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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
TAMESIDE
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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**OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and on discussion with a Council spokesperson for education and officers and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views of aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all its schools. The response rate was 88 per cent.
3. Group discussions were held with 24 representatives of schools and the LEA's partners. Telephone interviews were carried out with headteachers of a small sample of schools. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one nursery school, nine primary schools, three special schools and seven secondary schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money. Evidence was also drawn from HMI reports on schools in which literacy or numeracy had been inspected and HMI reports on schools requiring special measures or those with serious weaknesses.

COMMENTARY

4. Tameside, created in 1974, is one of ten Greater Manchester metropolitan boroughs with a stable population of approximately 221,000. The unemployment rate has declined recently and now, at four per cent, is one of the lowest within Greater Manchester. Tameside has been successful in attracting resources for urban regeneration. On the Government's ranking of social deprivation, Tameside is judged to be less needy than most other metropolitan authorities.

5. The education and leisure services departments merged in April 1999. The former director of leisure services was appointed director of the new department. Further reorganisation of the Council took effect in April, but this is expected to result in little change to education services.

6. Since the creation of the new department, reorganisation has taken place. The LEA is gathering momentum and has begun to direct more effort to school improvement. However, many developments are so new they are not yet having an impact in schools. The exception is in the work of the recently created standards and effectiveness service, which is beginning to monitor its schools more effectively and support its primary schools better. The LEA is, rightly, providing the greatest support to those schools most in need, and the weakest schools are improving as a result. Nevertheless, the support for secondary schools is less strong than it should be, and the LEA is less confident in its dealings with secondary schools than with primary schools. The LEA does not always ensure that its services are as effective as they could be in supporting school improvement. Moreover, the LEA has insufficient monitoring and evaluation procedures to know what effect its work is having. As a result its actions do not always meet the needs of pupils or schools.

7. Pupils enter school with average attainments. That level of performance is sustained through Key Stage 1 but thereafter, although rising, it falls behind national levels. Pupils underachieve in Key Stage 2 and beyond. Participation in education above the age of 16 is significantly below national levels and has shown a slight decline recently.

8. The LEA is funded at a level below that of most metropolitan LEAs. However, its spending is below the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) figure, which is contrary to the Council's publicly stated intention of spending to the limit on education services. The rise in school budgets has resulted from SSA increases, rather than additional resources being diverted from other sources. The recent higher level of capital spending does, however, reflect the authority's attempt to start to deal with the matter.

9. The LEA's support for special educational needs (SEN) is unsatisfactory. The SEN strategy is weak and the LEA has struggled to make sufficient progress in meeting its statutory obligations. There are also weaknesses in the following areas, either because the services are not adequately performed now, or were undertaken inadequately until so recently that the effects of change are not evident in the schools:

- planning of the education budget;
- provision of performance data and support for target setting;
- support for ICT for the curriculum and administration;
- support for school management;

- communications and consultation procedures;
- planning, monitoring and evaluating services; and
- planning and deployment of resources.

10. Other functions covered in the inspection are performed adequately. The following functions are performed well:

- support for numeracy;
- support for schools causing concern or likely to do so;
- support for school governors;
- support for school attendance;
- management of admissions and appeals;
- management of school places;
- support for financial and personnel services; and
- collaboration between agencies.

11. Support for school improvement has improved, but much still remains to be done. The legacy of poor consultation and communications procedures lingers: there is much ground to make up in re-establishing a relationship of trust with the schools. Until this is done there will continue to be weaknesses. Of these, the most critical is the LEA's current incapacity adequately to support school management. The LEA has much to do to create the conditions for sustainable self improvement in schools.

12. Section 9A of the Education Act 1996 states that an LEA shall ensure that it is exercising its functions relating to education provision with a view to promoting high standards in its schools. The cumulative weight of the weaknesses set out in paragraph nine above, signal that Tameside LEA is not at present successfully promoting high standards in its schools.

13. The schools in Tameside achieve what they do in an under-resourced environment and with support that, though in some respects effective, too often lacks consistency, coherence and strategic direction. Despite some recent progress, the LEA has yet to demonstrate that it is able to match resources to priorities and provide the strong and sustained educational leadership and direction which its schools need. It is recommended that the LEA be subject to a return inspection within two years.

SECTION 1: LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

14. Tameside is one of ten Greater Manchester metropolitan boroughs. It was created in 1974 bringing together the nine towns of Ashton-under-Lyne, Audenshaw, Denton, Droylsden, Dukinfield, Hyde, Longdendale, Mossley and Stalybridge. Together they form an area of forty square miles. The population of approximately 221,000 is stable and major concentrations are in Ashton-under-Lyne, Denton and Hyde. Approximately four per cent of the population is from ethnic minority groups, which is in line with the national average.

15. The unemployment rate has declined over the last ten years and, at four per cent, is now one of the lowest within Greater Manchester. Over one-third of the local workforce and half of those who are currently registered as unemployed have no qualifications. The largest employer in the area is Tameside Council which employs in the region of 10,000 people. There is also a high dependence on manufacturing, which provides over a third of jobs. The borough has a broad range of key industrial employers and in recent years there has been an expansion of opportunities in light engineering. Since the mid-1990s, Tameside has been successful in attracting resources for urban regeneration.

16. The proportion of adults with higher education qualifications at 7.5 per cent is well below the national average. On the Government's ranking of social deprivation within the Revenue Support Grant calculation, Tameside is 28th out of the 36 metropolitan authorities.

17. The school age population is 36,096. There is extensive provision for early years education: 74 per cent of three-year-olds attend nursery classes or schools and all children are offered full-time attendance at primary schools at the beginning of the school year in which they become five. The proportion of 16-year-olds continuing with education has declined slightly in recent years. Levels of participation in education beyond 16 are significantly below national levels: around 56 per cent continued with education in 1998, compared with 74 per cent nationally.

18. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need is also in line with the national average. The majority of pupils with special educational needs are taught in mainstream schools.

19. The LEA maintains three nursery schools, 79 primary schools, five special schools, 15 secondary schools, a pupil-referral unit which caters for Year 11 pupils, 12 special education resource bases and an education development centre.

Performance

20. A detailed analysis of the performance of schools was supplied to Tameside in an OFSTED LEA statistical profile. It highlights these features of performance:

- pupils enter primary school achieving in line with the national average;

- the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2 or above at Key Stage 1 is broadly in line with national figures;
- at Key Stage 2 the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above is below the national average;
- at Key Stage 3 the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above is below average in mathematics and science, but is in line with national figures in English;
- at GCSE the proportion of pupils attaining five A* to C is below average as is the Average Point Score (APS); the proportion attaining one A* to G is above the national average;
- at age 18 the APS for pupils entered for two or more A-levels is above the national average. However, the APS for those entered for less than two A-levels is well below the national average;
- boys perform significantly worse than girls in the end of key stage tests and GCSE;
- attendance in primary schools is slightly below average, while authorised absence is above average; and
- attendance in secondary schools and authorised absence reflect the national picture.

Funding

21. The overall Council budget in 1999/2000 is £13.7m above its aggregated Standard Spending Assessment. Although Tameside's education SSA is low compared with other metropolitan authorities, its revenue spending is in aggregate £2.2m below the education SSA over the last three years. The widening of the gap indicates that the recent education SSA increases have not always been reflected in full in the overall education budget.

| (£000) | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------|
| Education SSA | 82,079 | 90,523 | 95,619 | 268,221 |
| Expenditure (Budget 1999/00) | 81,951 | 89,483 | 94,549 | 265,983 |
| Shortfall against SSA | -128 | -1,040 | -1,070 | -2,238 |
| Spend/ Budget as % of SSA | 99.84 | 98.85 | 98.88 | 99.17 |

22. The Council's strategy in recent years has been to protect schools' budgets while seeking to make its overall savings elsewhere within the Council and in other areas of the education service. Schools visited acknowledged the efforts of the Council to implement a five-year plan, initiated in 1996/97, to improve school budgets, but they

have lacked detailed information to challenge the Council's claim that it has allocated all its education Standard Spending Assessment funds to the education service.

23. The Council has already told schools that it intends to pass on the increase in the SSA in the 2000/01 financial year to improve school budgets and meet its Standards Fund commitments. This will not, in itself, narrow the funding gap between the revenue budget and SSA.

24. The Council will meet the Secretary of State's expectation that local authorities in 2000/01 contain central administrative costs (currently £49 per pupil before additional delegation compared with the target of £65). It already delegates 80.7 per cent of the Local Schools Budget (target 80 per cent) before the impact of the new compulsory areas of delegation.

25. These are the significant features of Tameside's education budget:

- the SSA is £2259 per primary pupil and £2883 per secondary pupil. These are below the metropolitan averages (£2353 and £3020 respectively) and slightly below statistical neighbours¹ (£2270 and £2905);
- the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) share per pupil in the primary sector is £1535 compared with the metropolitan average of £1583 and the statistical neighbours average of £1585. Tameside secondary schools receive £2233 per pupil compared with the metropolitan average of £2334 and the statistical neighbours' average of £2318;
- total revenue expenditure on schools per pupil overall (£2364) is below the England (£2600), metropolitan authority (£2468) and statistical neighbours' (£2418) averages. As a result, the capacity to increase school budgets is limited, given the existing pattern of resource allocation;
- overall balances for primary are relatively high and increased by half over the past three years (average 5.1 per cent); special schools balances in aggregate are even higher and have doubled in the same period (8.6 per cent overall). At the same time secondary school balances are low (0.9 per cent overall);
- non-delegated special education funding per pupil in Tameside (taking into account recoupment from other authorities) is lower than in other metropolitan authorities but in line with statistical neighbours;
- schools' formula budgets set out in Section 52 statements, do not have any element for special educational needs which handicaps both the LEA's monitoring of schools' spending on special educational needs and governors' decisions on resource deployment;
- Funding allocated to support the Education Development Plan is low: (£15 per pupil) compared with the England (£25), metropolitan (£20) and statistical neighbours' (£20) averages; and

¹ Statistical neighbours – LEAs with characteristics similar to Tameside: Bolton, Dudley, North Tyneside, Oldham, Rotherham, Stockton-on-Tees, Stoke-on-Trent, Sunderland, Walsall and Wigan.

- centrally retained expenditure for strategic management (£44 per pupil²) is low compared with England (£54) and metropolitan authorities averages (£49), although it is in line with statistical neighbours.

26. The Council has allocated significant additional capital resources to complement its success in recent years in bidding for specific capital grant and borrowing permission. It contributed £0.38m (out of an overall programme worth £5.45m) in 1998/99 and £1.93m (out of £6.77m) in 1999/00 from corporate capital reserves and receipts.

27. Tameside identified a funding deficit in its schools' budgets in the mid 1990s and this led to a five year recovery plan. The LEA has not tracked the effect of its implementation through reports to the education committee as originally envisaged.

28. Tameside does not consistently involve schools at an early enough stage in some key resource planning decisions. The process for the delegation of services is symptomatic of a continuing weakness in communication and consultation. Too often schools are consulted at too late a stage to make a difference to LEA plans, or to take alternative action.

29. Schools attended presentations about service specifications and costings in early December 1999. In the main, the services are well regarded and published material was good and well presented. It was, however, too late for most schools to consider alternative providers of services. This very tight timescale inhibits schools' ability to exercise choice. The authority offers most of its services on three year contracts which creates additional difficulties for schools as they have to decide whether or not to withdraw from the service provision without having sufficient information about other available services. As a result schools are hindered in their attempts to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. The authority's willingness to offer a one year contract as a result of individual representation suggests it has recognised this although it is not clear whether all schools know of this option.

30. The decision not to offer a managed school meals service for secondary schools to buy back is a legitimate one. However, the timing of its communication not to do so to secondary schools in December is poor. It has created an unnecessary diversion for school managers and governors. Most, if not all, secondary schools will assume responsibility for their own provision. Indeed, they have little choice. The Council has failed to give them an opportunity to do otherwise although the authority has needed to agree a delay of implementation for two schools.

31. Governing bodies have been given some information about Best Value, mainly in the form of external publications. The authority's Fair Funding scheme required governors last year to submit a budget plan accompanied by a statement setting out what steps they will take to ensure that they apply Best Value principles in their spending decisions. This did not happen.

² The Council in its original section 52 return combined strategic and other central support functions (£49 per pupil). This figure is its revised estimate of strategic management costs.

Council structure

32. The Council has been under Labour control since 1979. Currently there are 48 Labour, four Conservative and two Liberal Democrat members, one People's Alliance member and two members of the Mossley Town Council steering group. The Council has embraced the modernising agenda of which the current structure is a result. A cabinet of nine members, called deputies, was established in January 1999 and will operate in shadow form until legislation. The cabinet deputy with responsibility for education and leisure services holds the portfolio for lifelong learning. There are currently five committees: policy, education and leisure services, social services and housing, economic and regeneration, and environmental and engineering services. A speaker's panel has been established which acts as a planning committee. Three scrutiny panels scrutinise Council decisions, for which they negotiate and produce a programme of work.

33. The education and leisure services department was created in April 1999 as an amalgamation of previously separate education and leisure service departments. It is one of seven departments of the Council. The others are: corporate services, economic and property services, environmental services, finance, housing services, and social services.

34. The Council has decided that, in order to introduce fully the modernising agenda for local government, a new organisational structure is necessary. From April, there will be a board, made up of cabinet plus the Chief Executive and four strategic directors who will have the overall responsibility for the strategic management of the Council. Four departments will be created from the current seven: education and culture, social services, development and technical, and corporate services. The principal role of strategic directors will be to provide performance management support to the heads of service and to ensure that the board's business plan is delivered through the plans of the heads of service, who will be the principal senior managers and, as such, the main officers responsible for service delivery. In the newly created education and cultural service, the strategic director will continue to carry out the role of chief education officer, and will be assisted by the small senior management team comprising the borough education officer and the head of the standards and effectiveness service.

35. These are minor changes and are not expected to disrupt the developments begun recently, and which schools need if they are to be supported effectively in improvements.

The Education Development Plan

36. Tameside's Education Development Plan is largely unsatisfactory. Its eight priorities reflect national and local issues. The priorities are:

- raising standards of attainment in literacy;
- raising standards of attainment in numeracy;
- improving the provision and use of information and communication technology to support teaching and learning;
- improving the quality of teaching;
- promoting social inclusion and reducing under-achievement;

- improving the quality of school leadership, management and governance in raising standards;
- promoting citizenship, creativity and independent learning; and
- improving the performance of schools causing concern.

37. The plan is based on an audit of local authority performance data and an analysis of the judgements of inspection reports on its schools and an analysis of the attainment of ethnic and other minority groups. References to special educational needs are interspersed through the Education Development Plan. As a result, special educational needs provision fails to gain the recognition which it needs if improvements are to take place. The other major planning instrument of the LEA is its business plan, and there is a high level of consistency between it and the Education Development Plan.

38. The overall LEA attainment targets that are set out in the plan are variable in both challenge and realism. Given the current levels of attainment in primary schools, the Key Stage 2 targets are very challenging, particularly those for English. Secondary school targets are less demanding. They were lowered from those originally proposed as a result of the consultation on the plan, though the LEA is now concerned that the secondary targets may be too low, in the light of the results of 1999, and is considering increasing them in the revisions to the plan. Progress towards achieving these targets has been made, although much remains to be done. All 1999 Key Stage 2 and GCSE results reflect an improvement on earlier years. The percentages of pupils attaining at or beyond Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 in mathematics in 1999 is three percentage points ahead of the target figure for 2000. Both the percentage of pupils gaining one or more A* to G grades in GCSE and the average points score for 1999 are slightly ahead of the target for 2000.

39. The process for setting targets for schools is set out clearly in the Education Development Plan, and this outlines the steps to be taken where there is continuing disagreement between the school and the authority about what constitute reasonable targets.

40. Many headteachers and governors consider that they were not well consulted during the development of the Education Development Plan. Certainly a significant number do not see the plan as a central instrument of educational policy in the LEA. Some have used it as a reference check for their school development plans, chiefly to ensure that the school development plan does not have major omissions, but of the schools visited, none had made any modifications to its school development plan in the light of the Education Development Plan. Three had systematically cross-referenced the plan with their school development plans and one to its post-OFSTED action plan.

41. It is not always clear how activities set out in the plan will contribute to the achievement of its priorities. This is particularly so where the description of the activity is insufficient to indicate its expected outcomes, and where it does not provide any effective criteria by which the successful implementation of the activity is to be evaluated. Monitoring arrangements focus on checking whether an activity has been done by the target date, and rarely indicate how it is intended to evaluate what the impact of the activity has been or what improvements in practice have stemmed from it. It is not clear how schools and other key partners are to be involved in the evaluation of the implementation of the plan. The resources identified for implementing the plan are

low in comparison with other LEAs and nationally, and are being revised. Much will fall on the officers of the standards and effectiveness service, which has some major gaps of subject coverage.

The Allocation of Resources to Priorities

42. The LEA has made a limited start to aligning its resources to its educational priorities. Although the LEA has, in the main, identified the appropriate areas for improvement, the resources necessary to bring this about are not always earmarked clearly. Too little emphasis is placed on identifying sufficiently what resources are needed to support current initiatives and priorities. This work is made more difficult because the LEA's monitoring and evaluation procedures are not yet sufficiently in place to inform the authority of the areas in which its spending is having the desired effect. In addition, the process suffers from the lack of effective communications with, and the involvement of, its schools. As a result of this the LEA does not have the information which could inform it of how the services are perceived by schools.

43. The recently stated intention to review and identify special needs funding in primary and secondary schools, taken with the significant changes in external funding for schools in recent years, necessitates an early assessment of schools' comparative funding needs. This process would aid the Council to make long term focused budget decisions and involve schools more centrally, and in a more timely fashion than currently, in its overall budget process.

Recommendations

In order to ensure schools are resourced to discharge their responsibilities and to enable the Council's targeting and assessment of spending priorities, the LEA should:

- review the level of funding available for schools by examining the assessed organisational and teaching needs.

In order to assist schools in the deployment of their budgets to support special educational needs and support the accountability of governors, the LEA should:

- include a notional special needs budget for each school in its Section 52 statement and school budget statements;
- implement the planned review of funding for special educational needs and use the results to inform the Council's long term budgeting strategy.

In order to support schools to exercise autonomy, provide them with greater flexibility and choice, and ensure greater incentive to secure cost effectiveness of traded services, the LEA should:

- shorten the contract lengths and extend the timescales offered to schools in making their buying decisions.

In order to ensure that schools consider the relevance of Best Value principles to the expenditure of funds from their delegated budgets, the LEA should:

- implement the requirements of the Fair Funding scheme (to secure from governors a statement to indicate how Best Value principles are being followed) and discuss these with schools as part of its annual dialogue.

In order to ensure that the Education Development Plan becomes more central to school improvement, the LEA should:

- ensure that headteachers and governors understand the significance of the Education Development Plan and its relationship to each school's development plan;
- revise the strategy for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Education Development Plan to show how effective the identified activities have been in achieving their objectives; and
- ensure a better match of activities to priorities.

In order to improve financial planning, the LEA should:

- review the education budget and ensure that resources are closely aligned to priorities.

SECTION 2: LEA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

44. A number of LEA services support school improvement effectively. These services are those which offer support for governance, attendance, personnel and financial services. Other services too provide satisfactory, although not wholly consistent support, such as the educational psychology service, the behaviour support service and the service supporting ethnic minority pupils. These services provide schools with the support they need to enable pupils to benefit from their school experiences. However, a number of other services do not provide the quality or quantity of support which schools require and as a result they struggle to overcome the difficulties which the lack of support creates. For example, too many schools spend too much time following up the cases of pupils with special educational needs which are being dealt with too slowly by the LEA. This not only diverts attention from other more pressing tasks, but results in the most needy pupils not always accessing appropriate support.

45. However, when the services are managed and co-ordinated effectively they have the capacity to provide robust support. For instance, when schools causing concern are identified, the services work very well together to provide essential support. This is a good example of how clearly stated aims, focused action and appropriate monitoring and evaluation procedures result in comprehensive support from which schools and their pupils derive benefits.

46. The LEA, though, does not adequately ensure that its services are as effective as they could be in supporting school improvement, nor does it involve other partners, such as the dioceses, sufficiently in this work.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

47. The LEA is now monitoring its schools effectively, although a number of schools remain to be convinced of this. It supports strongly its schools in greatest need and intervenes when necessary. The challenge provided to its schools varies: it is limited, yet adequate for primary schools, variable in special schools, but largely insufficient or inadequate in secondary schools.

48. The recently created standards and effectiveness service, under the newly appointed head of service, is the main agent in monitoring, challenging, supporting and, where necessary, intervening. The service is now operating under strong and visionary leadership: this is recognised and appreciated by schools. Regular meetings and training events ensure that all advisory and administrative members of the team maintain up-to-date knowledge of emerging issues and priorities.

49. The service is small. It has two senior advisers who were appointed recently from within the service and ten advisers. There is insufficient secondary management expertise at headteacher or deputy headteacher level to enable the service to provide the support which some of its secondary schools need. The LEA provides sound advice for schools on how they can obtain external support for subjects, but does not yet have strategies for supporting and developing leadership and management in its secondary schools.

50. The service has re-aligned priorities to reflect the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations and the DfEE Circular on schools causing concern, and allocated time to schools according to how the LEA perceives their needs. In November 1999 a process of classifying schools and an appeals procedure against classification were introduced. Schools have been placed into one of six categories: special measures, serious weaknesses, transition, schools causing concern, light touch and exemplary schools. The triggers for identification are performance data; the professional judgement of officers; an approach to the Council from the school itself and the OFSTED inspection report. These changes were necessary and have resulted in schools having a clearer understanding of the LEA's perceptions of their quality, the standards they achieve and their rate of progress. However, as the triggers have not been sufficiently developed into criteria, the rationale underpinning the categorisation of schools is not wholly clear. The criteria are not explicit enough to enable accurate categorisation or provide guidance on how and when movement between the different categories should occur. The appeals procedure is sound: in a number of cases, schools have moved in or out of the category in which they were originally placed as a result of appeal. The 'exemplary school' classification is not well understood and gives rise to confusion. It is being interpreted in some instances as just what it says, while in other quarters the understanding is that the category contains schools in which there are some aspects of exemplary practice.

51. Link advisers are key personnel in supporting school improvement. They are, in the main, valued by schools. The link advisers are assigned three days a year for monitoring schools in the light touch category, and a sliding scale operates allocating time according to the school's categorisation. Some of this designated time for monitoring is intended to be spent by the link adviser monitoring the performance and progress of a school from documentation. However, the different levels of entitlement are not clearly understood by schools, and the information produced by the LEA is open to some misinterpretation.

52. There has been no history of formally reporting to schools after visits by LEA officers. This is now developing and a note-of-visit format has been introduced. This is a promising start to improving communications between officers and schools, but it does not include enough detail to communicate messages unambiguously, and identify improvements which the LEA expects schools to make, or targets which have been agreed by schools with the LEA.

53. Insufficient attention has been paid to disseminating good practice across the authority. This has been recognised and identified as an area of work for development.

Collection and analysis of data and target setting

54. The provision of performance data to schools has shown considerable improvement over the last two years. The pupil achievement unit of the standards and effectiveness service provides locally-benchmarked data for both primary and secondary schools to support target setting. Secondary schools receive the outcomes of Key Stage 2 tests for their new pupils early in the autumn term. At a later time in the year, the unit also provides national data from the autumn package, but this is chiefly to assist with the interpretation of that data. The small team responsible for processing and producing performance data attempts to respond to specific requests from schools

for additional data or analyses, although its capacity to do this is limited both by time and by the degree of sophistication of the analyses they produce.

55. In spite of the recent improvement, the data provided goes little further than that which most schools already have, other than providing a broad LEA context. Nearly all secondary schools and many primary schools already make more sophisticated analyses of test and examination results than those provided by the unit, and the only additional feature of the provided data is that each school can identify how its achievements compare with those of other schools in the LEA. Because of the small number of secondary schools in the authority, the unit co-operates with neighbouring LEAs to provide a wider basis of comparison for secondary schools. Since other schools are not identified, it is not as easy as it should be for a school to track where it might learn from the better practice of others. The unit is beginning to develop ways of using data to indicate degrees of added value achieved by schools, but as yet the outcomes do not form part of the data provided to schools. Given the resources allocated to the service, what it achieves is satisfactory, but schools need more detailed information and analytical commentary to help them make adequate reviews of their achievements and progress. Some training has been provided for headteachers, deputy heads and governors to help with the interpretation of the data, and more is planned for the near future. However, further guidance is needed to help schools identify how the data can be best used to contribute to school improvement.

56. The Education Development Plan sets out the process to be used in target setting, including a succession of steps to be taken if targets for a school cannot be agreed by early negotiation. Link advisers, sometimes supported by specialist colleagues, calculate provisional targets for primary schools based on an examination of previous performance in the context of that of similar schools, and an additional factor to represent challenge. It is not always clear how the latter is determined, other than by an assessment of the school's needed contribution to the LEA's overall targets. These targets are then discussed during a school visit in the autumn term, which provides an opportunity for the school to suggest alternatives and provide evidence to support its view. Visits to schools indicated some inconsistency in the conduct of these discussions, and while in a small proportion of cases the provisional targets were modified as a result, there are cases where headteachers have accepted targets which they and their governors regard as highly unrealistic, and about which they are genuinely concerned. The process for secondary schools differs in that it is the school which identifies its own targets, which are then discussed with the LEA. Evidence from secondary schools indicates that while they are asked to explain and defend their targets, their explanations are usually accepted. There is little evidence of sustained challenge, or of questioning in detail based on a careful analysis of performance data, except where the overall picture is sufficiently serious to consider categorising a school as one causing concern. Many secondary school targets are not far ahead of their present performance levels. There are no valid reasons for the difference in process for primary and secondary schools.

57. There is some indication that headteachers have not been helped sufficiently to distinguish between challenge and criticism, and do not fully understand the concept of challenge in the role of the LEA. This may be linked to the fact that the later steps which are set out in the plan to deal with continuing difference between the school's and the LEA's view of what are reasonable targets appear highly confrontational, with

its reference to 'formal warnings'. Certainly, some headteachers see the LEA's expectations as forceful in this respect.

Support for literacy

58. LEA support for literacy is sound overall, although primary schools are more effectively supported than secondary schools. Standards achieved in national tests are in line with similar LEAs, and at seven and 14, in line with national averages. In 1999 there was a significant improvement in some aspects of performance: results in spelling rose by nine per cent at the end of Key Stage 1 and the proportion of pupils gaining Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 rose by seven per cent to 66 per cent. These gains will need to be sustained if the LEA is to reach its overall target of 81 per cent for 2002.

59. Improving literacy is given appropriate emphasis in the Education Development Plan. The LEA's strategy for improvement in primary schools is very sound and gives good value. The authority had developed strategies to improve literacy in primary schools before the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy. Over half the primary schools had been trained in the 'First Steps' programme designed to improve literacy and spoken English, and a Single Regeneration Budget project focused on school and family literacy in Hattersley. The National Literacy Strategy has become the centrepiece of the authority's strategy to improve standards of literacy, supplemented by continuing support for raising performance in the most disadvantaged areas, for some ethnic minority groups, and for improving the teaching of phonic skills through the DfEE funded 'Phonografix' project. Training has been provided for other support teams, for example, the ethnic minority achievement service and the Traveller education service. The performance and progress of schools are monitored systematically and a good level of support is targeted to those in most need. Support for secondary schools has been adversely affected for the last two years by the lack of a secondary adviser for English. A consultant has now been appointed to support work in developing whole-school literacy in Key Stage 3.

60. In the school survey, primary schools rated the LEA's support for literacy as satisfactory. Secondary schools rated it as less than satisfactory, and special schools indicated that it was good. These judgements were largely confirmed by the school visits. Although the initial training for all primary schools was well received, the illness of the consultant in the first term left schools unsupported. Since then a second consultant has been appointed, and those schools which received intensive support welcomed it. The support for planning and monitoring was particularly helpful. Over half of the primary schools have received some level of additional support. Just over half of those schools which received no extra support sent coordinators for additional training, and half have attended training on teaching phonics. The network meetings for coordinators are valued by most schools. All schools spoke warmly of the support of the schools' library service, in providing collections of resources, or advice on books to develop the range of pupils' reading. Schools' progress in literacy is monitored satisfactorily by the link adviser.

61. Special schools appreciated the support they had received, particularly where they had been involved throughout the training. In one school, the literacy coordinator is now a leading literacy teacher.

62. The LEA has rightly emphasised the need to improve primary literacy over recent years. Some secondary schools have worked on improving boys' literacy as part of the improving standards in schools project, but overall there has been little support for literacy in secondary schools in the past two years, and most schools visited regretted the loss of specialist advice. Schools found the national training on literacy at Key Stage 3 useful and welcomed the appointment of the consultant.

Support for numeracy

63. Support for numeracy is good. Standards in numeracy at the end of Key Stage 1 have remained roughly in line with the national average, although the proportion gaining Level 3 is below it. In 1999, the proportion of pupils who achieved Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 rose by 12 per cent to 66 per cent. The LEA is now making good progress towards its target of 75 per cent, but the target is nonetheless challenging. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils achieve results in line with the LEA's statistical neighbours, but below the national average.

64. The authority has a well-planned strategy for Key Stages 1 and 2. The National Numeracy Strategy has been implemented promptly. The LEA has added to the support available for numeracy by funding an additional half-time post to make two full-time consultants available. There are clear criteria for providing intensive support, and the added consultant time has enabled an extra cohort of schools to receive four days' support. Schools are selected for this extra support on the basis of their performance in tests over three years, and other factors such as the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals or with English as an additional language. Training has been provided for all advisory staff to enable them to monitor schools' progress. The mathematics adviser is well aware what needs to be done to meet the targets for 11-year-olds.

65. Primary schools value the training, and those schools which are receiving intensive support welcomed help with planning and demonstration lessons. Some schools which have not been given extra support, welcomed monitoring and advice given by the mathematics adviser. Special schools attended the initial training for numeracy and found it useful.

66. Support for secondary schools has been less consistent, but there are areas of strength. Two summer numeracy schools have been effective in improving pupils' mathematics skills and in improving their transition to secondary school. Individual schools have received good support in targeting areas for improvement, although some secondary headteachers felt that the LEA was not monitoring their performance and acting on areas of weakness systematically.

Support for information and communication technology

67. Improving the provision and use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning is one of the priorities of the Education Development Plan. To support this, the LEA has prepared an ICT development plan, although this is somewhat late in the day and more of it remains to be acted on than has been achieved so far. Much of this is the result of there being only the mathematics adviser to cover ICT until recently, and his priority concern was rightly the launch of National Numeracy Strategy. In response to the survey, more than half the

primary schools and almost two-thirds of the secondary schools rated support for ICT in the curriculum as poor, a more critical response than in most other LEAs surveyed.

68. The LEA has kept to its programme to meet requirements for implementing the National Grid for Learning in its schools, although little has been done to help schools consider the implications of this for the curriculum. Some schools have developed ICT learning centres for pupils with special educational needs. The LEA is also involved in developing the North West Grid for Learning, and some work has also been done to develop training under the New Opportunities Fund, although as yet the uptake for this has been slight. Most primary schools now have ICT action plans, and have been supported in developing these by a former primary teacher currently employed as a consultant. Partly filling the gap resulting from the lack of a specialist adviser, the LEA has arranged for some teachers to attend courses run by a neighbouring LEA.

69. The information and communication technology plan envisages the development of an overall strategy to embrace both curriculum and administrative uses of ICT in schools. This has hardly got underway as yet, although the plans which exist suggest that developments of this kind will contribute to all-round improvement. There are currently more weaknesses than strengths in this aspect of the LEA's support for its schools, but a general adviser has been appointed recently as ICT strategy manager to enable progress to be made.

Support for schools causing concern

70. Improving the performance of schools causing concern is, rightly, a priority of the Education Development Plan. The costings in the Education Development Plan are low. One secondary and four primary schools have been judged to require special measures since 1993. Three primary schools have made such progress that they have since been removed from this category. In addition, one secondary and six primary schools have been identified by OFSTED since September 1997 as having serious weaknesses.

71. In the past, the LEA has not always known of weaknesses in its schools, or taken sufficiently effective action to support them. Nevertheless, the LEA intervened quickly once schools had been identified as weak by OFSTED. The action plans produced by schools, with the support of the LEA, have been accessible working documents which the schools have found helpful. The LEA has supported governors in dealing efficiently and effectively with weak staff, and has been successful in supporting the appointment of new headteachers with the ability to turn schools around. Tameside has carried out improvements to accommodation where this had been unsatisfactory and has created more conducive climates for learning.

72. The recent changes which the standards and effectiveness service has undergone have now resulted in effective procedures for identifying schools causing concern. Tameside's introduction of its categorisation of schools in November 1999 with its associated protocols goes a long way to ensuring that schools with weaknesses are appropriately identified by, or identify themselves to, the LEA. The strategies for improvement are clear and robust. Once a school is categorised as causing concern, a task group is formed and a case conference held to decide on how best the LEA can help it improve. The membership of the task group comprises one of the senior management team, the school's link adviser and other appropriate personnel,

depending upon the needs of the school. For example, group members could be drawn from the financial or personnel services, in addition to other members of the standards and effectiveness service. The group composition may change, but will remain in existence until the school is no longer felt to be causing concern. Schools with weaknesses are making sound progress. The LEA is monitoring and supporting them well.

73. The monitoring and evaluation of the school's progress is through its link adviser. In the past there has been a tendency to monitor the progress of the plan, rather than the progress of the school, but recent work on analysing results of pupils' performance and other data has improved the process. The notes of visit made by link advisers are not yet sufficiently detailed to provide the assistance and feedback which schools need to improve further, but developments are underway.

Support for early years education

74. The support for early years provision is satisfactory. The LEA spends over £2.5m on its mainstream nursery education provision, a figure which does not include the contribution of other budgets. It makes extensive provision for the early education of its three and four-year-old children: 100 per cent of four-year-olds and 74 per cent of three-year-olds are offered a maintained place. The LEA currently maintains three nursery schools, but most of the early years provision is in nursery classes attached to primary schools. OFSTED inspection reports indicate that the quality of early years provision in Tameside schools is at least satisfactory, and often good.

75. One of the priorities in the Education Development Plan refers directly to early years: improving the quality of teaching. Other priorities relating to early years provision are identified in the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan. While these plans are, on the whole, satisfactory, they do not identify needs sufficiently, or focus enough on how maintained nursery education contributes to raising attainment. As a result there is a lack of understanding in schools of the part that nursery education plays in improving standards.

76. The LEA has established an early years development and childcare partnership, and the consequent arrangements with other agencies are fruitful. Significant developments have taken place recently which have resulted in more and better co-ordinated provision for young children and their families. The links with the social services department are sound overall. They are particularly strong in areas where schools have some form of joint provision. The links with the health authority are also effective. Integrated professional development opportunities for those employed in early years settings, in the maintained, voluntary, independent and private sector, provide valuable experience for training and disseminating information.

77. A review of educational provision in Ashton-under-Lyne is currently being carried out, and as a result the three nursery schools are staffed by acting headteachers who are on temporary transfers from posts in other schools. While this position is understandable in the face of uncertainty, it has existed for too long and has damaged morale.

78. Although the LEA has a staffing policy for its nursery classes which specifies one teacher and one nursery nurse to 26 children, seven of the 47 nursery classes are

staffed solely by nursery nurses. This is an unsatisfactory situation when the LEA is working hard to develop teaching in a diverse range of early years provision within its early years development and child care partnership, and improve teaching in mainstream early years classes.

79. There are useful strategies to support staff in the transition from working towards the desirable learning outcomes to the early learning goals. While the LEA monitors the quality of its early years provision by identifying key issues relating to early years in the OFSTED inspection reports on schools, it does not provide the LEA with a sufficiently clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of provision.

Support for management

80. Analysis of inspection reports shows that the proportion of schools in Tameside where improvements in management are needed is considerably higher than nationally. As a consequence, the LEA has rightly included the improvement of school leadership and management as one of its priorities in the Education Development Plan, although the activities set out in the plan do not constitute a coherent strategy for achieving this. Many of the measures are either at a very early stage of development or have not yet begun, and the authority has insufficient expertise and experience to achieve the objectives set. The standards and effectiveness service has little expertise or experience from which to support senior management in secondary schools. This is fully recognised, and some advice and training is acquired from outside sources. The national training schemes for senior managers in primary and secondary schools are supported, and training is often purchased from nearby universities and other LEAs. Training courses for subject coordinators and heads of department are included in the LEA's staff development programme, and advisers organise network support groups, which are valued. A recently formed group has been established to meet the needs of deputy heads who are not following the National Professional Qualification for Headship course. Nevertheless, in response to the school survey, secondary headteachers rated the LEA's support for senior management as poor. The response of primary school headteachers was somewhat more positive, though only a quarter considered that it was good.

81. The LEA offers a management and curriculum service level agreement, which allows schools to negotiate a six-day programme of consultancy and advice to match their particular needs. This scheme has potential, provided that there is the expertise to back it up, but so far the response has been on a small scale only. Financial management support has improved since the reorganisation of the education and leisure services department last spring.

82. In spite of statements in the Education Development Plan of its commitment to supporting self-evaluation and review in schools, the LEA has done little until recently to help schools with this. Links have been established with an outside agency to provide the OFSTED school self-evaluation training. However, no preparations by the LEA were made beyond informing those headteachers selected to attend, that arrangements had been made for them to attend the training. This aspect of the LEA's work is far from satisfactory.

83. The LEA has identified the need to support teaching as a priority in the Education Development Plan. It identifies a range of activities in support of this priority.

One of these, support for newly qualified teachers, is much valued by schools and teachers. This year the LEA has identified two local priorities on which to focus support: teaching quality at Key Stage 2 and science at Key Stages 3 and 4. These priorities were established on the basis of information in OFSTED reports and performance data. A key element in the strategy in improving practice is the appointment and deployment of advanced skills teachers (ASTs) but these have proved difficult to recruit.

84. Headteacher appraisal has hardly got underway, and as yet is making little or no impact. Secondary headteachers are concerned about the specialist gaps in the advisory team, particularly the lack of advisers for English and modern foreign languages. Some make their own arrangements to obtain specialist support, using sources of help suggested by the LEA. In other cases the LEA makes the arrangements.

85. In providing support for school management, the weaknesses of the LEA's provision outweigh its strengths. The provision is unsatisfactory.

Support and training for school governors

86. The quality of support provided by the LEA for governors is rated very highly by schools. The governors' support unit provides a range of services to help governors through three service level agreements: a service for clerking meetings; a governor support programme, which provides regular briefing sessions on current issues for chairs of governing bodies and headteachers and for governors with specified responsibilities; and a training programme. All have attracted a very high take up. The clerking service is particularly highly regarded and provides efficient support. Clerks receive regular briefings to enable them to explain and respond to questions about current issues, and governors find this useful.

87. The provision of termly briefing sessions for chairs, vice chairs and headteachers constitutes the main mechanism through which the LEA consults and communicates with governors. This enables them to be well informed about new developments and to prepare views on them in anticipation of their meetings. This is supported effectively by a termly booklet which provides an updating service on local and national issues and draws attention to the immediately forthcoming training programme. Where courses are not available at times when needed - as when a new chair of governors takes over and there is no course targeting this for some time - the head of unit makes direct contact and offers help. The training programme is reasonably well supported, and end-of-course evaluations are very positive. However, not enough is done to evaluate the impact of training on governors and the extent to which the training enables them to be more active in their role. For example, the evidence from some school visits suggests that the role of the governing body in target setting was very limited, and that governors did not feel sufficiently clear about the process and its implications to take an active part in it.

88. While in the past governors have not had enough opportunities to contribute their views on LEA policy issues, there is now a cautious welcome of the new intentions to improve communication and consultation, outlined in a consultation document which was circulated to schools in December 1999.

89. There is confusion about whether charges are levied for the termly briefing meetings. These are a necessary and integral part of the LEA's working with governing bodies and the chief means it has of communicating its policies and intentions to them.

90. Currently, there are vacancies for about 13 per cent of places on governing bodies. Long delays often occur in identifying people to fill vacancies for LEA nominees on governing bodies, a process which depends on the district assembly.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that services contribute more effectively to school improvement, the LEA should:

- monitor and evaluate the contributions which these services currently make, and make the changes necessary to create a more effective service for schools.

In order to improve support for schools and help them improve, the LEA should:

- present greater challenge to secondary schools;
- clarify the criteria for the categorisation of schools, and schools' entitlement to advisers' time; and
- continue to develop the monitoring, evaluation and reporting procedures on schools.

In order to improve the effectiveness in the use of performance data in schools, the LEA should:

- extend the range of analyses of performance data provided to schools to provide more help in identifying the extent of improvements they are making; and
- provide more guidance on how performance data analysis can contribute to school improvement by helping to identify areas of strength and weakness in the practice of the school.

In order to provide effective support to school management, the LEA should:

- extend the range of external sources of expertise, advice and training in school management to complement its own provision, subject to suitable quality assurance, and broker this more effectively to schools;
- guide schools in obtaining the support they need in areas where it lacks expertise in secondary management;
- give more active lead to help and encourage schools to undertake regular self-evaluation and review; and
- reinforce and strengthen headteacher appraisal.

In order to support improvements in early years education, the LEA should:

- monitor and evaluate early years provision more closely, and find ways of helping staff to understand the role they play in helping to raise standards across the LEA; and
- ensure that its guidance related to staffing of nursery classes is followed.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

91. Education is regarded as central to Tameside's development and its responsiveness to its people. The Council's 'Vision for Tameside' (1996) sets out its commitment to education as a priority. The Council has recognised the need for change in order to become more service focused and accountable. Improving the educational attainment levels of the population is one priority which the Council recognises it cannot do alone: it needs to work in partnership with other sectors and agencies. The strong corporate culture is driving joint working in a number of areas and with a number of departments. Notably, the arrangements between education and leisure services department, and the economic and property services department are resulting in the regeneration of the Hattersley area. Education and leisure services and the social services department's corporate parenting initiative are beginning to impact upon the work in schools. Schools welcome, and are playing their part in, the recent corporate initiatives to monitor, evaluate and improve the experiences of looked-after children in order to ensure that they are sufficiently supported.

92. Schools applaud the stated priority given to raising educational attainment, but have yet to be convinced of the Council's commitment to this priority. The LEA does not yet have the confidence of schools, owing in part to its weak communication procedures. Schools do not understand fully the LEA's ways of working and complain of a lack of consultation about, and full involvement in, its work.

93. The education and leisure services department's business plan reflects the Council's and the department's aims. Although the aims are sound, it is not clear how the department proposes to involve schools in their achievement.

94. The merger of education and leisure services in April 1999 resulted in restructuring and re-organisation within the department. The director of education and leisure services, formerly director of leisure services, took up post on creation of the new service, since which time it has been re-organised into: school service, standards and effectiveness service, lifelong learning service, recreation service, countryside service, financial resources and human resources. The first two services are those involved most directly in support for school improvement, and the heads of these two services, together with the director, form the department's senior management team. It is a small team which faces a big agenda. This reorganisation has had little time to bed down and is followed closely by a further Council reorganisation. Although the impact of the proposed reorganisation cannot be gauged, the Council must ensure that the strategic management team adequately reflects its responsibilities for education and schools.

95. The standards and effectiveness service is beginning to have an impact on school improvement. Education welfare, finance, personnel and governor support services are also providing appropriate support for schools, but the impact of other services is slight. The roles of the new management personnel are clear and recognised by schools. The day-to-day running of the department is systematic and methodical, but it has yet to prove itself by providing the necessary strong educational leadership and direction which the LEA needs to help it support its schools effectively. Although the Council operates an appraisal system, its employee development review,

through which it monitors and supports the performance of individual employees, there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the LEA's services and functions. This results in the authority having too little information about the effectiveness of its strategies and actions. These weaknesses result in the LEA relying too heavily on the feedback from the involvement of external agencies such as the OFSTED and Audit Commission survey and the reports of district auditors rather than from its schools. The LEA, in attempting to take remedial action, occasionally implements plans which are hastily considered and have not been formulated in consultation with schools.

96. The core management team of the department is small and over-stretched. It consists of the director and two heads of service. The two heads of service are currently carrying heavy responsibilities for key aspects of the LEA's work. Although some services are satisfactorily managed, there are major weaknesses in the strategic management of special educational needs. The proposed changes to the Council's management structure must not retard the momentum for improvement which has begun.

97. Schools have not felt comfortable with the changes to the strategic management of the education service, and still have some uncertainty about the changes. The views of schools range from feeling that it is too early to judge the quality of the management and leadership, to viewing the reasons for change as purely economic, with little regard to the direction or quality of the education service. However, they are beginning to appreciate the personal contact with the new director and are developing a trust in certain managers of the department.

98. The LEA's consultation and communication procedures have been unsatisfactory. Although a number of improvements are taking place, particularly as a result of the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations, the LEA has not ensured routinely that schools are consulted or kept informed. The LEA has recently published a draft communications policy and is seeking to work with schools, but it still has a long way to go before schools feel that there is a true LEA-school partnership. For example, the proposed restructuring of the Council was notified to schools after decisions had been made.

99. The LEA liaises satisfactorily with other partners to the benefit of schools. The West Pennine health authority, the Tameside education business partnership, Greater Manchester Police, Manchester TEC and Manchester Metropolitan University report strong working relationships with the LEA. There are many examples of relevant contributions being made to staff and curricular development. Notable among these are the joint operations with police and the education welfare service to combat truancy and the work which the police school liaison officers have carried out in drawing up a policy for drugs action in schools. This policy has been adopted by all secondary schools. Although the LEA liaises adequately with the diocesan boards, it does not consult them sufficiently about its plans or involve them as fully as it might in developments. For example, diocesan representatives are largely unaware of the LEA's categorisation of schools and have not been consulted about the schools with which they are closely involved.

Management services

100. Education and leisure department staff provide the personnel, finance and ICT support to schools. The Council intends to maintain the bulk of the ICT function as a strategic activity while personnel, financial support and payroll became delegated services from April 2000. These services have recently produced draft service level agreements, which set out in helpful detail a description of services offered currently. Although they enjoy close contact with their customers, to date the services have not employed systematic customer surveys or intelligence gathering to assess perceived needs and seek feedback on service quality. Support services contribute to the work of the authority in supporting schools causing concern, but they in turn are not systematically involved in multi-agency sharing of information about schools.

101. The finance support service is good. It is highly regarded by schools and is invariably seen as helpful and knowledgeable. Schools in Tameside operate with chequebook accounts and feel confident and well supported to manage their finances with an appropriate degree of autonomy. Relationships with support staff are good. Budget setting and control systems are sound, well rehearsed and understood, and allow for light touch monitoring by the local authority. The LEA has yet to establish electronic reconciliation of budgets between the centre and schools. In the meantime monthly reconciliation is facilitated by hard copy exchange of information on salaries and non-staffing budgets generated from the electronic systems, held respectively at the centre and in schools. Systems operate differently in the foundation schools but accommodate the realignment of systems with the minimum of fuss. At present the service does not provide schools with benchmark information about the deployment of budgets and spending patterns of other schools within the authority or elsewhere, or assist in accessing other sources of similar information.

102. The personnel service is good. It is viewed very positively by headteachers and governors. Both the day-to-day routine work and the support in case work were highly rated by schools who were unanimous in indicating that this service is one with which they wish to trade in future. The service is clearly very responsive but its style has not generally been to anticipate need, for instance, in respect of benchmarking staffing structures and gradings, although some limited comparative information was provided on headteachers' salaries.

103. Schools' expectations of ICT support have not been matched by the provision of a reliable service. Schools have commented unfavourably on this aspect of support. National Grid for Learning developments have not been integrated with the development of administrative information technology support. Software and hardware support are not operating coherently. All schools have electronic mail for administrative purposes, but they do not as yet use it effectively or confidently.

104. At an operational level, schools see staff within the education management information systems team (EMIST) as very helpful, if over-stretched. The service offers a full training programme, has produced a good guide on managing the administrative information technology systems, and is refreshingly active in seeking to canvass schools' views about the future focus of the service. There are plans to integrate the administrative and curricular systems, although no school visited knew about the plans. This needs to be reinforced to assist in schools' planning and preparation for information management. A recent reorganisation within the department, which pulls

together all aspects of ICT infrastructure support is a positive move, but much still needs to be done to ensure the service retains a focus that schools share and acknowledge.

105. Schools obtain property support services from in-house and external providers. There is a legacy in Tameside of a school building stock in an indifferent state of repair. This is acknowledged by the Council and expressed as a major concern by schools. Schools have inherited the responsibility for structural repairs and maintenance with a share of a budget which was subject to cuts in the early 1990s, and subsequently not restored. The in-house buildings works service has an uneven reputation with schools. The transfer of the Council's housing stock to a housing association from April, involved the establishment of the building works department as an arms length body. Schools will need to be able to access accredited support services and the LEA recognises it must be more proactive than currently in its procurement role.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that the plans to make education central to Tameside's development are implemented, the LEA should:

- improve current plans and ensure they are translated into actions which support school improvement and raise standards; and
- introduce more effective monitoring and evaluation procedures in order to inform of the quality of the services which it provides.

In order to enable schools to make more informed decisions about the deployment of their budgets, the LEA should:

- provide, or assist schools' access to, benchmarking information about resource and staffing deployment.

In order to enable services to ensure they meet school requirements and pursue a process of review and continuous improvement, the LEA should:

- find means of identifying customers' needs and seeking feedback from users.

In order to involve the LEA's partners more fully, the LEA should:

- ensure that appropriate consultation takes place.

In order to secure the effective and coherent use of ICT in school management, the LEA should:

- provide schools with clear and consistent information and reinforcement about its ICT strategy, its pattern of implementation and timing;
- refocus the work of its education management information systems team (EMIST) to ensure that it matches delivery expectations; and

- ensure that the use of electronic mail has maximum impact in contributing to improved communications between the LEA and its schools.

In order to assist schools in securing access to services of an appropriate standard to meet their needs, the LEA should:

- support schools in procurement and in assessing the quality and value for money of services. In the case of property, this should be done immediately.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

Strategy and analysis

106. The LEA's support for special educational provision is largely unsatisfactory, and its strategy is not fully developed and, as a result, is unclear. The failure to pinpoint the needs of pupils with special educational needs across all areas of the Education Development Plan limits the potential for the LEA to monitor, review and evaluate its provision against identified priorities. The recently established special educational needs focus group has carried out a review, the findings of which will go a long way to helping the LEA define more clearly its strategy for supporting special educational needs provision.

107. The proportion of pupils in Tameside with a statement of special educational need is in line with the national average, as is the percentage of pupils in special schools. Funding for special educational needs is significantly below the national average but in line with the LEA's statistical neighbours.

108. Two reviews in recent years have prompted the LEA to modify its special educational needs policy to reflect local and national priorities. The current policy is well known and is used by some schools as a basis for the development of their own policies. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs placement, however, is not clear and not well understood by schools. The LEA is trying to make inclusion work but, in practice, the absence of a coherent plan about its management in relation to locality and disability is a barrier to successful implementation. The infrastructure to support adequately this policy of inclusion is not yet in place, in particular in relation to levels of funding to provide for additional resources.

109. Recent network meetings, conferences and courses, organised and run by the specialist adviser, have been well received by special educational needs co-ordinators, and have begun to articulate a clearer view of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs.

110. While there are many positive features of the school-based support provided by specialist agencies, especially the education psychology services, the LEA lacks a clear long term view of its intended provision. Although there has been a recent audit of special educational needs there has been, as yet, no visible influence on the special educational needs forum or the LEA's management of its special educational needs provision.

Statutory obligations

111. The LEA is struggling and achieving too little success in meeting its statutory obligations. There is a history of considerable delay in issuing statements of special educational need. The reasons are many, varied and almost never shared with schools, special educational needs co-ordinators or parents. The delays were partly attributed to the practice of not statementing pupils following assessment and identification of their needs, but of placing them on service waiting lists and statementing when a place became available. This practice has ceased, but a backlog still remains. There has, however, been a marked improvement over the last two years owing to the implementation of the LEA's continued improvement project.

112. The percentage of statements being processed within 18 weeks has increased from one per cent in 1997/98 to 25 per cent in 1998/99. An even higher percentage of 59 per cent was reached in the early part of this year, but the introduction of a new computer system caused considerable problems, and accounted for a reduction in the proportion of statements being processed. While this improvement is acknowledged, the processing of statements is still unsatisfactory. Statementing schedules are often missed through lack of clearly recorded completion dates, and a shared protocol with the health services. The criteria for all disabilities are not always clear and not shared with all the agencies involved. Whatever the reasons for the delay, the LEA has been unable to drive the statementing process at the rate necessary to enable it to meet the needs of pupils. This is a view held by many schools and substantiated by the inspection findings. A new procedure to use special educational needs co-ordinators to contact parents to sign and complete the original paperwork is a move in the right direction, but this must be in addition to the work of the named officer and the parent partnership officer.

113. The quality of statements has also improved over the last two years. They are now satisfactory. Pupils' statements are aimed at giving access to a broad and balanced curriculum, with additional activities or resources identified to ensure that access. However, they are too generic, and lack the essential detail of identifying specific learning objectives and specific aspects of provision which could aid pupils' learning. The LEA has given limited guidance on the compilation of pupils' individual education plans, but most schools undertake the task independently of the authority. Although the LEA's strategy for monitoring the quality of individual education plans is satisfactory, it is not well understood by schools. Schools appreciate the practical advice and guidance given by their education psychologist in constructing the plans.

114. The LEA does not formally initiate reviews of statements although education psychologists often do this. The LEA currently attends 42 per cent of annual reviews, usually at the request of schools. There is a policy for LEA officers, including the psychology service, to attend Year 6 transition reviews or those known to be of particular concern. While a number of schools confirm this practice, others regret that there is no LEA presence at such important meetings. Extended roles and responsibilities of some education officers, especially in dealing with transport issues, and special educational needs appeals in the summer term exacerbate the situation. The educational psychology service's input to the review process is valuable, but inadequate in special schools with increasingly complex pupil groupings. Review documentation and amendments are sent to the LEA but rarely generate a response. This has led to a repetition in some cases of the same issues in subsequent reviews, giving a number of schools the impression that their pupils' needs are not an LEA priority and driving them to implement their own recommendations. This is unsatisfactory. There is no planned strategy to monitor the quality of reviews, and only recently has the LEA collated information about individual education plans and special educational needs registers. It is not yet clear what will be done with this information.

Value for money

115. The LEA does not provide schools with budget information about special educational needs. The absence of financial data is unsatisfactory and prevents schools and the LEA from being able to monitor special needs spending, gathering

information about the value for money, and effectiveness of spending on special educational needs. School Standards Fund budgets in relation to special educational needs are well documented and shared with schools. The value offered by special educational provision is unsatisfactory and will not improve until this aspect of the LEA's work is reviewed and given a much higher profile.

Recommendations

In order to improve the provision for special educational needs, the LEA should:

- ensure that the current policy is developed to reflect the long term strategy for special educational needs which includes details of how monitoring and evaluation of the quality of provision will be carried out;
- implement, with vigour, the recommendations of the special educational needs focus group;
- ensure that there are more effective procedures for monitoring statements of special educational need and individual education plans;
- ensure that statements are completed within the statutory time limits;
- develop multi-agency protocols for the implementation of the Code of Practice;
- attend more reviews to enable better evaluation and development of inclusive practices to inform future strategic thinking; and
- develop transparent, fair and equitable criteria for assessment to ensure that all pupils continue to receive inclusive provision.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

School premises

116. In 1997, Tameside undertook a detailed analysis of the condition of its school premises, which it set out in a development register. This has been useful in anticipating the subsequent asset management planning process, and has provided the basis for its bidding for grants and borrowing permission. Bids have also been informed by work on suitability assessments of premises in advance of DfEE guidance. The cost of the backlog of premises-condition repairs and replacement was estimated at £51m. The Council has explored the potential for a major Private Funding Initiative repairs and maintenance proposal, but without success. It has, however, undertaken significant capital work in recent years. Nevertheless, the outcome of the Asset Management Plan assessment is likely to show that the current premises need remains not far short of the original figure and represents a major continuing budget pressure.

117. The responsibility for tackling the premises issue rests jointly with the Council and schools. The Council acknowledges that the use of delegated resources by schools to fulfil their buildings responsibilities has been patchy in the first year of delegation, not least because of the schools' concern about the buildings legacy and their perception about the adequacy of the resource. The Council is on schedule to meet the timetable for its Asset Management Plan. Schools have been surveyed and headteachers are aware of the general direction of the plan, although they have yet to be engaged by the authority about the detailed implications of the plan for their mutual tenant and landlord responsibilities. The Council intends to carry forward this work in the near future. It will review, with schools, how to deploy Formula and Seed Capital Funding. The LEA will also need to schedule future surveys in order to update regularly the Asset Management Plan. The co-ordination of the efforts of all partners to implement the Asset Management Plan, and to recognise and engage in their major individual and collective responsibilities, is a major task.

Supply of school places

118. The numbers of surplus places in Tameside are relatively low. There are small net surpluses at primary (one per cent) and secondary (two per cent), although the figures conceal an actual surplus³ of five per cent and seven per cent respectively. The pressure on school places will lessen in the next decade as the effects of falling birth rates work their way through the age groups.

119. Tameside has its School Organisation Plan in place and has established its School Organisation Committee. It has adopted a robust approach to place reduction and rationalisation. In particular, this has involved a proposal for a major Private Funding Initiative scheme to finance the rebuilding of two primary schools, and the relocation and rebuilding of a secondary school, alongside the closure of two other primary schools. The scheme is at an advanced stage but the LEA is awaiting the outcome of the Secretary of State's consideration of the statutory proposals before it progresses. Reorganisation elsewhere involves proposals to rationalise nursery and

³ An actual surplus is defined as the difference between capacity and the numbers on roll where capacity exceeds the pupil numbers.

primary provision in the Ashton-under-Lyne area and the co-location of a special school and a high school.

120. The Key Stage 1 plan is being implemented. All reception year classes have 30 or fewer pupils and no classes will be in excess of 30 by September 2001.

Admissions to schools

121. The management of the admissions process in Tameside is good, but some aspects of secondary transfer are unsatisfactory. The service is highly rated by schools. A recent report from district audit showed the effectiveness of the admissions procedures and the management of the appeals system, including improvements in the period from appeal to settlement. All secondary appeals in 1999 were completed by the end of May, and the small number of primary appeals by mid-June.

122. The admissions booklets are clear and meet the expectations of the Code of Practice. Detailed admissions criteria are set out in the secondary booklet for all schools. A general guide for admissions to voluntary aided schools appears in the primary guide.

123. All admissions to community and voluntary schools are tracked through the central admissions service. A single admissions form is employed for secondary transfer to these schools. The three foundation schools, which are oversubscribed, manage the process independently. There is a good flow of information between the Council and foundation schools, which manage their admissions in advance of the others. However, the secondary admissions process is a confusing and time-consuming exercise for parents. Contributory factors are the different closing dates for application, the emphasis placed on first preferences for community schools, the different admissions criteria, especially for foundation schools, and the absence of catchment areas within the borough, in contrast to their presence in neighbouring LEAs.

124. Rationalisation will be a difficult task, but an issue that needs to be addressed to achieve greater transparency and fairness. The Council is currently consulting on some options to the current admissions arrangements, and intends to bring these matters to the Admissions Forum in the near future.

125. A notable feature of the Council's processes is the use of the database on individual pupils to track pupils' movements between schools and to feed this information back to schools, with the reasons for transfer. Schools have welcomed the capacity to benchmark themselves against others and to analyse the effects on pupils' performance. The Council feels that the use of the tracking and reporting of pupil movement to schools have contributed to the reduction, for reasons other than house move, from 35 per cent to 24 per cent over a two year period.

126. Forecasting of pupil numbers is sound and uses up-to-date information from the health authority. There is a reluctance to provide schools with more than yearly forecasts because of the nature of school recruitment and population movement. However, as the smaller age groups work their way through, this will become a more critical issue for schools to address. The LEA works insufficiently closely with neighbouring authorities to enable it to develop further its forecasting and systems of tracking pupils' movements. However, the LEA is aware of these shortcomings and

intends to improve its working relationship with neighbouring LEAs in order to overcome the weaknesses.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

127. The LEA monitors exclusions carefully and makes appropriate provision for pupils who are not educated at school. It has a well-established home and hospital tuition service, and a Pupil Referral Unit which provides full or part-time education for 28 pupils in Year 11 who have been permanently excluded from school. It is now centralising and extending its provision for pupils who have been permanently excluded in Year 10, and is moving towards a full time programme of education and training for them. Almost all the small number of primary age pupils, and pupils in Key Stage 3 who are permanently excluded, are found a place at another school. Many schools in the LEA accept some pupils excluded from other schools. Only a small number of pupils are out of school for more than a term. About a third of the pupils excluded in 1998/99 were out of school for less than a month.

Support for attendance

128. Attendance in Tameside schools is comparable with both national averages and with those of the LEA's statistical neighbours. For secondary schools, figures correspond almost exactly with both averages for all three attendance measures - attendance, authorised and unauthorised absence. Primary school attendance is slightly lower than the averages for overall attendance, but the amount of unauthorised absence is lower.

129. The LEA's support for schools in relation to pupil attendance is good. The education welfare service is well managed. Education welfare officer time is allocated to primary schools on a need-related basis, which has been developing over the last two years and is accepted by schools. Secondary schools have a minimum entitlement of one education welfare officer visit per week, and several get more than this. This is a sensible arrangement and makes most effective use of the resources available. The service is highly valued by the schools, especially the secondary schools, all of which rated it as satisfactory or better. The secondary response is the highest approval rate expressed in the surveyed LEAs. Only nine per cent of primary schools rated the service as poor, most of them schools which have a low allocation of education welfare officer time and would like more.

130. The service has a clear set of performance targets, and its work is monitored by a group of users which includes a number of headteachers among its members. It also has a sound internal performance management operation.

131. A varied range of support strategies is employed in addition to normal school support through home visits. Chief among these are periodic 'blitz' days for secondary schools, which focus the resources of several officers on one school. Less frequent, but productive, are town centre combined operations by education welfare officers and police. The service has sought to identify the times when potentially poor attenders are most vulnerable and intervene positively on these occasions. For example, education welfare officers make contact during the summer holiday with children with poor records of attendance to ensure that the child has everything needed for starting secondary school. A support group for young carers helps them discharge their

responsibilities without adverse effect on school attendance. Education welfare officers are making attempts, through the consolidated admissions arrangements backed up by personal contacts with parents, to reduce the amount of casual inter-school transfer, in order to achieve more stability in a child's schooling. Schools are given good guidance and advice on strategies which they can employ to improve attendance, such as contacting a parent on the first day of absence.

132. The service meets all legal requirements. Its cost is about ten per cent higher than the average for other metropolitan LEAs, but this represents good value for money.

Support for behaviour

133. OFSTED inspections of primary schools show the quality of behaviour to be below those in the LEA's statistical neighbours and nationally. Secondary school inspection findings indicate that, in a much larger proportion of secondary schools than is found nationally, behaviour needs improvement. Permanent exclusions had been around an average of 64 per year, but rose in 1997/98 to 90. The LEA has set challenging targets to reduce exclusions to half that figure by 2002. Although the number fell slightly during the academic year 1998/99, exclusions will have to reduce dramatically in order that the target of 45 is achieved. The LEA recognises the enormity of the task it faces.

134. The LEA provides satisfactory support to its schools to enable them to manage behaviour effectively. The Behaviour Support Plan is a well-structured and useful document: its vision statement translates into principles, which form the objectives for action. Nevertheless, many of the performance measures are indicators which lack detail against which the success of action taken can be measured, and too little guidance about monitoring and evaluation is built into the plans. Visits to schools revealed varying degrees of familiarity with the document. In those schools, usually secondary, where the Behaviour Support Plan was in use, it was regarded as a good source of guidance and a helpful tool for behaviour management. However, a significant proportion of schools is less familiar with the Plan's contents and its usefulness is not recognised. The LEA does not co-ordinate sufficiently the information it receives from the various agencies which work with schools. As a result, it is not in a position to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Plan in order that it can further improve its strategy for behaviour support.

135. The behaviour support service is well managed and co-ordinated. It is a sparingly resourced, relatively small service which links effectively with other agencies to provide appropriate bespoke support for schools. This may take the form of staff development training, improving teachers' skills in behaviour management and providing guidance on dealing with individual pupils. The support is provided through a bidding process in which schools are invited to bid every six weeks. Support is usually provided to schools on the submission of a second bid. Once support has been agreed, a planning meeting is held with staff concerned when a strategy for improving behaviour is devised. Schools then receive support over a six-week period, reducing to a lower level of support during the following six weeks. Schools which have received this support and input by the educational psychology service regard it as a good quality of service, effective in helping to improve pupils' behaviour and reduce exclusions. However, the delays experienced by the process and the quantity of support offered are

not always sufficient to help the school manage behaviour as effectively as they might. It was these factors which resulted in the LEA's support for improving pupils' behaviour being rated by schools on the survey questionnaire as less than satisfactory.

Support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage, including Travellers

136. The LEA support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage through its minority ethnic achievement service has changed the structure and focus of its work this year. Support is concentrated on those schools which have significant numbers of Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils, whose performance the LEA is rightly seeking to improve. Staffing has been delegated to schools, and most have taken up a service level agreement with ethnic minority achievement service. The support is now concentrated on improving performance in language. The ethnic minority achievement service has well-established links with schools, but the changes are taking time to bed down as both schools and the service staff get used to a different style of working and identifying the best strategies, for example, for teaching the National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy to pupils at early stages of learning English. The support of the ethnic minority achievement service teachers and bilingual assistants is much valued by schools which use the service. Guidance and training are also available for teachers in schools which have one or two pupils who are not fluent in English, and this was universally appreciated. The LEA has detailed information on the achievement of minority ethnic groups and has set ambitious targets for them. The performance of Bangladeshi pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 improved significantly in English in 1999 but not in mathematics. The performance of Pakistani pupils improved, but at a lower rate than for the authority as a whole. The LEA has identified the need to improve its data on the progress of individual pupils over time to refine its target setting for this group.

137. The Traveller education team works hard to identify and support Traveller children, both those based in the LEA and families moving through. Attendance of those children enrolled at school is monitored. Parents of nursery age children are contacted and encouraged to enrol their children in school and given support with early reading materials. The service is beginning to provide distance-learning materials. It now needs to set more specific priorities with clearer, achievable targets for its work.

138. The multi-cultural and anti-racist review group has been in existence for a number of years. It is chaired by the director and its membership includes representatives of headteachers, teachers, governors, Council officers and the Tameside Racial Equality Council. The work of the group focuses on promoting a multi-cultural and anti-racist dimension within the LEA, monitoring equal opportunities and anti-racist strategies, advising on good practice and advancing the recommendations of major national initiatives, the most recent of which has been the report on the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

139. In response to the school survey, more than a quarter of primary schools and almost half the secondary schools rated health and safety in schools to be poor or very poor. Visits and discussions showed that nearly all of this dissatisfaction is accounted for by the LEA's poor record of building maintenance. This has resulted in a sizeable backlog of repairs to buildings and playgrounds resulting in conditions which the

occupants judge to be poor. Officers are well aware of this, and explain the problem as the result of a large gap between need and available resources. Some buildings are heavily reinforced structurally to ensure safety, and in some pressing cases recently it has been necessary to draw on Council reserves to make them safe. On several occasions it has been necessary to divert resources from projects which schools assumed would go ahead, to more pressing cases, sometimes without a sufficient explanation for the action to overcome the view that the LEA has reneged on a promise.

140. An independent survey of buildings and sites security has resulted in all school buildings now having protection against intrusion when occupied, while the most vulnerable sites have anti-theft and vandal protection at other times, including remote control monitored closed circuit television installations. Good guidance is provided to schools on all matters affecting health and safety, and the LEA has drawn up a model health and safety policy for consideration by schools and governors, which most schools have adopted. Adequate arrangements are made for training to be provided for first aiders, for teachers with health and safety responsibilities, and for headteachers and governors. Regular checks are made to ensure that schools have a nominated person with child-protection responsibility, and on the uptake of training for this, which is reported to be of good quality. Links with social services and the police on child protection matters are also good.

141. There is an active health and safety group, involving headteachers, teachers' representatives, and officers. The accident report system is securely monitored and checked. Health and safety officers make regular checks to ensure that schools have up-to-date policies, that risk assessments have been undertaken, that checks have been made on arrangements for storing hazardous substances, and for testing electrical equipment. The LEA has very good working contacts with the area health authority, which has helped with the production of health education materials for schools, and co-operates on projects such as drug abuse and health practice education projects. There is for example a jointly-funded drugs education project in a group of primary schools.

Support for looked-after children

142. The Council has recently established a policy intended to improve the support for and performance of looked-after children. The policy is welcomed, and is well understood and approved by schools. They are confident that working relationships between them and the different agencies involved will improve. There is now a database of looked-after children, and schools are aware of the looked-after children on their rolls; attendance is monitored by the education welfare service and many schools have a named teacher and governor in place. Monitoring and adequate support are provided by the education resource team attached to social services.

Recommendations

In order to ensure schools are equipped to work with the LEA and diocesan bodies in addressing the joint responsibilities to implement the Asset Management Plan and contribute to the necessary major improvements to the building stock, the LEA should:

- ensure that the funding needs which will emerge from the Asset Management Plan are securely incorporated into the Council's capital and revenue budget priorities; and
- support schools in ensuring they understand, recognise and implement their responsibilities.

In order to seek to secure greater fairness and clarity for parents and pupils, the LEA should:

- provide early leadership in order to reduce the current complexities of the secondary transfer arrangements.

In order to improve the support for improving behaviour, the LEA should:

- co-ordinate the information from the various services engaged in providing behaviour support and use this to guide improvements; and
- improve the speed of response to schools which need support for behaviour.

APPENDIX

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ensure schools are resourced to discharge their responsibilities and to enable the Council's targeting and assessment of spending priorities, the LEA should:

- review the level of funding available for schools by examining the assessed organisational and teaching needs.

In order to assist schools in the deployment of their budgets to support special educational needs and support the accountability of governors, the LEA should:

- include a notional special needs budget for each school in its Section 52 statement and school budget statements; and
- implement the planned review of funding for special educational needs and use the results to inform the Council's long term budgeting strategy.

In order to support schools to exercise autonomy, provide them with greater flexibility and choice, and ensure greater incentive to secure cost effectiveness of traded services, the LEA should:

- shorten the contract lengths and extend the timescales offered to schools in making their buying decisions.

In order to ensure that schools consider the relevance of Best Value principles to the expenditure of funds from their delegated budgets, the LEA should:

- implement the requirements of the Fair Funding scheme (to secure from governors a statement to indicate how Best Value principles are being followed) and discuss these with schools as part of its annual dialogue.

In order to ensure that the Education Development Plan becomes more central to school improvement, the LEA should:

- ensure that headteachers and governors understand the significance of the Education Development Plan and its relationship to each school's development plan;
- revise the strategy for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Education Development Plan to show how effective the identified activities have been in achieving their objectives; and
- ensure a better match of activities to priorities.

In order to improve financial planning, the LEA should:

- review the education budget and ensure that resources are made closely aligned to priorities.

In order to ensure that services contribute more effectively to school improvement, the LEA should:

- monitor and evaluate the contributions which these services currently make and make the changes necessary to create a more effective service for schools.

In order to improve support for schools and help them improve, the LEA should:

- present greater challenge to secondary schools;
- clarify the criteria for the categorisation of schools, and schools' entitlement to advisers' time; and
- continue to develop the monitoring, evaluation and reporting procedures on schools.

In order to improve the effectiveness in the use of performance data in schools, the LEA should:

- extend the range of analyses of performance data provided to schools to provide more help in identifying the extent of improvements they are making; and
- provide more guidance on how performance data analysis can contribute to school improvement by helping to identify areas of strength and weakness in the practice of the school.

In order to provide effective support to school management, the LEA should:

- extend the range of external sources of expertise, advice and training in school management to complement its own provision, subject to suitable quality assurance, and broker this more effectively to schools;
- guide schools in obtaining the support they need in areas where it lacks expertise in secondary management;
- give more active lead to help and encourage schools to undertake regular self-evaluation and review; and
- reinforce and strengthen headteacher appraisal.

In order to support improvements in early years education, the LEA should:

- monitor and evaluate early years provision more closely, and find ways of helping staff to understand the role they play in helping to raise standards across the LEA; and

- ensure that its guidance related to staffing of nursery classes is followed.

In order to ensure that the plans to make education central to Tameside's development are implemented, the LEA should:

- improve current plans and ensure they are translated into actions which support school improvement and raise standards; and
- introduce more effective monitoring and evaluation procedures in order to inform of the quality of the services which it provides.

In order to enable schools to make more informed decisions about the deployment of their budgets, the LEA should:

- provide, or assist schools' access to, benchmarking information about resource and staffing deployment.

In order to enable services to ensure they meet school requirements and pursue a process of review and continuous improvement, the LEA should:

- find means of identifying customers' needs and seeking feedback from users.

In order to involve the LEA's partners more fully, the LEA should:

- ensure that appropriate consultation takes place.

In order to secure the effective and coherent use of ICT in school management, the LEA should:

- provide schools with clear and consistent information and reinforcement about its ICT strategy, its pattern of implementation and timing;
- refocus the work of its Education Management Information Systems Team (EMIST) to ensure that it matches delivery expectations; and
- ensure that the use of electronic mail has maximum impact in contributing to improved communications between the LEA and its schools.

In order to assist schools in securing access to services of an appropriate standard to meet their needs, the LEA should:

- support schools in procurement and in assessing the quality and value for money of services. In the case of property, this should be done immediately.

In order to improve the provision for special educational needs, the LEA should:

- ensure that the current policy is developed to reflect the long term strategy for special educational needs which includes details of how monitoring and evaluation of the quality of provision will be carried out;
- implement, with vigour, the recommendations of the special educational needs focus group;
- ensure that there are more effective procedures for monitoring statements of special educational need and Individual Education Plans;
- ensure that statements are completed within the statutory time limits;
- develop multi-agency protocols for the implementation of the Code of Practice;
- attend more reviews to enable better evaluation and the development of inclusive practices to inform future strategic thinking; and
- develop transparent, fair and equitable criteria for assessment to ensure that all pupils continue to receive inclusive provision.

In order to ensure schools are equipped to work with the LEA and diocesan bodies in addressing the joint responsibilities to implement the Asset Management Plan and contribute to the necessary major improvements to the building stock, the LEA should:

- ensure that the funding needs which will emerge from the Asset Management Plan are securely incorporated into the Council's capital and revenue budget priorities; and
- support schools in ensuring they understand, recognise and implement their responsibilities.

In order to seek to secure greater fairness and clarity for parents and pupils, the LEA should:

- provide early leadership in order to reduce the current complexities of the secondary transfer arrangements.

In order to improve the support for improving behaviour, the LEA should:

- co-ordinate the information from the various services engaged in providing behaviour support and use this to guide improvements; and
- improve the speed of response to schools which need support for behaviour.

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