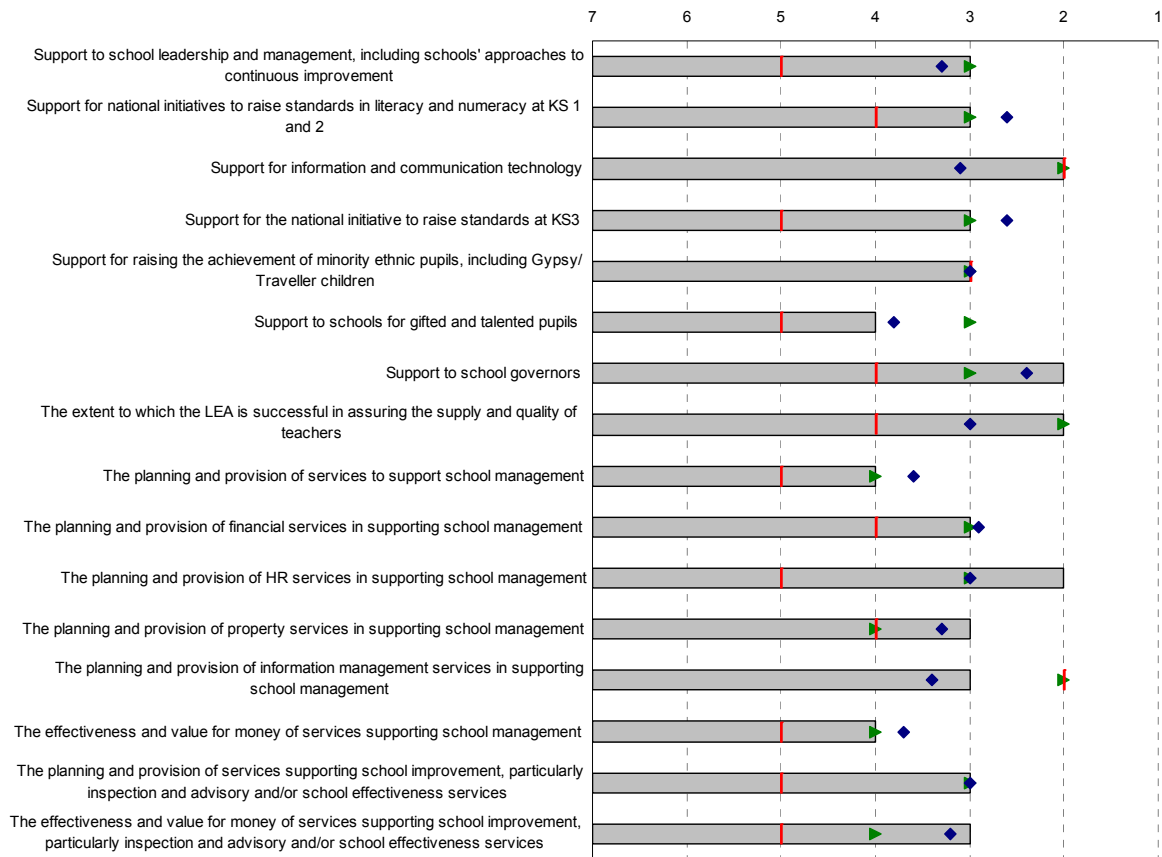
43. Surplus capacity in primary schools grew from 8.5% in 2001-02 to 12.4% in 2002-03. Following the closure of one primary school, surplus capacity has fallen slightly to 12.2%, but this remains too high, especially as a further decrease in the number of primary aged pupils is forecast. About one school in six has at least a quarter of its places empty. Further closures are anticipated, three of which have been agreed by the school organisation committee with a further three subject to consultation. There are outline plans for the further review of primary school provision. These rightly take into account the condition of school buildings and the quality of education in schools, but it is not yet clear how any changes will be funded.

Recommendation

- Finalise and implement a strategy to reduce surplus capacity in primary schools, taking full account of the condition and suitability of school buildings.

Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

Summary table of judgements



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.

Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

44. Education Walsall has made significant improvements in its support for school leadership and management since the last inspection and this is now highly satisfactory. A major factor is the clarity and openness with which Education Walsall communicates with schools. This, in turn, has gained schools' trust and confidence in the LEA's capacity to lead them forward.

45. There is a consistent and well co-ordinated focus across the full range of functions on the development of leadership and management in schools. This co-ordination extends beyond the advisory service to include SEN and inclusion support, resource management and the management of human resources. The management structure within Education Walsall supports and promotes this co-ordination effectively. Sound performance management arrangements help to ensure that

good intentions are translated into action, and that any underperformance is identified and challenged.

46. The authority has identified appropriately the need to increase schools' autonomy but self-evaluation in schools remains a key area for development. Education Walsall is applying well-designed strategies in a range of school improvement services to equip schools' staff and governors with the skills to become more effective in identifying and acting upon weaknesses. School inspections over the last year indicate that this focus is bearing fruit, with the leadership of headteachers judged consistently to be good or better. There has also been a significant improvement in the quality of governance, reflecting the authority's effective support in this area.

47. Officers and school improvement advisers are deployed effectively, targeting schools most in need according to clear criteria. These schools are improving at a faster rate than others in areas such as attendance and exclusions, and in the performance of pupils for whom English is an additional language.

48. Education Walsall identifies and disseminates good practice well. There is an effective network of leading teachers in primary schools, and lead departments help promote good practice in secondary schools. Good work in developing potential heads of secondary departments in subjects where recruitment is difficult, also helps ensure that the momentum of improvement is maintained.

49. Schools are generally satisfied with the management support services that they buy from Education Walsall or from the council, and the services are of at least satisfactory quality. However, more work is needed to develop schools' awareness of the range, quality and cost of services available from other providers.

Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2

50. The support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2 is now highly satisfactory.

51. The primary strategy team is valued highly by schools; their work is coherently planned and delivered, and targeted at areas of greatest need. The support provided is timely and well focused. A network of leading teachers helps to share good practice and their work is well co-ordinated. The primary numeracy and literacy strategy teams have good mutual links and with other school improvement services, including the Key Stage 3 strategy team. Links with early years support are developing. Further improvements to the way support is co-ordinated are planned and this has the potential to strengthen the teams' effectiveness further.

52. Low levels of literacy on entry to the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are being tackled through a number of recently established and suitable intervention programmes. Support from the English as an additional language team (EAL) has been well focussed on schools with the largest number of minority ethnic pupils. The Key Stage 1 results in these schools are improving at a faster rate than in other primary schools. Results are improving more rapidly at Key Stage 2 than at Key

Stage 1, where they have remained similar for the last three years until an improvement in 2004. At Key Stage 2, the results have remained consistently below those for similar authorities and below the national average, although they have risen steadily and at a rate which exceeds the national trend.

Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3

53. Support for the Key Stage 3 strategy has improved and is now highly satisfactory. Earlier weaknesses in the transfer of data between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 have been addressed and the Key Stage 3 strategy is firmly established in schools.

54. The use of data to set targets for pupils is well established. School targets are challenging and include those for pupils who enter Key Stage 3 with lower levels of attainment than those expected nationally. A useful pilot initiative is addressing how better use of assessment may raise standards.

55. Schools are very positive about the quality and impact of the support they receive. The strategy for supporting attainment at Key Stage 3 is well understood and is targeted where improvement is needed most. All of the strands of the Key Stage 3 strategy are being implemented appropriately and lead departments play a significant role in spreading good practice. The strategy team has good links with other parts of the school improvement service which are developed through regular meetings. As at Key Stages 1 and 2, planned improvements to the work of the school improvement advisers have the potential to strengthen these links further.

56. Results have risen sharply in schools that have received the most support. The progress made by pupils between Key Stages 2 and 3 is higher than in similar LEAs. Evidence from school inspections shows that the proportion of good teaching at Key Stage 3 is better than in similar LEAs. Attendance is increasing and exclusion rates are falling. In 2004, unvalidated results indicate that the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in the core subjects was similar to the previous year although more pupils achieved the higher levels. However, overall attainment at Key Stage 3 remains below the national average.

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

57. Previously, the support for this function was highly satisfactory and it remains so. Education Walsall has responded well to the recommendation in the previous report. Data is now comprehensive and used effectively to support and challenge individual schools. Schools are provided with an analysis of their attainment data, categorised by ethnic origin, and comparative data for the population as a whole. The attainment and rate of improvement of Indian and Black Caribbean children are relatively high whereas Pakistani children show the poorest attainment levels. A range of appropriate actions to help raise the achievement of underperforming minority ethnic groups has been identified. For example, there has been a particular focus on training for early years practitioners, concentrating on

diversity issues and the needs of children of asylum seekers, and a Children's Fund project targets support for disaffected boys from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and African Caribbean communities.

58. Consultants, funded through the minority ethnic achievement grant, are deployed effectively. For African Caribbean pupils, for example, a consultant is developing curriculum materials for personal, social and health education. The West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Travelling Children provides appropriate specialist support for Gypsy and Traveller pupils. The service also provides strategic and operational functions and comprehensive data analysis.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

59. This was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It has improved and is now satisfactory overall although progress with the expansion of support in the primary phase, beyond the Excellence Cluster, has been slow. Education Walsall does not expect this to extend to all primary schools for another year.

60. All secondary schools, but less than half of primary schools, receive support. There is a developing policy framework for all schools, but it has yet to be developed into a plan of action. Specialist schools are used as sources of expertise and, for talented pupils, provision in sport and in the arts, particularly music, is developing well. Those schools currently receiving support work well together; for example, in training and the exchange of ideas which have led to adopting new approaches. However, the evidence of improved attainment at higher levels is mixed. The support has yet to secure consistently high results for the most able pupils.

Recommendation

- Establish and implement an action plan to expand the support for gifted and talented pupils to all schools.

Support for school governors

61. Support for school governors has improved significantly and is now good. Education Walsall has a good understanding of the quality of governance in schools and school inspection reports indicate good improvement over the last year. Schools value the service they now receive from Education Walsall. There is good support for recruiting school governors. The service has targeted groups representing minority ethnic groups with the aim of promoting governing bodies that are more representative of the local communities. Governor vacancies are comparatively low.

62. A comprehensive training programme is offered to school governors. Centrally-run courses are well attended and highly regarded by participants. The content and timing of training programmes are also tailored responsively to the needs of individual governing bodies. The training seeks appropriately to develop governors' ability to challenge performance in their schools as well as informing them about new developments and statutory requirements. Communication with

governors is generally good. A newsletter is published each term and governors receive regular briefings on emerging issues in their individual schools.

The supply and quality of teachers

63. This function is now good. Data management, in particular, is much more robust; data are analysed well to predict future needs and identify action in a clear strategy for the recruitment and retention of staff. Although there are no major recruitment problems in Walsall, the strategy identifies where improvements are needed and has resulted, for example, in improving the retention of newly-qualified teachers. Also, in partnership with secondary schools, there are well-conceived initiatives to develop the potential of existing teachers as future heads of department in some key subject areas where it is hard to attract high quality candidates from outside the borough.

64. There is a coherent framework for continuing professional development (CPD) based on a career progression model for leaders and managers, teachers and support staff. It is well regarded and supported by schools. A particular strength of the programme is its explicit reference to how local professional development links to achieving the strategic objectives of Education Walsall such as in the development of the strategy for SEN and inclusion.

65. Mentoring and induction arrangements, including good quality guidance materials, for headteachers and newly qualified-teachers are firmly established and national training programmes promoted well. The arrangements for monitoring and supporting newly-qualified teachers' induction and development are particularly good.

Planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management.

66. These functions are now satisfactory overall. Schools receive a comprehensive range of management support services to a standard that is at least satisfactory. The authority publishes a clear and timely prospectus of support services on offer from Education Walsall and from the council. An annual trade fair supplements this, where schools can discuss with each service provider the options available to them. Schools can generally tailor the level of services they choose to their specific needs. However, the information provided about alternative providers is limited and schools receive little support to help them to procure services from elsewhere.

67. Schools receive inadequate information on the standard of service they should expect from support services. Education Walsall recognises this and is planning to provide more information in the prospectus of support services for next year. Although the standards are not published, the performance of services and the outcomes are subject to frequent monitoring and close scrutiny as part of the contract management arrangements. The high and, in some cases, increasing level

of buy-back of support services is a good indication that schools value the services they receive.

68. The value for money of most management support services is satisfactory. Services have been market tested by many schools that previously used other suppliers, and by the council as part of the procurement of the strategic partnership contract with Education Walsall. Services provided to schools by the council and by Education Walsall are regularly assessed following the general principles of Best Value reviews.

Recommendations

- Provide schools with service standards and performance information on the management support services they receive from Education Walsall and the council.
- Develop, in partnership with schools and other service providers, an extended range of suppliers from whom these services can be procured.

69. Financial services have improved and are now highly satisfactory. Schools report an increased level of satisfaction with the quality of financial information they receive from the LEA. They rate the quality of financial support and advice as better than satisfactory, although their views compare unfavourably with those of schools in most other LEAs. A few schools report that the service is sometimes unable to provide the timely support to which they are entitled through the service level agreement.

70. Easily accessible data enable schools to benchmark their spending against that in similar schools. The council has recently introduced a new finance system that allows schools on-line access to their financial records. Schools that have not yet transferred to the new system continue to receive monthly budget monitoring reports which are helpfully set out in a format that matches consistent financial reporting requirements. Schools report that these statements are generally accurate and that links with payroll are reliable.

71. The LEA has entered into partnership with another provider to supply schools with helpful budget-modelling software and associated training. This supports the LEA's active and effective efforts to improve the quality of resource management in schools as part of its broader strategy to increase school autonomy.

72. Personnel support was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. There has been significant progress in addressing the issues raised then, particularly in building the capacity of the personnel support service and updating the personnel manual for schools. The human resources function is now good. The service is responsive to the needs of individual schools and provides good professional advice. Schools cite adequate staffing levels, good leadership and guidance in the form of a comprehensive human resources manual as the reasons why this service performs

so well. The service contributes to the aim of increasing schools' autonomy in managing personnel issues.

73. Monitoring and challenge of personnel management practices in schools are conducted effectively. Sickness rates in Walsall's schools, for example, have fallen significantly from an annual average of 12 days per teacher to 7 days. The service maintains positive relations with staff representative bodies and the industrial relations climate is healthy. Contracts of employment are issued too slowly but the rate is improving as schools become more rigorous in ensuring that appropriate checks on potential employees are complete before their employment begins.

74. Property services have improved and are now highly satisfactory. Schools report an increasing level of satisfaction with the technical support they receive on maintaining their school buildings and managing building projects. Schools value the personal contact they have with surveyors and the advice they receive. Most schools buy back the service, but some technical support is provided to schools that choose to make their own contractual arrangements for building works. The helpful technical support and responsive repairs service provided are particularly valued by schools.

75. Information management services were good at the time of the last inspection when no fieldwork was undertaken. While progress has been made in many areas, some aspects of information management have not kept pace with the rapid developments in this field and it is now highly satisfactory.

76. Schools are satisfied with the authority's approach to managing information, the way it communicates with them, and the technical support they receive for ICT. There are clear protocols for managing communications with schools and requesting data. Communications to groups of schools are generally included in a monthly newsletter. All mass communications are checked for quality and managed in such a way that schools do not feel over-burdened with information. Likewise, schools are content with the way the authority handles requests for information. For example, there is a single pupil database, and statistical information is transferred securely on-line. Schools can also choose to use on-line financial accounting. All schools have fast internet connections.

77. However, schools do not have electronic access to some key documents and information. For example, the new finance guidance document is only currently available in a cumbersome paper format. The information that is available to schools on-line is dispersed across several different websites which reduces the ease of access. Some user groups, such as school governors, are not adequately provided for. The council recognises that it needs to develop in these areas and it is currently finalising a new strategy for ICT.

Recommendation

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide schools with improved access to information and communication on the LEA's website. |
|---|

Planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory services.

78. The planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement were unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Since then, Education Walsall has appointed well-qualified staff to key posts and has improved the deployment of support to schools. These areas of work are now highly satisfactory.

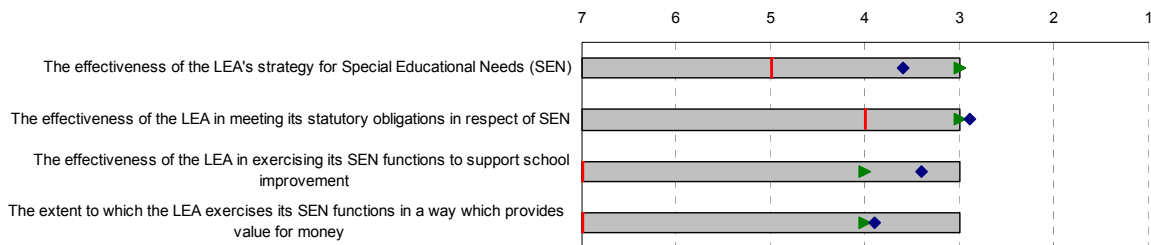
79. Education Walsall has recognised that all its services can contribute to improving schools and, in particular, to developing their capacity for effective self-management. This recognition is reflected in the organisation's structure, which requires close co-operation between school improvement advisers, staff whose expertise lies in the fields of SEN and inclusion, and officers specialising in management support services, such as finance and personnel. The new school-focused teams offer an innovative approach by including professionals from other council services and from the health service.

80. School improvement services are underpinned by a clear planning structure and an effective performance management system. There is some variability in the quality of team plans, but all focus on the improvement of key national and local performance indicators. Managers are, therefore, well aware of strengths and weaknesses and take decisive action when necessary. Appropriately, Education Walsall provides differentiated levels of centrally-resourced support in proportion to schools' needs. Schools value this approach and have access to additional advisory support should they require it through the Black Country School Improvement Partnership.

81. Centrally-retained budgets for school improvement are a little lower than in similar authorities, though they are supplemented by an above average level of non-devolved Standards Fund. School improvement services provide highly satisfactory value for money. However, schools with the lowest level of need for support receive generous allocations of centrally-funded time. Education Walsall is seeking to develop schools' capability for self-evaluation from a comparatively low base but as schools improve these skills, this generous level of support will be too high.

Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

Summary table of judgements



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

82. Good progress has been made with the strategy for SEN. It is now highly satisfactory and has many good features. A major strength of the strategy is that provision for SEN is securely rooted in the corporate strategies for promoting inclusion and school improvement.

83. The significant weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection have been addressed robustly. The trust and confidence of schools have been gained as a result of comprehensive consultation and effective leadership. Schools are much clearer about the way in which budgets for SEN are allocated and there is a shared understanding of respective responsibilities. The new arrangements fully reflect the SEN code of practice and promote early identification of need and school-based action. Schools are increasingly confident that the approach results in a fairer distribution of resources. Special school headteachers are actively involved in supporting inclusive practice. They provide expert advice to mainstream schools and promote the inclusion of pupils with SEN into local schools.

84. Partnership work is central to the SEN strategy. Education Walsall has made good links with social services, health services, parent groups, the West Midlands Regional Partnership and voluntary agencies. These effective relationships provide opportunities for joint work and funding for innovative projects to further promote inclusive practice within the borough in line with the vision for inclusion. Previous concerns about the management of the parent partnership officers have been resolved. The parent partnership officer remains under the management of the council and is not an employee of Education Walsall. Consequently the parent partnership team is now able to provide a strong, independent voice for parents.

85. Changes made to the management and organisation of the Educational Psychology and SEN support services have had a positive impact on the coherence of provision and in the levels of satisfaction with the services expressed by schools.

Renamed as the Consultation and Inclusion Support Service (CISS), it is better equipped to provide consultation and advice to school staff as well as responding to the needs of individual pupils. The school-focused teams provide a good model for identifying whole school developments and supporting early intervention to meet pupils' needs. This initiative is still at an early stage of implementation and evaluation of its impact has not yet been implemented.

86. Education Walsall has already recognised the need to improve the procedures for identifying whole school targets for children with SEN and for monitoring how well these pupils achieve. The delivery plan for 2004–2008 appropriately identifies these as areas for future development. Therefore, the capacity to develop the SEN strategy further is good.

Statutory obligations

87. Arrangements to meet statutory obligations are highly satisfactory. Good progress has been made in developing systems and procedures to fulfil statutory duties and to ensure that the allocation of resources is transparent and proportionate to need. Comprehensive information about the SEN strategy is published on Education Walsall's website. Good relationships and effective links with statutory and voluntary agencies have been forged at both strategic and operational levels.

88. The new ways of working reflect fully the SEN Code of Practice. The introduction of the school-focused team provides schools with access to specialist expertise and advice early in the process of assessment and many more pupils have their needs met within the normal school arrangements. The proportion of statements of SEN completed in 18 weeks is in line with national averages and has improved although completion continues to be delayed by health advice. The involvement of school-based staff on the statutory assessment panel promotes effective moderation across schools and identifies where individual schools require further support. The contents and tone of correspondence to parents are much improved. However, there has been a small number of occasions when the local guidance for communicating with parents has not been followed and this has had an adverse effect on relationships between parents, the school and Education Walsall.

89. Recruitment of additional staff to the educational psychology service and the monitoring and assessment team has further increased Education Walsall's capacity to meet its statutory obligations. Annual reviews are attended by officers and systematic monitoring of out-of-borough placements has begun.

90. The strong parent partnership service is independent of Education Walsall and provides comprehensive and impartial information, guidance and support that are valued by parents. The work of the service is supporting the reduction of appeals to tribunal.

SEN functions to support school improvement

91. Very good progress has been made in addressing the poor provision identified at the time of the last inspection. The effectiveness of Education Walsall in supporting school improvement through exercising its SEN function is now highly satisfactory.

92. The improvements to this function have been achieved by very good leadership, an effective consultation and training programme, the restructuring of the SEN support services and the introduction of more open funding arrangements. Good guidance is available to identify what schools should be doing to support pupils with different levels of need and to enable them to review and evaluate their provision. Comparative SEN data are provided as part of the annual target-setting process when targets for the lowest attaining 20% of pupils are discussed. Special schools are equally well supported and challenged with a growing use of performance data to evaluate the impact of their provision. The monitoring and assessment team regularly examines the progress of pupils with statements of special educational need at the time of the annual review.

93. Special schools involvement in promoting inclusive practice is highly valued by mainstream schools. Consultation and funding arrangements have led to the effective identification and use of expertise to support mainstream schools. Further consultation on specialist provision includes formalising the role of special school outreach work.

94. The management of the CISS is now highly satisfactory. The re-organised service has a clear focus on consultancy and advice, and works with schools to develop their capacity to support a diverse range of SEN. The approach is also proving to be an efficient model for accessing and planning for the use of SEN services. The monitoring and evaluation of support for SEN in school improvement have been strengthened by the introduction of the school-focused teams. This innovative model provides effective communication between school improvement advisers and CISS. The approach is responsive to schools' needs and encourages them to review and evaluate their provision. However, at this early stage, the records of the school-focused team meetings do not include sufficient detail about what is to be achieved by the intervention of multi-agency teams and therefore do not provide a sufficiently rigorous platform for later evaluation and challenge.

Value for money

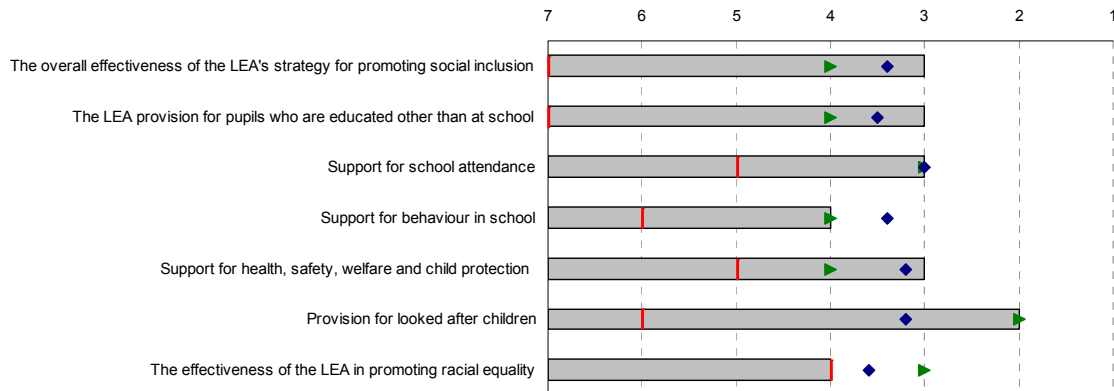
95. Education Walsall provides highly satisfactory value for money in its SEN functions. There have been significant improvements to this function since the last inspection when value for money was poor. Weaknesses have been tackled rigorously through the comprehensive SEN consultation process, restructuring of the support services and the appointment of additional well-qualified staff to the monitoring and assessment team. The total cost of SEN provision is in line with that for similar LEAs.

96. The very effective leadership provided by Education Walsall has developed the trust and confidence of schools that funding will be delegated fairly, therefore benefiting pupils with the greatest needs. The mechanisms for delegating and accounting for funding for SEN are transparent and provide clarity about the respective responsibilities of schools and Education Walsall for pupils with different levels of need. This improved transparency is welcomed by schools, as are the arrangements introduced to provide funding for pupils with more complex or long-term needs without the need for a lengthy and expensive statementing process.

97. The new arrangements for the allocation of SEN funding provide effective systems for planning, monitoring and evaluating SEN spending. Budgets are monitored regularly and Education Walsall makes very good use of benchmarking data, including that provided by Ofsted school inspections and the SEN Regional Partnership, to evaluate the impact of provision and to prioritise future developments. There is a coherent disability access plan and targets to provide local provision for those pupils with SEN currently educated outside the borough, all of which are intended to lead to further efficiencies in the use of resources. These developments are being positively supported by multi-agency working to identify opportunities to extend local provision.

Section 5: Support for social inclusion

Summary table of judgements



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

98. Previously very poor, this aspect of work has improved significantly, and it is now highly satisfactory. The recommendations made at that time have been fully addressed. Social inclusion, a key priority in the vision for Walsall, is reflected in the strategic aims of Education Walsall. Plans to close the gap between the achievement of different groups of children and young people and to improve their participation in education are clearly defined. The strategy is understood by elected members who have allocated additional funds as part of the council's neighbourhood strategy. As a result, the capacity for further improvement is highly promising

99. There is active involvement in work with other agencies to improve services for children and young people. This involvement is effective in securing good co-operation and information-sharing in order to co-ordinate better the use of resources and develop greater safeguards for children at risk.

100. Education Walsall has improved the quality and effectiveness of its work in this area and now delivers better services to schools. This has been achieved by skilful reorganisation of teams and responsibilities. There is greater emphasis on meeting basic needs, such as places for pupils out of school, and on ensuring that services are effective and well regarded. Managers are well qualified and deployed effectively. Development plans are monitored regularly, with progress reported to elected members and the Walsall Education Board. Reasonable steps are taken to meet statutory requirements.

101. A considerable factor in the improvement since the last inspection is the quality of communication with, and involvement of, key partners. Schools are particularly appreciative of the extent to which they have been consulted and report

high levels of confidence in officers and a growing sense of shared purpose. The provision of support for attendance and behaviour is beginning to meet schools' needs. The co-ordination of work between school improvement and inclusion service staff through the school-focused teams has the potential to avoid unnecessary duplication and offers a sound basis for supporting and challenging schools. While progress has been rapid, some changes are not yet fully embedded and greater attention is needed to develop school autonomy and to implement Education Walsall's role in brokering school-led partnerships.

Provision for pupils educated other than at school

102. Previously judged very poor for failing many of the borough's most vulnerable pupils, provision and systems for pupils educated other than at school are now highly satisfactory. This has been achieved by investing in additional pupil referral units (PRU) and remedying the deficiencies in an existing unit which was providing an unacceptable standard of education in 2002. All pupils without a school place now receive 25 hours of tuition and there is capacity to support early intervention in order to prevent exclusion.

103. The number of exclusions has significantly reduced and the management of re-integration has improved. Although provision has been increased considerably, less is spent on this than in comparable LEAs, thus providing good value for money. The progress of children educated at home is appropriately monitored. Those without a school place are subject to a rigorous multi-agency process to determine the best way to meet their needs. Elected members receive comprehensive reports on exclusions and the quality of provision is now subject to the same accountability and improvement systems that govern schools.

104. The strategy for improving provision for pupils educated other than at school is good and matches the overarching strategy and plans in the updated and comprehensive behaviour support plan. Within the provision, there is a range of options for different ages of pupils excluded from school and those unable to attend for health or other reasons. Alternative education for excluded pupils at Key Stage 4 is developing well, delivered through work place providers, further education and the use of tailored programmes, many leading to accreditation.

105. The arrangements for children not in school are organised in order to secure a return to mainstream education. In some cases, schools organise this themselves through 'managed moves' which are preventing exclusion. There is currently no Walsall-wide system for co-ordinating this. The arrangements lack consistency and there is only limited monitoring of their impact.

Recommendation

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and implement an LEA-wide system of managed moves for pupils. |
|---|

Support for attendance

106. Support for attendance was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection and is now highly satisfactory. Attendance remains below the national average but there has been overall improvement and the gap between Walsall's performance and national averages has narrowed significantly for primary and secondary schools, with a very marked improvement for special schools.

107. Restructuring of the service and additional recruitment to education welfare services (EWS) has resulted in suitably differentiated support to schools and vulnerable pupils. The teams are now deployed on the basis of accurate attendance data and by information arising from school-focused teams. They work in partnership with schools, focusing on a range of supportive and preventive action. High-profile activities such as the frequent truancy sweeps, concentration on particular schools, higher levels of prosecutions, and fast-track prosecutions have raised the awareness of children, parents and local communities of the importance of school attendance.

108. The EWS provides good quality guidance and training to schools. Agreements with each school detail the amount of support provided and headteachers report a growing confidence in the work of the team. Well-focused inter-agency work is undertaken by linking education welfare officers to other services or developments; for example the attendance of looked after children is identified as a priority and linked to the actions in the Excellence Cluster. The attendance of Gypsy and Traveller children is improving.

Support for behaviour

109. Support for behaviour has improved and is now satisfactory. Services have been reviewed and reorganised to provide more co-ordinated and coherent support for schools in managing pupils' behaviour.

110. The behaviour support plan has been updated and offers a strategic framework for the delivery of services, including those linked to the SEN strategy. There is now a well-defined continuum of support that includes access to vocational and informal education programmes and a good range of provision for meeting the needs of all pupils. Appropriate plans have been developed to increase the number of local specialist placements for children with behavioural difficulties and to provide them with better access to services offered by health and social services. There is a coordinated approach that joins up the Key Stage 3 and primary behaviour and attendance strategies through sharing expertise and joint training.

111. Significant progress has been made in reducing exclusions and there are now fewer independent appeals and more comprehensive guidance to schools, parents and carers covering the exclusion procedure. The behaviour support team has a comprehensive referral process and a system of allocating and reviewing support needs, but no apparent means of targeting the service except through issues identified by school-focused teams. The service is now beginning to be well

regarded by schools as it improves its response to their needs and the outcomes for pupils.

112. The council is committed to improving behaviour and has funded increased levels of support for all schools, particularly access to different forms of mentoring. However, there is currently no behaviour service that schools can purchase and this is limiting the potential for effective schools to become more autonomous in responding to the challenges of teaching children with behavioural difficulties.

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

113. The council retains responsibility for health and safety while Education Walsall has contractual responsibility for child protection. The close working partnership between the council and Education Walsall ensures these two separate but related functions are performed highly satisfactorily.

114. The council continues to take reasonable steps to meet its responsibilities for safeguarding the health and safety of pupils. Risk assessments are undertaken and schools are issued with model policies and guidance to increase their awareness of their responsibilities. Additional guidance and training packages have been produced following the recent appointment of a health and safety manager.

115. At the time of the last inspection the arrangements for protecting children from significant harm were unsatisfactory. Good progress has been made in this area and the support provided is now highly satisfactory. A senior officer from Education Walsall takes strategic responsibility for child protection issues and very good working relationships have been established with other agencies. There is effective partnership and clear commitment at a strategic level for multi-agency working. Schools have greater confidence in the agreed procedures and their contact with social services has improved. Education Walsall takes an active role in the area child protection committee (ACPC) and is making a positive contribution to future provision as a member of a sub-group planning a move from the ACPC to a Safeguarding Board.

116. At operational levels, the recruitment of an education manager for child protection has led to improvements in the quality of support to schools. Schools have received training and good guidance about the thresholds and protocols for referral to social services. The take-up of required training and the records of designated teachers in schools are now more rigorously monitored. Education Walsall has recognised the need for more robust monitoring and evaluation of schools' child protection procedures and has identified these as areas for future development.

Provision for looked after children

117. Provision for looked after children has significantly improved and is now good as a result of the effective leadership by senior officers and collaboration across departments. The council has examined its role as corporate parent and

following awareness training for councillors, a corporate parenting strategy has now been adopted. The portfolio holder for education is actively involved and acts as a champion for looked after children. Elected members also attend excellence awards events and visit children's homes. They receive progress reports and have full and active participation in all corporate parenting forums. New elected members are offered support through their induction programme.

118. Systems have been introduced to identify, monitor and promote the achievement of looked after children. Realistic and challenging targets are set out in the new EDP and the progress of this group is closely monitored at school level by a designated teacher and by the looked after children's team. The team has agreed the information to be shared and has established a common database that offers a comprehensive picture of Walsall's looked after children. Almost every admissions authority in Walsall has ensured that its admissions criteria offer improved access to school places for looked after children.

119. For these pupils, attainment at age 11 is in line with national averages. At age 16 the number gaining 5 or more GCSEs at grade A*- C is more than twice the national average and those gaining 1 or more GCSE at grade A*- G is well above the national average. The percentage of looked after children who were permanently excluded is below the national average.

120. The completion of personal education plans (PEPs) has considerably improved since the last inspection; 90% are now completed. Processes have been improved through the training of social workers and by introducing targets into their performance management procedures. Social workers now have a growing awareness of the value and importance of PEPs. The scrutiny of PEPs is effective but currently lacks a more systematic and qualitative approach. Given the progress that has been achieved in establishing effective support, educational and social prospects for looked after children in Walsall are highly promising.

Promoting racial equality

121. Performance in promoting race equality remains satisfactory as this is insufficiently embedded within all education service functions. For example the recruitment of minority ethnic teachers and support for council or contractor employees are not well advanced. However, the work in combating racism has continued and efforts have focussed on improving the attainment of children from minority ethnic groups. This has been identified as a priority in the EDP which also includes appropriate action to improve leadership and promote partnership.

122. Model policies, action plans and guidance have been issued to schools and headteachers have access to appropriate training. However, monitoring by Education Walsall currently only focuses on the extent to which schools comply with policy rather than their development and use of the guidance and support materials.

123. Racial incident report procedures are in place and returns from schools are analysed but it is unclear how the analysis is used. Too few schools make the

regular returns expected in the specified timescale although there is appropriate challenge in schools where returns are not made or no policy has been established. There is no annual report to elected members on racial harassment incidents but this is discussed at the corporate equalities board.

124. The council has addressed the weakness identified in the last inspection that departments were working in isolation. There is now greater co-ordination through regular meetings with the council's corporate equalities board. Liaison with minority ethnic communities is strong. Consultative forums have been established to improve links between communities and education service representatives. Neighbourhood partnerships, on which headteachers are active participants, facilitate useful dialogue with minority ethnic communities. There has been a positive and supportive response from the education service in helping schools where tensions exist as a result of recent international events.

Recommendation

- Ensure that all schools return racial incident reports in the specified timescale, and that racial incidents are reported formally to elected members.

Appendix A

Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA :	Walsall Local Education Authority
LEA number:	335
Reporting Inspector:	Kevin Jane HMI
Date of Inspection:	October 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	2	
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	
1.4	The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities	4	
1.5	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	3	

1.6	The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice)	3	
1.7	The quality of leadership provided by senior officers	2	
1.8	The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities	3	
1.9	Support for Early Years education	3	
1.10	Support for 14 – 19 education	3	
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	4	
2.4	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention	2	
2.5	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	3	
2.6	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	3	
2.7	The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools	2	
2.8	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	4	
2.9	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	4	
2.10	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	2	NF
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	3	

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	2	NF
3.4	Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3	3	
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	
3.8	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	2	
3.9	The planning and provision of services to support school management	4	
3.9a	The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management	3	
3.9b	The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management	2	
3.9c	The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management	3	
3.9d	The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management	3	
3.10	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management	4	
3.11	The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	3	
3.12	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	3	
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	3	
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	3	
5.2	The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place	3	
5.3	Support for school attendance	3	
5.4	Support for behaviour in schools	4	
5.5	Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	3	
5.6	Provision for looked after children	2	
5.7	The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality	4	

**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 Walsall 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 2002;
- 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 members, headteachers 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:

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools;• support for information and communication technology. |
|--|

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

The Metropolitan Borough of Walsall in the Black Country is a mixture of urban, suburban and rural communities. The population has declined in the last decade and is currently just over 250,000. Approximately 13.6% of the population are of minority ethnic heritage and there is a small but growing number of asylum seekers. Although there are areas of relative affluence, there is significant social deprivation and Walsall ranks in the top 20% of most deprived local authorities nationally. Rates of unemployment, teenage pregnancy and crime are all above national averages and very low levels of post-16 education qualifications contribute to the generally deprived picture. As a consequence, Walsall qualifies for the majority of national and regional funding programmes.

There are now 49,319 pupils of school age in 127 maintained schools with the percentage of the school population from minority ethnic heritage well above the national figure. There are currently 8 nursery schools, 93 primary schools, including 12 infant and 12 junior schools, 19 secondary schools (all of which have sixth form provision), 7 special schools and three pupil referral units. This number is slightly lower than the position at the last inspection after planned amalgamations and school closures. A new city academy opened in 2003. Of the 19 secondary schools, 17 have specialist status. One primary school holds Beacon status. There are currently no schools requiring special measures and 2 have serious weaknesses. This represents a significant improvement on the position at the time of the previous inspection.

There is universal provision in a variety of settings for all three and four year olds whose parents want it and the current take-up is around 97%. The borough has five Sure Start programmes in operation. The percentage of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is above the national average at both primary and secondary level. The percentage of primary age pupils with a statement of special educational need is below national averages but in line for secondary age pupils.

The performance of schools

Pupils' attainment at the ends of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 is consistently below national averages and at the end of Key Stage 2, it has also been frequently below averages in similar authorities. In the GCSE, performance is below national averages both for the number of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades and 5 or more A*-G grades. It is also below that of similar authorities on the second of these measures. Value added measures show that pupils make poor progress in Key Stage 4.

There has been improvement in attainment at the ends of all key stages, and preliminary, unvalidated figures for 2004 show that improvement has continued. However, the rate of improvement, though comparatively rapid, has not been fast enough to make a significant difference to the gap with national averages.

In 2003, the LEA missed its targets for pupils' attainment. The gaps were often wide and the LEA was not on track to meet its targets for 2004. The unvalidated figures for 2004 show that the targets were not met.

Inspections show that there are fewer good or very good schools than in the country as a whole and that substantially more primary and secondary schools require improvement.

Attendance in primary schools is below that in similar areas and well below the national level. In secondary schools it is in line with the average on both comparisons. In both phases, attendance has improved. Exclusions from both primary and secondary schools were in line with national levels in 2001, the latest year for which comparative figures are available.

Funding data for the LEA

Schools budget	Walsall	Statistical neighbours average	Metropolitan Average	England Average
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Individual schools budget	2,759	2,820	2,812	2,900
Standards fund delegated	68	74	62	63
Excellence in Cities	25	43	54	35
Education for under fives (non-ISB)	53	62	50	85
Strategic management	34	45	34	30
Special educational needs	157	97	118	126
Grants	42	23	31	26
Access	26	66	56	60
Capital expenditure from revenue	0	19	19	24
Total schools budget	3,164	3,254	3,239	3,354
Schools formula spending share	3,007	3,092	3,066	3,197

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05

LEA budget	Walsall	Statistical neighbours average	Metropolitan average	England average
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Strategic management	93	118	119	99
Specific Grants	7	13	11	14
Special educational needs	29	28	27	36
School improvement	31	32	36	38
Access	101	99	108	142
Capital expenditure from revenue	0	2	1	2
Youth and Community	89	83	77	75
Total LEA budget	349	374	379	406

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05

Note:

All figures are net

Funding for schools in financial difficulties excludes transitional funding.

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

Notes