



**OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF  
SOLIHULL  
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**<sup>1</sup>, which focuses on the effectiveness of Local Education Authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. In addition to the standard themes, the inspection covered special educational needs, behaviour and attendance.
2. The inspection was in two stages. An initial review established a picture of the LEA's context, the performance of schools, its strategy and the management of services. The initial review was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, OFSTED inspection information and audit reports. Discussions were held with elected members, officers in the Education and other Council departments and representatives of groups with which the LEA works in partnership. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was sent to 85 schools. The response rate was 92 per cent.
3. The second stage of the inspection involved visits to 19 schools to gather the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support provided by the LEA had contributed to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, was effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provided value for money.
4. This report draws on evidence from the initial review, the school survey, a cost analysis carried out by the Audit Commission and school visits. Additional evidence has been used from recent HMI visits to Solihull schools.

<sup>1</sup>LEA Support for school improvement: A Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities, London, OFSTED 1997

## COMMENTARY

5. Overall the socio-economic profile of Solihull is a little more favourable than the national average. This, however, is only a partial picture. The gap between affluence and deprivation in different areas is a significant feature of the Borough. The statistics on pupil performance set out in this report show that standards are generally above national averages. This masks the wide disparity in results between schools. For instance, for a fairly large area in the north the proportion of pupils gaining five or more higher GCSE grades is only one-fifth, while the proportion gaining no passes is ten times higher than for pupils in south Solihull schools.
  
6. Solihull is a very effective LEA with many strengths and few weaknesses. It is a very high-delegating authority and much of what it does is a model of good practice. The LEA has been successful in encouraging in its schools an informed consumerism in relation to services that has improved the services. For instance, the inspection and advisory service provides support of such a consistently high quality that all Solihull schools and some in neighbouring LEAs purchase its services regularly and report they receive good value. As a consequence the LEA is able to provide a range and depth of support that few LEAs of a comparable size can match. The performance of the following functions is at least adequate and often good or very good:-
  - consultation with schools over major plans;
  - procedures for monitoring and evaluation;
  - support for school improvement planning;
  - support for management;
  - support for school governors;
  - support for the quality of teaching;
  - support for literacy and numeracy in primary schools;
  - support for schools in special measures;
  - support for attendance;
  - use of performance data by the LEA;
  - behavioural support;
  - pupils' support services;
  - management of resources;
  - personnel services;
  - financial services;
  - property management;
  - admissions and school places.
  
7. By contrast, there are some significant weaknesses in the performance of the following functions:-
  - strategy for social inclusion;
  - strategy for the future development of behavioural support;
  - strategy for special educational needs and monitoring of provision;
  - implementation of ICT strategy;

- guidance on the use of performance data.

A significant weakness is the lack of a coherent strategy to counter the effects of social deprivation highlighted at the start of this commentary. The Education Department has rightly identified social inclusion as a high priority and this has been articulated in two bids for an Education Action Zone (EAZ) but these were unsuccessful and leave a partial vacuum in LEA policy in their wake. *De facto*, through supporting schools in special measures, intensive support for numeracy and literacy and special initiatives there has been a major change in the last two years in the way the LEA deploys its resources. However, there is some confusion and muddled thinking in Solihull schools about social deprivation issues, special educational needs and allocation of resources. There is a need for clearer leadership and vision from the LEA and a clearer articulation of policy.

8. The LEA starts with a comparatively low level of resources per pupil and there is a sense of grievance on this issue in the LEA as a whole. However, the LEA and schools manage the available resources well, and the LEA has well-developed mechanisms for evaluating its own effectiveness. Consequently, it is well placed to meet the challenge of the Best Value regime.
9. Overall, the LEA performs very well. It has achieved a suitable balance between 'challenge' and 'support' and between delegation and meeting the needs of schools. The LEA enjoys good relationships with its schools and most of the elements of partnership and a 'high trust' LEA are in place. It has the capacity to build on this good foundation in order to improve in those areas where there are weaknesses. A key challenge is to raise attainment in its low performing schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

10. A. **To improve the quality and effectiveness of its strategic planning at all levels the LEA should:**
  - produce a coherent strategy for social inclusion. This should be based on an audit of current provision made by the LEA and its partners to schools serving areas with high degrees of social deprivation;
  - extending targets to raising attainment in low performing secondary schools, particularly in numeracy and literacy;
  - articulate the strategy and update the policy for special educational needs so that there is a clear lead to the schools;
  - extend the behaviour plan to include planning, costings, success criteria and to indicate how the various agencies will be co-ordinated;

**B. In order to improve the quality of support for governing bodies the LEA should:**

- ensure that all governing bodies receive the full feedback on the findings of the annual review;

**C. To improve the quality of LEA services to schools the LEA should:**

- take urgent action to complete the implementation of the central financial system;
- in collaboration with schools, take action to reduce the high school balances;
- provide schools with the support they need for the implementation of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) strategy;

**D. Improve further the value of its data analysis and school profiles by:**

- evaluating the provision for pupils from ethnic minority groups and systematically collecting and analysing data to target resources;
- providing guidance on value-added issues and analyses that would complement those in the schools;
- reviewing partnership agreements with its schools to enable data to be used more effectively to disseminate good practice;
- providing greater challenge to some secondary schools in target-setting.

**E. Improve the quality of support for special educational needs by:**

- monitoring the effectiveness of the use of central and delegated funds;
- improving communications and extending the role of schools in evaluating the effectiveness of provision;
- providing effective guidance to special schools on the use of data for target-setting;
- improving support for the curriculum in special schools.

## **SECTION 1: THE CONTEXT OF THE LEA**

### **The Borough**

11. The Borough was established in 1974 and covers a large geographical area. It has a stable population of about 203,900. Overall, the socio-economic profile of Solihull is a little more favourable than the national picture. In 1997, unemployment was 4.6 per cent and the percentage of pupils eligible for free meals was 16.5 per cent in the primary phase and 14.7 per cent in the secondary phase; these are below the national averages. However, while the economic indicators in the southern part of Solihull are favourable, there are some very deprived areas in the north. For instance, the proportion of children living in higher social class households varies from 7.3 per cent in Smith's Wood ward to 78.5 per cent in Knowle ward. The gap between affluence and deprivation is a significant feature of the Borough. About four per cent of Solihull's pupils are of minority ethnic origin. Solihull has a lower proportion of residents from ethnic minorities than is the average for England.

### **Pupils in schools**

12. In January 1999 there were 34,896 pupils on roll at 86 schools maintained by the LEA comprising:- four 11-18 secondary schools, nine 11-16 secondary schools, 67 primaries, five special schools and a pupil referral unit (PRU). In addition, there was one grant maintained primary school which has opted for community status, and a city technology college. There were 5,074 'extra district' pupils who accounted for 14 per cent of the school population.
13. The LEA has a policy of providing part-time nursery education for the full year prior to children commencing infant education at the age of five. In September 1999, 95 per cent of those eligible were on the role of a maintained school's nursery class. There are no nursery schools, but 51 of 56 schools have nursery units with 2,380 places.
14. The percentage of Solihull pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) is below the national average at primary and secondary level.
15. In January 1997 the proportion of pupils aged 16 remaining in full-time education was 69 per cent, which is very close to the national average. In 1998, 51 per cent of school leavers attended the sixth form college or further education while 19 per cent stayed on in LEA maintained schools.

### **Structure of the education department**

16. The Council has 51 members; 15 Labour, 24 Conservative, 11 Liberal Democrat and one Independent Ratepayer. In 1996 the administration



changed from Conservative control to minority Labour control. In 1999 a minority Conservative administration was formed.

17. The Council has approved a new committee structure which has operated since April 1996. There are two main committees (strategic & operations and audit) and the service committees (education, housing, social services etc). In addition, the strategic committee is supported in its work by a range of small member-led advisory groups; these deal with specific issues and co-opt others from different departments, services or schools with relevant expertise.
18. The Education, Libraries and Arts department is one of six departments. Within this department there are four divisions which are headed by two senior assistant directors, a head of school services and a chief inspector respectively.
19. The LEA has a substantial inspection and advisory service comprising 19 inspectors, 11 advisory teachers, a literacy consultant and a numeracy consultant.

## **SECTION 2: PERFORMANCE OF SCHOOLS**

20. **Children's attainment on entry to school is generally above average.**
21. **Attainment is above national averages at all key stages except in the sixth form. In Key Stages 1 and 2 attainment is often well above national averages.** For example in 1998:-
- at Key Stage 1 standards in reading and writing tests were well above, and those for mathematics and science were above, national averages;
  - at Key Stage 2, compared to national averages, standards in English and mathematics were well above, and in science were above;
  - in the Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE examinations pupils' performances were above national averages;
  - Solihull students in LEA maintained schools entered for two or more GCE A level examinations averaged 15.7 points which is significantly below the average nationally (17.6) and that for its statistical neighbours (18.2). (Provisional results for 1999 indicate a marked improvement.)
22. **In Key Stages 1 and 2 attainment is often above that for its statistical neighbours. At Key Stages 3 and 4 standards are broadly in line with the averages for its statistical neighbours.** For example in 1998:-
- 88.1 per cent of pupils achieved level 2 in reading at Key Stage 1, which is above the average for statistical neighbours (83.7 per cent) and well above the average nationally (80.1 per cent);
  - in 1998, Solihull was placed fifth out of 148 authorities for Key Stage 2 results, performing considerably better than LEAs with similar levels of deprivation;
  - in the GCSE examination 53.2 per cent of pupils attained five or more grades A\*-C compared to 52.9 per cent for its statistical neighbours but significantly above the national average (44.7 per cent).
23. **Over the period 1995 to 1998, there have been significant improvements in pupils' performances in Key Stage 1 and 2 tests at a rate greater than the national average. Over the same period there have been improvements in GCE A level results, progress at GCSE level has been variable, and Key Stage 3 results have not improved significantly.** From 1995 to 1998:-
- the percentage of pupils gaining level 4 in the Key Stage 2 mathematics tests improved by 16.2 per cent, compared to 13.6 per cent nationally;

- the percentage of pupils gaining level 5 in the Key Stage 3 mathematics tests improved by 0.4 per cent, while nationally the figure was 1.9 per cent;
- in the GSCE examinations the percentage of pupils gaining five or more grades A\*-C rose by 4.7 per cent, but the percentage gaining five or more grades A\*-G fell by 0.2 per cent.

**24. OFSTED inspection data confirms that standards are generally close to, or above, those for its statistical neighbours and nationally**

Out of 53 primary schools inspected since September 1993, 83 per cent were judged to be good or very good which compares to 72 per cent for statistical neighbours and 68 per cent nationally. There is a similar picture at secondary level with 83 per cent of Solihull schools judged to be good or very good, 78 per cent for statistical neighbours and 67 per cent nationally.

Five schools have been judged to require special measures but subsequently two have been removed from this category. One school is currently judged to have serious weaknesses. Overall, the percentage of schools judged to require improvement is close to, or below, the average for other LEAs.

OFSTED has also provided data which compares the GCSE results for Solihull schools against other schools with similar socio-economic characteristics. On this analysis for 1995 to 1997, the results for nine Solihull schools were broadly in line, while they were better than like schools in two cases and below in two others.

LEA analysis shows that there is wide variation in the performance of schools. For instance, in the proposed EAZ area which includes three secondary schools, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more higher grades at GCSE is one-fifth and the percentage gaining no passes is ten times higher than the average for schools in south Solihull.

**25. Solihull schools have many strengths which contribute to raising pupils' achievement, but also some weaknesses**

Early years provision is judged to be of good quality. Analysis of OFSTED reports by the LEA has identified areas for further development, particularly in relation to assessment, the use of outside play, ICT and management.

In general, both primary and secondary schools are well led; the quality of teaching is usually sound or better and pupils' attitudes to learning and relationships are good. There is evidence that there has been improvements in the quality of monitoring and evaluation over the stated period. The provision for cultural, and particularly, spiritual development is sometimes unsatisfactory in both phases but marked improvements have been noted in the later inspections. In secondary school inspections teachers' management of pupils was rated as poor in one-fifth of all Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 lessons inspected.

**Attendance and exclusions**

Overall attendance is in line with the national average for primary schools and above for secondary schools.

Exclusions in primary schools were below national averages in 1998. In secondary schools they were below national averages but the trend is upwards.

## SECTION 3: THE LEA STRATEGY

- ***The LEA has a clear and corporate strategic approach to planning. It has made sound progress towards its stated goal of becoming a high-trust LEA founded on an effective partnership with its schools. In particular, consultation, monitoring and evaluation arrangements are good, the Education Development Plan (EDP) sets relevant priorities, there is high degree of delegation to the schools and the latter are very clear about the cost of services – the principles of Fair Funding and Best Value are taking firm root. There is consensus amongst members of all political parties on almost all issues relating to education.***
- ***There is, however, no clear strategic plan for social inclusion and there are weaknesses in the plans for SEN and behaviour.***

### The strategy of the Council

26. The vision for Solihull was summarised by the Chief Executive when he took up his post in 1996. He stated that the Borough should:
- become Britain's number one local authority for service to its citizens;
  - enable Solihull's citizens to compete in a high skills economy;
  - play a major part in planning for a healthy, compassionate society;
  - work towards balanced development.
27. The Council's Strategic Vision document is produced annually and expands and develops this vision. For 1998/9 this reaffirms that the Borough is working towards an inclusive society including high educational standards and wide learning opportunities. In terms of education, the Council identifies the need to:
- continue to promote and facilitate high quality education provision, working in strong partnership with schools;
  - formulate and deliver an EDP;
  - participate in the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) initiative taking schools and the wider community into the information age.
28. The LEA has a strategic agenda which stems from local and national priorities. These priorities are:
- raising standards in schools;
  - promoting life-long learning;
  - preparing for the 'information society';
  - promoting social inclusion;
  - supporting the modernisation of local government.

## Education Development Plan

29. The EDP sets out eight priorities for school improvement in the period 1999 to 2002. These are:

- literacy;
- numeracy;
- information technology;
- personal and social development;
- raising standards at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4;
- schools' quality assurance;
- helping schools causing concern and spreading good practice;
- early years.

30. From the local audit, and from continuing local priorities, further themes have been identified:

- the arts curriculum;
- teaching and learning;
- Key Stage 2;
- the 14 - 19 curriculum;
- life-long learning;
- special educational needs;
- continuing professional development;
- behaviour;
- equal opportunities.

These themes are detailed within the activities planned to address the priorities.

31. The EDP draws together activities within other LEA plans which hold as their common aim the raising of standards of achievement for all pupils. These include the Literacy, Numeracy and ICT development plans, the Asset Management Plan, Behaviour Support Plan and the Early Years Development and Childcare plan. For each priority, the plan identifies the tasks to be carried out, nominates the person(s) responsible, with relevant timescales. There are success criteria, and monitoring and evaluation procedures are clearly set out.

32. Solihull dates its early years policy development from 1970. Policy has been continuously reviewed and updated. The LEA Early Years Development Plan has been approved by the DfEE and is of good quality.

33. The Behaviour Plan is a misnomer. It is a clear and thorough statement of existing provision in Solihull and its development has involved consultation with a wide range of interested parties, but it is not a plan. It gives no clear strategic direction to the schools.

34. The SEN policy was formulated in 1994. The EDP is insufficiently explicit about support for pupils with special educational needs.
35. The Education department identifies as a key issue the disparity between the socially disadvantaged North of the Borough and the affluent South. The EDP does not clearly define the LEA's strategy for social inclusion over the next three years. There is less consensus amongst Members on this issue than the other priorities identified by the LEA.
36. The EDP has been approved by the DfEE for the full three years with only general conditions applying to all LEAs. It has been drawn up after full and extensive consultation but not all relevant sections of the finalised EDP have been shared with interested partners.
37. The resources to monitor school performance are provided largely from delegated budgets, but the EDP has meant refocusing centrally held funding to fulfil some duties. There is a limited resource of one day per school for core monitoring. Contingency procedures are in place for schools causing concern. The success of the LEA's strategy will depend upon it maintaining the quality of the relationship it has nurtured with its schools. Target-setting processes are clear and rates of progress to 2002 are manageable. Priorities are clearly argued and appropriate. Activities are defined and the provision for schools causing concern is sound. The resource costs are acceptable.
38. A considerable strength of the LEA is its strategy for help, support and challenge to schools to further school improvement. This is where the partnership works best. There is some excellent practice and this is documented later in this report.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

39. The LEA uses a good range of methods to monitor its own effectiveness. These include:- regular reports to elected members; surveys conducted by individual services; use of performance indicators; review and audit reports. There are sound procedures for evaluating progress with implementation of the EDP.
40. The Council is committed to using the European Business Excellence model to improve its services and achieve best value. It is well placed to meet the challenge of the 'Modernising Local Government' White Paper. It has formed a Citizens' Panel that has met, although no questions relating to education have yet been considered by the panel. The Council makes use of peer assessment by other councils via the West Midlands Best Value Assessment Scheme. Scrutiny functions are addressed through a well-established sub-committee of the Education Committee.

### **Consultation and partnership**

41. Consultative arrangements are a strength of the LEA and an effective partnership is being forged. A framework is in place that involves major stakeholders and is a key strand in Solihull's corporate Best Value initiative. Consultation draws on a wide range of strategies, including use of the Internet through the Solihull website for the 'Achieving Excellence in Schools' document. The joint funding and participation in the Primary Partnership, and the LEA's

involvement in the Consortium of Secondary Headteachers, are explicit attempts to move relationships with schools into a partnership model. As part of the LEA's adoption of the European Business Excellence model, all schools were surveyed in 1998 about their perceptions of the LEA, using the Audit Commission's model of a 'High Trust LEA'. Changes in policy and practice were made as a result of the feedback received from schools. Taken together, this means that headteachers are becoming more closely involved in the formulation and development of policy and this provides a more formal route than the established, informal, use of cluster meetings and *ad-hoc* consultative groups.

42. There are, however, some indications that partnership arrangements could still be improved. Data relating to schools are not routinely shared with all schools. For example, the LEA has not circulated to schools all of the Annexes to the Solihull EDP including details of the targets for all schools and the LEA action to improve standards for pupils with SEN. Nor is this information available in the main library. However, partnership approaches place demands upon all parties and schools visited had not familiarised themselves with LEA procedures. For example, a few schools are insufficiently aware of the procedures for LEA intervention in schools with weaknesses although these are set out clearly in LEA documents.
43. The LEA has supported the proposal to form a Governors' Forum as it believes it could prove useful in the light of its strategic objective to create more opportunities for formative involvement of governors in the policy-making process. Parents' groups and their representatives are not widely involved in policy making, although the developing relationship with the Special Needs Action Partnership (SNAP) has provided an effective channel for mediation and consultation. At the time of the inspection the Committee was moving towards the formal appointment of parent members of the Committee from April 2000.

### ***Support for promoting social inclusion***

44. Promoting social inclusion is one of five priorities in the LEA strategic agenda. The report has referred previously to weaknesses in the LEA Behaviour and SEN strategies, and there is more detail in Section 6 of this report. Although there are some schools in socially deprived areas where pupils attain good standards and demonstrate what can be achieved in challenging circumstances, overall, there is a stark contrast between attainment in different parts of the Borough. A key challenge for the LEA is to raise attainment in its low performing schools.
45. The problem is long standing but has received more recognition over the last two years. The LEA has submitted two bids for EAZ status but these have been unsuccessful. The second was appropriately entitled 'Bridging the Gap'. There is currently a partial vacuum in LEA policy that is fuelling some uncertainty and discontentment in schools. The Council considered a proposal for £500,000 to counter social deprivation and approved £250,000 for this purpose. This is a recognition that more needs to be done but it is a short-term strategy and is not guaranteed to extend beyond this year. In some schools this money is not clearly targeted and so it will be difficult for the Council to evaluate the effectiveness of its strategy.



46. A large region of the Borough has many similar characteristics to inner-city areas, but does not qualify for national projects such as Excellence in Cities. On the whole, the LEA has been unsuccessful in its bidding for external funding and in gaining support from business and industry for initiatives specific to this region. What is lacking, although the need is now recognised, is a multi-agency approach. Co-ordinated action is needed to ensure that schools are supported appropriately so that they improve and are not identified as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses. To date all six schools requiring special measures or with serious weaknesses have been in this particular region of the Borough.

### **Allocation and use of resources**

- ***The LEA receives the fourth lowest resources per pupil in England from the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) formula.***
- ***The LEA now spends at the level of the education SSA, but has previously spent significantly above it.***
- ***The LEA and schools manage their resources well generally, but cumulative balances are too high in some schools.***
- ***Spending on special educational needs overall is appropriate.***
- ***Useful policies are being developed to target resources at under-achievement and also to counter social deprivation; these are not yet clearly articulated or fully effective.***
- ***There are well developed mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of the use of most resources but there are weaknesses in evaluating those allocated to schools for SEN pupils and to counter deprivation.***

### *Education resources*

47. The SSA distribution produced the fourth lowest resources per pupil in England for Solihull LEA in 1999/00. In 1995/6, the LEA budgeted to spend 11 per cent above the SSA, but by 1999/2000, education expenditure was only marginally above SSA (Appendix 1). Within the education budget, the LEA gives a high priority to expenditure for children under five and budgeted to spend 73 per cent above the indicative SSA in this area. This has knock-on effects. Expenditure in the adult, community and youth service block is substantially below SSA, although expenditure on the youth service has been recently increased as part of the local authority response to social inclusion issues. Secondary schools in Solihull have had a small decrease in the real level of resources in recent years.
48. In 1999/2000, Solihull was in the lowest four metropolitan authorities for Standards Fund allocation per pupil for many of the blocks of expenditure including NGfL, National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, school improvement, behaviour support and the total Standards Fund allocation. A comparatively high level of resources was allocated for capital expenditure on Class Size Plans and building maintenance and improvement.

## **Managing central resources**

49. Comparative information produced by the DfEE shows that budget per pupil in Solihull, compared with other metropolitan authorities, is:-
- slightly below average for strategic management;
  - in the lowest quartile for central special education expenditure;
  - close to average for school improvement;
  - close to average for home to school transport;
  - very low for non-devolved specific grant relating to the issues described on Standards Fund allocations.
50. The LEA has effective processes for allocating resources to educational priorities and extensive information available about the cost of its services. This information is used as part of the Business Excellence process to review the effectiveness and efficiency of its services. Resulting actions include decisions to close the governors' clerking and purchasing advice services and extensive negotiations with schools on the extent of music, swimming and inspection and advisory services. However, the expenditure review processes have not been systematically extended to all areas of education expenditure, in particular in relation to school-based expenditure on SEN and on social deprivation.
51. Education services are generally efficiently and effectively run.

## **The impact on schools**

52. Solihull pioneered delegation of resources to schools, starting back in the 1970s. In 1999/2000, 85.5 per cent of the school budget has been delegated to schools, substantially higher than the average for metropolitan authorities of 82.0 per cent and for England as a whole of 82.4 per cent. Of the central resources delegated to schools, a very high proportion is forecast to be used in 1999/2000 to buy back centrally-provided services; this is an indication of the high esteem in which schools regard the services which the LEA provides.
53. Most schools visited were concerned about the level of resources that they received. In practice, however, schools were managing their budgets effectively and were remaining financially viable, although there is substantial variation between schools in their levels of balances. In some, balances are too high. The implementation of the Class Size Plan and nursery and primary reorganisation is causing substantial changes in pupil numbers that will impact on budget planning for some schools.

## **Resources for special educational needs and overcoming deprivation and under-achievement**

54. Overall spending on pupils with special educational needs is broadly average for metropolitan authorities. Within this context, a high proportion (almost 13 per cent) of the Local Schools Budget is allocated to SEN while the amount retained centrally is low. The money devolved to schools is on the basis of a learning difficulties factor (LDF) which is sophisticated and calculated by the

LEA. The criteria used are clear to the schools. Some schools have unrealistic expectations of a lean, central service.

55. There is a debate in the LEA regarding the distribution of resources between the deprived north and the affluent south. A key challenge is to raise attainment in low-performing schools wherever they may be. In practice, extra resources are being allocated. This is partly due to the nature of the funding formula; partly to national initiatives, such as the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies, where identified primary schools receive intensive support; and partly through external pressures such as supporting schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses. Policy development has tended to be piecemeal and reactive. As a result, there are anomalies, such as, insufficient attention to raising literacy and numeracy levels in the low-performing secondary schools. There is no detailed audit of current provision to inform the debate, and the various elements of present practice are not yet brought together as a clearly-articulated policy.

### **School places and admissions**

- ***Solihull has effectively managed the supply of school places in the primary sector.***
  - ***There are now substantial pressures on the availability of places for secondary pupils from Solihull, but the LEA is taking appropriate action to manage this.***
56. Solihull has actively and effectively managed the supply of school places in the primary sector; there are currently around seven per cent surplus places, which is in the lowest quartile among metropolitan authorities. However, the surplus places are particularly high in two wards in the north of the Borough. A review of primary provision has been carried out in these areas and reorganisation proposals for primary schools in these wards are about to go to consultation. The incident of appeals to the LEA about placement in primary schools is low.
57. The Council has carried out an extensive exercise on primary provision to meet the class sizes pledge and to extend the availability of nursery provision for all three and four year olds in the Borough. This has required a reduction of provision in some schools, along with new or increased provision in others. New catchment zones have been developed and an extensive public consultation exercise has been carried out. The link between the class sizes programme and the consequent rationalisation of admissions numbers, the Council's expansion of nursery provision for three and four year olds and the reorganisation of primary provision in line with demographic changes has been planned and is being implemented effectively. The LEA has been accorded a comparatively high level of capital and revenue resources from the Standards Fund to implement the plan.
58. The LEA faces considerable pressure on available places in the secondary sector. The main pressure on Solihull comes from the flow of one-fifth of secondary pupils into the Borough, primarily from Birmingham. Overall, there are 4.8 per cent surplus places in secondary schools, placing the authority in

the lowest quartile position among metropolitan authorities. In the January 1999 return, one school in the north of the Borough had 30 per cent surplus places, but these have since reduced.

59. Secondary school populations are projected to rise by five per cent by 2005. The LEA is taking adequate steps to plan for the increase and has held discussions with schools and with the DfEE. The LEA is managing the admissions process appropriately in partnership with schools.

### **Statutory duties**

60. The LEA takes steps to ensure that its statutory duties are met in full. In the recent past there have been unacceptable delays encountered in the issuing of Statements of Special Educational Need but the LEA is now meeting requirements.

### **Links with Other Agencies**

61. Liaison is good generally but further co-ordinated action is needed in areas of high social deprivation.
62. There is effective joint working with the Social Services Department; for example, developing policy and procedures for monitoring the education and performance of looked-after young people. There has also been fruitful liaison on the Solihull Area Child Protection Committee, the Drug Action Team and Youth Justice. The latter has led to more considered approaches to dealing with young people who offend. There has also been joint liaison with Social Services and the Fire Service on increasing fire-safety awareness. Relationships with the Police are very good and based on the concepts of community and sector policing. A strategy group meets regularly to discuss joint areas of concern and there is close liaison on drugs and child abuse.
63. The LEA maintains strong links with local industry and commerce through its close collaboration with the Birmingham and Solihull TEC and Central Careers. The Solihull Education Business Partnership involves the delivery of 200 teacher placements in local companies, nearly 3000 work experience placements for pupils, a range of activities to promote lifelong learning, and assistance to schools to gain access to quality assurance models. The Partnership's development plan is linked to the LEA's EDP and recognises other plans such as the Behaviour Support Plan. There is a joint agreement between the TEC and the schools inspectorate to support the development of Investors in People in schools. Landrover, the largest employer in the Borough, has a computer suite and other facilities used by about 5000 primary and secondary pupils a year. It liaises closely with LEA officers and also plays a role in the Lifelong Learning Partnership.
64. An analysis by the LEA has revealed that the co-ordination of multi-agency working is patchy in areas of high social deprivation and more action is needed. There has been a number of small projects that have enjoyed a degree of

success, particularly involving the North Solihull Steering Group, but the LEA is not achieving the high level of co-ordinated response needed to bring about dramatic improvements. From the original proposals in the EAZ bid, the LEA intends to work with health authorities to develop health and behaviour 'profiling' to serve as a basis for subsequent policy development.

## SECTION 4: THE MANAGEMENT OF LEA SERVICES

### The Solihull Inspection and Advisory Service (SIAS)

- ***The SIAS provides support of consistently high quality.***
  - ***There is a full range of good quality curricular and management advice.***
  - ***The operation of the service is a model of good practice.***
65. Solihull delegated the full costs of the Inspection and Advisory Service to schools in 1992. In 1999 core funding, amounting to £522,330, was retained for central strategic functions. This amount is in line with the average retained in all metropolitan boroughs but, at 25 per cent of the total service budget, reflects a level of buy-back and external purchasing which means that the inspection and advisory service is considerably larger than that retained by most metropolitan authorities. The service is able to offer specialist coverage across the curriculum and for all phases of education including post-16. Other than retained funds for schools in need of support, the only LEA-provided monitoring in schools in the current financial year is one day to monitor the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.
66. The service is very well led by the Chief Inspector who maintains a high level of contact with all schools. He is assiduous in monitoring and, where necessary, challenging schools and SIAS staff to maintain standards. The service's activities are evaluated carefully and are held in very high regard by schools. They are founded on an Annual Review process, led by the school's Pastoral Inspector, which evaluates all aspects of the school's performance and management. All schools purchase this review package. In all schools visited during the inspection the work of the SIAS was judged to be highly regarded and was helping schools to improve very effectively.
67. Schools purchase a high level of service – approximately 80 per cent of delegated funds are earned back from LEA schools. In 1998/9 20 per cent of the service budget was earned from schools outside the LEA. The LEA's policy of full delegation over the last six years has meant that the SIAS has had to align its priorities to schools' needs. There is an explicit focus on supporting school improvement and schools are encouraged to ensure that their school improvement planning is externally validated.
68. It is as a result of this policy of high delegation that the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations presents a new challenge to the LEA. The policy has encouraged schools to diversify and to develop their own strengths as self-managing schools. The challenge now faced is how to translate the clear intervention strategies laid out in the helpful 'Solihull Approach to School Intervention' document into the complexity of new relationships with schools with very different needs. The socio-economic diversity of the Borough means that schools operate in very different contexts. This is overlaid by the development of different styles of working with pastoral and subject inspectors and advisory teachers.
69. All schools value the service. Buying it back is an important feature of their improvement plans. For many schools their 'shareholding' in the service is an

important symbol of their commitment to the LEA while the support they receive furthers their development.

### **Pupils' support services**

- ***Individual services are well managed; overall co-ordination is sound.***
  - ***There have been weaknesses in the administration of assessments but these are now resolved.***
70. The main function of the **Education Welfare Service** is to support and encourage pupil attendance. Work is well targeted to where it is needed most. For example, the recent change in priorities has resulted in the appointment of additional Assistant Education Welfare Officers in the north of the borough. Work patterns of individual officers are carefully monitored. Although there have been difficulties in the past, the service is now well managed and well regarded by school staff.
71. The **Education Psychology Service** is well managed. Work is carefully planned based on clear objectives and there is rigorous time management of staff. Sixty per cent of staff time is devoted to supporting pupils, schools and parents with a wide range of problems. This involves regular contact with all schools. All educational psychologists have personal targets linked to overall service targets and their performance is measured against these. In 1997/8, for the most part, targets were met. There is careful monitoring of costs to determine value for money. As yet, however, there is no measure of effectiveness in terms of pupils' progress.
72. The help and advice given by the educational psychologists are valued by schools but they would like more. Recent under-staffing has limited the role of psychologists in some schools, but this has now been addressed. There is now much more targeting of resources than previously, and schools welcome the flexibility. However, there is scope to define further and communicate better what help schools can reasonably expect.
73. The **Special Educational Needs Management** service has responsibility for managing the statutory assessment of pupils with special educational needs and the making and reviewing of statements. In 1997/8, only 49 per cent of statements were completed within the 18 weeks required by the Code of Practice. In 1998/9, this percentage fell to 25 per cent. This was clearly unacceptable. In response, staffing was increased in December 1998 so that by the end of July 1999, all statements were being issued on time and the backlog of cases awaiting a decision had been cleared. Schools are rightly critical of what happened and are clearly anxious that the present satisfactory standards are maintained. Not all schools are yet aware of the recent improvements. The LEA needs to communicate current service standards more clearly.
74. The **Learning Support Service** is mainly concerned with the individual teaching of pupils with learning difficulties. There is a large staff (66.3 fte) sub-divided into teams. For example, the advice and assessment team gives support to schools,

mainly advising class teachers on how to handle learning difficulties and providing help for new co-ordinators for special educational needs (SENCO). The amount of help depends on the percentage of children attracting Learning Difficulties Factor funding. There are also teams for the Under 5s, emotional and behavioural difficulties, general learning difficulties, hearing impairment, speech and language, specific learning difficulties, and visual impairment.

75. The service is well managed with very good co-ordination between the different teams. There is a well developed and well presented annual development plan reviewing the previous year's performance and setting out the plan for the following year. Targets are clear; action is specified and responsibility for the action defined; success criteria are specified and resources identified although in general terms rather than specific costings. This overall plan is used as a basis for setting individual staff targets and all are appraised annually on this basis. Schools are asked to complete an annual service review questionnaire and INSET evaluations are monitored. The monitoring of costs follows similar procedures to those used by the Educational Psychology service but there is scope for new criteria linking pupil progress more closely to costs.
76. The work of support staff is highly valued by schools. However, most say that they do not receive as much support as they need and they have concerns about the way help is allocated between schools. There is therefore a need to clarify what help schools can reasonably expect.
77. The **Home Tuition Service** provides home tuition on a one-to-one basis; a pupil referral unit; the monitoring of college-based provision for Year 11 pupils; and monitoring of the LEA's hospital budget. The service has also developed useful guidance and procedures aimed to ensure that children educated at home receive an appropriate education. The service is well managed. It responds quickly to pupils' needs and provides them with a satisfactory education. New arrangements which have just come into force should ensure that, subject to health and other personal constraints, all pupils will receive full-time tuition. The pupil referral unit received a good OFSTED report in May 1999.
78. Current arrangements for monitoring the progress of **looked-after children** are satisfactory. The LEA now maintains a database which was developed in collaboration with the Social Services Department. This is being used to monitor the progress of all looked-after children in the Borough. Initially, the LEA has adopted the national target of ensuring that 50 per cent of children leave school with at least one GCSE pass. However, this will be revised on the basis of current monitoring to produce an appropriate local target for the academic year 2000/01.
79. A developing and promising feature of special needs is the degree of **co-operation between the different support services**. This is maintained by meetings of service leaders in a Special Needs Management Group and by the recently established Special Educational Needs Consultation Group which includes headteachers. Special needs services are also represented on other



management groups; for example, on the National Literacy Strategy steering group. Effective co-ordination is maintained with other bodies such as the Area Child Protection Committee, the police, social services, the TEC and health.

### **The Schools' Library Service**

80. The service is currently used by about 40 per cent of primary and 60 per cent of secondary schools, which buy different levels of service. Good links have been established with subject advisers and inspectors to ensure that what the service offers is well linked the schools' curricular needs.

**The Youth and Community Service** and the **Music Service** were not inspected on this occasion.

### **Management support services**

#### **Financial support**

- ***The Education Finance Service provides high quality financial information to schools which enables them to manage their finances effectively.***
  - ***The recent implementation of a new system has produced considerable problems with the availability of financial information for schools and central education services.***
  - ***The current cumulative level of school surpluses is unnecessarily higher.***
81. The education finance team produces an innovative and helpful range of financial information that helps schools to manage their finances.
82. The LEA introduced an innovative official loan scheme for schools in 1996. This allows school reserves to be loaned on to other schools for purchase of assets. It has helped schools to manage the cash flow for large purchases and has primarily been used for purchase of ICT equipment.
83. A working group of schools and officers carried out a review of the funding formula. This identified priorities for any additional resources to be made available for schools. The results of the review could not be completely implemented as they would have required a substantial increase of resources. They were, however, fed into the budget-making process and will continue to inform priorities for additional funding in future years.
84. The Council is implementing its new Oracle Financial system and this is in the process of being rolled out to secondary schools. Implementation of the system has needed to be carried out urgently to ensure Year 2000 compliance. The system is designed to allow schools on-line access to financial information. Priority has been given to schools in the implementation of the system. There have been difficulties with integration of the payroll and other parts of the system and this has produced problems with the availability of routine financial information for schools. Although the situation has improved over the last few weeks, problems are still encountered in accessing financial information. A high priority needs to be given to resolution of these problems.

85. School visits demonstrated that the extensive range of financial information provided by the LEA is having some impact on their assessment of spending priorities. Schools were using financial projections to plan and adapt future staffing needs and some were beginning to use benchmarking information to examine areas of their budget such as the use of support staff and classroom assistants. There is considerable potential for this information to be used more extensively, in particular to examine the effectiveness of resources used to meet special educational needs or to overcome educational deprivation.
86. Balances in some schools are too high, although the use of them to finance a loan scheme mitigates the effect. Cumulative school balances were £3.4 million in April 1999. The Budget Strategy Advisory Group is starting to review the reasons for the level of balances. Measures to encourage schools to spend more closely to their budgets are needed.

### **Personnel**

- ***The LEA provides high quality personnel support services to schools. The schools value the services they receive.***
87. Around 70 per cent of the resources for personnel services are delegated to schools, all of whom buy-back the service. Personnel Services have also been sold to 14 Grant Maintained schools and to the sixth form college.
  88. On recruitment of staff, the LEA has negotiated a central contract for placing advertisements. It runs a recruitment programme for newly qualified teachers, which is well supported by schools. It ran a general advertisement for extra teachers needed as part of the Class Size Plan. The LEA takes a high profile in the recruitment of heads and deputy heads in the Borough. Standards Fund resources are about to be used to appoint a recruitment strategy manager to improve the quality of the recruitment processes and the data available.
  89. Advice provided to schools on personnel issues is good.

### **Information and communication technology (ICT)**

- ***The LEA has a coherent strategy for providing equipment and communications for development of ICT in schools, both in the curriculum and in support for school management. Implementation of the plan is, however, less effective.***
90. The LEA has a coherent strategy for ICT development in the Borough and the use of NGfL resources to improve the level of equipment, software and communications within schools. The strategy involves the installation of computer suites in primary school. The secondary sector already has networks in place and so the NGfL development is appropriately concentrating on development of communications. The Solihull Grid is being developed as a Borough-wide intranet to manage the communications network between schools, the LEA, other Council services and the wider range of services available on the internet.
  91. A programme has been agreed to invest in a quarter of schools in each of the four years when NGfL resources are available. Schools chose the priorities for

the programme. Work is currently being carried out in the second year of the programme. The lower than anticipated Standards Fund allocation for 1999/2000 has had some impact on the programme and connections to the Solihull Grid have taken longer than originally anticipated. This is partly because of technical problems beyond the LEA's control, and partly because of the capacity of a small unit to respond to unexpected pressures.

92. There was insufficient LEA support for the implementation of NGfL for primary schools in Phase I and this led to inefficient use of the equipment. The LEA recognises this deficiency and has responded to criticism by producing an action plan to ensure smoother implementation in schools in later phases of the programme.
93. In relation to administrative ICT, the LEA has standardised on its own financial system but also uses a commercial software package for pupil data and other administrative systems. There is a programme for gradual expansion of administrative facilities. The LEA is encouraging schools to integrate curriculum and administrative networks but more consistent support is needed to make this a reality.
94. In the school survey, schools rated support for ICT in school administration and curriculum uses of ICT as significantly better than the average.

## Property

- ***The LEA has given a high priority to Asset Management Planning and investment in maintaining the building stock for many years. As a result, school buildings in Solihull are in considerably better condition than in many LEAs.***
95. The LEA has carried out the principles of Asset Management Planning for many years. The condition of school buildings has been surveyed regularly, most recently in 1995. A complete re-survey is currently being carried out, to be completed by December 1999. The LEA has placed a high priority on maintaining the quality of the building stock in the Borough. The LEA has achieved continued investment over many years by a combination of success in bidding for capital resources and local decisions to invest resources.
  96. The school survey indicates that schools consider central LEA services to be satisfactory, a response which is better than for the majority of the LEAs surveyed. Schools have benefited from the comparatively high priority given to the maintenance of school buildings. Schools will now have an increasing responsibility for preventive maintenance to their own buildings. The biggest uncertainty is about the extent of work that will be required to address suitability issues in school buildings. Methodology has yet to be finalised to survey schools for suitability, particularly of specialist facilities.
  97. The Facilities Management Team have needed to deliver a considerably larger building programme in recent months. The combination of normal capital programmes, New Deal for School resources, implementation of Class Sizes Plan, nursery expansion and primary school reorganisation has at times

stretched their resources. Much of the work has needed to be carried out to tight deadlines and has over-stretched local contracting resources. As a result, some building work has been completed too close to the time when the buildings were due to receive children. However, the LEA has acted as speedily as extraneous factors have allowed.

### **Contracted services**

98. The LEA provides contract management services for schools. The school meals service has a Charter Mark and is highly rated by schools. Expenditure on SEN transport is appropriate and is effectively controlled by linking provision of transport to policies to increase the independence of pupils with statements. In some cases, centrally contracted services, such as school cleaning, have been stopped in response to the views of schools.

## **SECTION 5: LEA SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING STANDARDS**

### ***Improvements in schools visited***

- ***Schools make extensive use of LEA services which are effective and are leading to improvements generally.***
99. The inspection team made judgements about improvements in 12 primary, five secondary and two special schools. All the schools had made use of LEA services, often extensively. Where support had been provided it was generally effective; in some cases the support was very effective, for instance, in supporting two schools that had experienced serious weaknesses. In one primary school the degree of support overall was insufficient to meet needs particularly in terms of finance and meeting the needs of pupils with SEN. The overall picture is a very positive one.
100. There is some variation in the effectiveness of support given to individual curricular areas within schools but this is more associated with the level of support than with its effectiveness. Consistently effective support was evident for numeracy and literacy in primary schools, for teaching, attendance and for school development planning. The degree of support was insufficient in a number of schools in guidance on the use of performance data, and centrally provided support for pupils with SEN.
101. The LEA is held in very high regard by its schools. The rapid response to queries, the easy accessibility of officers and inspectors and the LEA's practical support in times of crisis were frequently mentioned by the schools. The quality of support from the inspectorate and, in particular, the pastoral inspector, is highly praised. The LEA has achieved a relationship with the majority of its schools that is enduring and welcomed by the schools. The contentious areas are LEA plans for SEN, tackling social deprivation, and behaviour. Schools are unclear of the LEA's plans and some confuse the issues when making criticisms of LEA provision. The schools themselves have high expectations of the LEA.
102. The school survey showed that schools judge that the LEA performs the great majority of its functions well. Of the 19 LEAs surveyed, Solihull achieved close to the highest score in 23 of the 78 categories. It scored very low in a few categories, namely SEN, meeting the needs of minority ethnic groups, and improving behaviour.

### **Support for the use of performance data**

- ***The LEA is improving its provision and use of performance data. This is recognised and valued by the schools but there are still weaknesses.***
103. The LEA circulates a range of data to schools which assists them to conduct an analysis of performance as a basis for target-setting and planning. A recent innovation is that each primary and secondary school receives an analysis for each key stage relevant to it. This includes data which sets the school's results over four years in a national context in a format jointly developed between headteachers and the LEA. Most schools find this data

useful. However, there is limited data for similar schools and this reduces a school's ability to identify and share effective teaching. Some schools do use the informal networks or liaise with their pastoral inspector on such issues and the LEA has already indicated that it intends to include this type of analysis in future years.

104. There is no value-added analyses in the profile provided to schools but the LEA does fund a baseline assessment scheme for use in primary schools, a scheme for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The quality of analysis by schools varies but includes some outstanding practice which ought to be disseminated.
105. The LEA makes good use of data at individual school level to conduct an annual review of performance and is using it to target resources at areas of greatest need. A weakness is that it has not collected data on ethnic minority pupils or value-added outcomes. As a consequence it cannot be sure that the needs of ethnic minority pupils are being met or that it has an informed perspective on the apparent dip in performance from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and, in LEA maintained schools, from Key Stage 4 to GCE 'A' level.
106. The process for setting targets is clearly stated and the LEA has issued practical guidance to schools. In addition, it provides high quality training to inspectors and schools. The work of the pastoral inspector in negotiating targets with the schools is crucial. This process has been more rigorous in primary than secondary schools. The LEA judged rightly that three primary schools have set targets which are too low. There is a small number of schools where the targets for numeracy are too low. Consequently, the target for Year 2000 in numeracy has already been exceeded. The LEA is on course to meet its targets for 2002 but a few schools, mostly in areas of high social deprivation, need to make substantial improvements to meet their individual targets.

### **Support for improving standards of literacy**

- ***Support for the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) is good, building upon the Solihull Literacy Project.***
  - ***Standards are rising across all key stages.***
107. The attainment of pupils in the end of Key Stage 2 tests is well above national averages and slightly above those of the LEA's statistical neighbours. A challenging target of 90 per cent of pupils reaching Level 4 and above has been agreed with the DfEE for 2002 with an intermediate target of 81 per cent for year 2000. Provisional results for 1999 show that 77 per cent of pupils reached this level. Whilst this indicates that the intermediate target is within reach, a challenging 9 per cent improvement is needed to reach the 2002 target.
  108. Solihull has spent several years developing work in English and literacy, establishing its own successful literacy initiative under the direction of the English inspector as the Solihull Strategy Manager. It has taken on board the NLS, giving good leadership to schools with appropriate training and guidance and a well-used Literacy Centre. The literacy consultant and advisory teachers have given schools considerable support with the management of the distance learning materials and school-based training. Schools have welcomed the

introduction of the NLS and rated the LEA's support for teaching literacy above the average for LEAs included in the schools' survey.

109. Literacy was a focus for visits in 12 schools. Standards have improved in all schools and the intensive support given in targeted primary schools was judged to be effective in nearly all cases. In two schools where improvements were less than could be expected, the support and advice offered by the LEA were not sufficiently effective in moving the schools on. This was due to a reluctance on the part of the schools to accept in full the challenge presented, both in the targets set (which were lower than the LEA proposals), and in addressing some of the teaching issues arising from the implementation of the NLS.
110. In secondary schools the picture is more varied with inspectors and advisers having a limited impact in the schools, although the Key Stage 2/3 Transition project is having a positive impact in Key Stage 3. In general, secondary schools are less well prepared than their primary counterparts to build on pupils' experiences of the NLS and maintain the progress being made through Key Stages 1 and 2. The LEA is developing plans to involve secondary schools managing NLS and Key Stage 3 English curriculum integration. In so doing there are lessons to be learned from the success of targeting primary schools in need of support. Careful attention needs to be paid to the very different levels of literacy in the Borough and to the different needs in reading and writing which younger pupils bring to their secondary schools.

### **Support for improving standards in numeracy**

- ***Support for numeracy in primary schools is good.***
  - ***In secondary schools support is effective when provided but the level of support does not always match the need.***
111. The attainment of pupils in end of Key Stage 2 tests is above national averages and broadly in line with statistical neighbours. Provisional results for 1999 indicate that the gap with literacy targets has been reduced. A numeracy target of 84 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 and above has been set for 2002, with an intermediate target for the year 2000 of 75 per cent. This target was reached in 1999. This means that the LEA is well on course to meet its target for 2002 but also suggests that intermediate targets are too low.
  112. The LEA numeracy project in 1998/9 has provided a focussed lead and a sound foundation for the implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS). The numeracy development plan clearly outlines the programme of support to be given to schools. The LEA has established a firm understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching of mathematics in primary schools. This has enabled it to target resources to areas of greatest need. Support is still being improved and the LEA plans to establish a numeracy centre and steering group.
  113. Support for secondary schools is more variable and is dependent on the schools buying the services on offer. In one school there was limited support for numeracy even though the need was clearly evident from performance data. However, plans are in place for the integration of the NNS and the Key

Stage 3 curriculum. As part of emerging policy, extra money is being allocated to schools where under-achievement has been identified by the LEA.

114. Numeracy was a particular focus in three secondary and nine primary schools visited. The quality of support was practical and effective in all these schools and it was at least good in seven schools. The support provided through courses, co-ordinators' meetings, leading mathematics teachers and advisory visits is highly valued by the schools and is making an effective contribution to raising standards.

**Support for schools requiring special measures and those with serious weaknesses.**

- ***The LEA provides very effective support for schools in special measures.***
  - ***The LEA has clear and appropriate intervention strategies which have recently been extended. The annual review is highly valued by schools but is dependent on a buy-back arrangement and the process does not involve governors sufficiently.***
115. Five LEA maintained schools in Solihull have been judged to require special measures since 1993; one special and four primary schools. Two of the primary schools have been deemed to no longer require special measures. A third primary school was closed in August 1998, merged with a second school and a new school re-opened on the same site in September of the same year. There is only one school in Solihull that has been identified by OFSTED, since September 1997, as having serious weaknesses and this was only identified as such in February 1999; it is too soon to make judgements on the effectiveness of support.
116. The LEA has supported its schools in special measures very well. LEA inspectors make regular visits to the schools to monitor progress and give advice. Schools feel that the balance between the two has been helpful.
117. In one school, the LEA seconded an EBD professional to manage the situation in the absence of the substantive post-holder. Elsewhere, the headteacher and governors have been given access to a mentor headteacher to assist with planning and resultant strategies and this support is highly valued. Subject specialists have been called upon by the attached adviser to strengthen curricular development, and teachers have benefited from in-class support and the opportunity to watch model lessons, in particular for literacy. In another school, the LEA has obtained the services of additional governors, who have been appointed to bring expertise and experience where required.
118. In addition the LEA has identified 13 schools as causing concern to varying degrees. Progress is monitored through termly visits by pastoral and support inspectors. Extra support is identified through an annual review procedure. The LEA's judgements contained in the annual review are shared with the headteacher but not routinely with the governing body. In the past, this has meant that the governors in one school did not take appropriate action to remedy identified weaknesses and, as a result, the school was placed in special measures.



119. The LEA has strengthened its procedures. These have been clearly documented and issued to schools very recently. Some schools are unclear how the intervention strategies impinge on them directly but this uncertainty should be resolved in the imminent annual review. The latter works well but is dependent on the schools buying back the package. This policy needs to be kept under review.

## SECTION 6: SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

### Support for teaching

- ***The LEA provides good quality support for teaching.***
  - ***The range of curricular advice available is greater than for many similar LEAs as a result of the extensive delegation and trading activities of the LEA team.***
  - ***Strategic planning to address weaknesses in teaching Information Technology is sound but the impact of advice and support to schools is variable.***
120. The LEA strategy and advice given to schools to improve teaching is based on a thorough analysis of inspection data and analysis by inspectors. There is an extensive range of popular courses offered through an annual programme that covers the full curriculum and includes courses for governors. Good use is made of other local training providers including higher education. Training covers a wide range of specialist needs, including an effective central programme for newly qualified teachers, a programme for learning support assistants, and a full course for SENCOs.
121. Inspectors facilitate curricular groups for subject leaders and cluster groups well. These groups are effective means of sharing expertise and promoting initiatives. The inspection and advisory service also provides a range of high quality curricular support materials and guidance documents for schools.
122. In-school support for teaching is well regarded by most schools. Primary schools make much more use of advisory teachers than secondary schools. A positive feature of the curricular support provided is an almost universal willingness on the part of inspectors and advisory teachers to respond quickly to school requests. Inspectors, in particular, are adept at responding to a school's identified needs and providing sharply focused advice on curricular planning and the quality of teaching. Their support for newly qualified teachers is highly effective. The school survey indicated a high degree of satisfaction. LEA support to improve the quality of teaching was rated at levels higher than in many of the LEAs in the survey.
123. Strengths of the LEA support for teaching include a number of initiatives developed in partnership with schools, such as the Solihull Boys' Achievement project. A high level of investment has been made in assuring both the quality and supply of teachers through the secondary School Centred Initial Teacher Training scheme, shortly to be extended to primary schools. The fully-delegated Music Service operates successfully in schools, providing a wide range of specialist music teaching.
124. The impact of advice and support to schools for using ICT is uneven and therefore unsatisfactory; in some schools support is of good quality while in

others it is not aligned to the school's needs. Support to improve teaching is focused on improving the curricular applications of ICT. Ninety per cent of schools received consultancy visits and 18 per cent of primary teachers attended training in 1998/99.

### **Support for pupils with special educational needs**

- ***From a very unsatisfactory position, practical support for SEN has improved significantly; it is now sound generally, with progress continuing to be made.***
  - ***A significant number of schools and some parents have yet to be convinced that provision is sound.***
  - ***Policy and strategy are inadequately defined.***
  - ***Although schools are using delegated funds appropriately, monitoring by the LEA is inadequate and as a consequence is not well placed to counter claims that the needs of some schools are not being met.***
125. Provision for SEN in mainstream schools is now sound, but the LEA has not overcome its legacy of perceived poor provision. The confusion is exemplified by the processing of statements. With justification, schools are critical of slow procedures in the past when the LEA did not meet its statutory obligations. The LEA has acted decisively, and all statements are now being processed within the national guideline of 18 weeks. Several schools visited were unaware of these improvements in the service.
126. The LEA issues clear criteria for placing pupils on the different levels of the Code of Practice and effectively monitors the accurate application of these. Schools are funded appropriately although this is not always their perception and there is confusion with other resource issues. Schools are using delegated funds well but this is not monitored adequately by the LEA. There is a lack of transparency in allocating central resources to support pupils at Stage 3 and the funding mechanism fails to take account of pupils with severe behavioural problems.
127. In-school support is provided effectively by the learning support service and educational psychologists. This is complemented well by educational welfare officers and the home tuition service. The inspector for SEN provides good quality advice and support and this is another area where there have been significant improvements over the last two years. The LEA makes suitable arrangements to facilitate and support regular meetings of SENCOs.
128. There are gaps in the provision for special schools, particularly curricular support. There is insufficient support for target-setting. The strategy for SEN is not clearly articulated and this leaves the special schools particularly feeling isolated and unsure of the way forward.
129. The LEA is improving communications with schools and parents; through, for example, the establishment of the Special Needs Consultation Group and by the development of better links with the Special Needs Action Partnership. There is still work to do; the LEA is still some way behind many other LEAs.

130. There is effective monitoring of individual services, notably the learning support service and the educational psychology service. However, these evaluations have not revealed the degree and extent of discontent in schools regarding aspects of SEN provision and overall strategy. In the school survey, the LEA received the lowest rating for meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs. The LEA-school partnership needs to establish a mechanism for evaluating the LEA effectiveness on the wider issues of SEN policy.

### **Support for improving pupils' behaviour**

- ***Practical support is good but does not consistently meet the degree of need in schools.***
- ***The partnership arrangements for excluded pupils are not always effective.***

131. The practical help that is given to schools by the learning support service is good. This includes classroom support for pupils, advice to teachers and governors, participation in case conferences relating to individual children, and placement of pupils in either special schools or units within mainstream schools. Also, good help is provided by educational psychologists, the home tuition service, and educational welfare officers. They liaise well with each other and with other agencies. A useful contribution is made by the work of the Solihull North Inclusion Project. The range of strategies is more limited than in some other LEAs. For instance, there is no pupil referral unit for secondary aged EBD pupils and some schools report that they have had to seek INSET outside the LEA.

132. For the most part, the LEA deals well with more severe behavioural problems but there are instances where schools report that problems are addressed too slowly, in part because of inadequacies in the statementing process. Some schools report that a lack of pre-exclusion intervention strategies has resulted in pupils progressing from fixed-term into permanent exclusions unnecessarily. Procedural arrangements for excluded pupils are very clear, but the partnership of school and LEA has not always worked as effectively as it might; new procedures introduced in September 1999 should rectify this.

133. Overall, the support provided by the LEA is valued by teachers but they would like more, better targeted on their needs. Schools are using delegated funds well.

134. The LEA has set appropriate targets in the Education Development Plan where improving behaviour is identified as a 'Theme'. Its permanent exclusion target is an average of 35 pupils over the three years 1999 - 2002 reducing from 45 to 30 over this three year period.

## Support For Improving Attendance

- ***Support for improving attendance is good***

135. LEA support for attendance is good. However, a concern is that authorised absence, particularly in primary schools, is well above average. This issue is not sufficiently addressed in the EDP but the LEA is to be one of four LEAs taking part in a DfEE-funded research project on this issue. In addition, clearer guidance is now being developed in collaboration with schools to ensure better monitoring of attendance patterns to ensure that absence can genuinely be authorised.
136. The LEA has set appropriate targets for improvement in attendance in its EDP. These involve reducing unauthorised absence in primary schools from 0.1 per cent in 1997/8 to 0.07 per cent in 2001/2. In secondary schools, the target is a reduction from 0.6 per cent to 0.4 per cent over the same period. The EDP sets out appropriate strategies for improving unauthorised attendance although links with the Behaviour Support Plan and social inclusion initiatives require further development.
137. Support for improving attendance is primarily the responsibility of the Education Welfare Service. Education Welfare Officers attend or phone all secondary and many primary schools every day and their work, though criticised in the past, is now highly valued by schools. They carefully follow up non-attendance by phone calls, personal visits and other means, thus making it clear that the only acceptable norm is to attend school. They also advise schools on strategies to improve attendance. The service has also given advice on training to make governors more aware of their responsibilities and options. Education Welfare Officers cooperate well with other services such as the Social Services Department and the police.
138. The LEA targets resources appropriately, for example, using attendance data to focus the work of Education Welfare Officers where it is needed most. Service priorities have recently been changed with the appointment of assistant education welfare officers to work in the north of the Borough, in particular, with pupils having difficulty coping with the transition from primary to secondary school. As the LEA develops its inclusion policies, the role and targets for the service will need to change further.

## SECTION 7: LEA SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF SCHOOLS

### Support for improvement in the management and efficiency of schools

- ***Support to headteachers and other senior managers is good; a major contributory factor is the high quality of the support from inspectors, particularly pastoral inspectors.***
  - ***The LEA is making sound progress in the development of school self-evaluation.***
  - ***Support for development planning is good.***
139. Working to improve skills of quality assurance in schools has been a priority in the LEA for many years. This emphasis is reinforced in the EDP where it is included as a priority. The activities include improving schools' use of data, monitoring and evaluation procedures and enhancing the quality of leadership through professional development.
140. Support for the use of performance data is improving but there are still weaknesses and this is commented on elsewhere in this report. A pivotal figure in improving school self-review is the pastoral inspector. This support varies in quality but only from sound to outstanding; in many schools it is also linked to challenging schools in a constructive but critical way. The pastoral inspector has been instrumental in several schools in helping senior and middle managers devise and implement monitoring and evaluation procedures. The pastoral inspector is enabled to carry out this role through regular training and good supporting advice on recent legislation and other initiatives to guide their discussions with schools. Although take up of the service is dependent on buy back, schools invariably do so and its support for senior managers in schools is a strength of the LEA.
141. Support for the professional development of senior managers is good through a combination of annual conferences, inspectorial support, LEA courses and other providers. There are gaps in the LEA's own INSET provision, particularly at secondary level, but this is effectively complemented by encouragement and support to use alternative providers. For several years there has been a rolling programme of training and development for senior managers in primary schools. A steering group has been charged with reviewing these management modules. All headteachers are appraised by a headteacher colleague and LEA inspector every two years; in 1998/9, 69 per cent of headteachers were appraised.
142. The LEA has recently undertaken a review of the induction of new headteachers. The findings accord with HMI visits to schools. There has been a lack of consistency in the application of LEA policy varying from excellent provision to isolated cases where anticipated support did not materialise. The LEA has strengthened procedures to ensure greater consistency in the future. The Director attends the appointment of all new

headteachers and a senior assistant director attends those for deputy headteachers; these inputs are valued by the schools.

143. In the school survey, LEA support for the appointment of headteachers and deputies, headteacher appraisal, for headteachers and senior management and for self-evaluation and development planning were all highly rated by schools.

### **Support for governance**

- A range of LEA personnel to support governors in their duties provides highly effective support.
  - The LEA is successfully advising governors in promoting school improvement.
144. The LEA provides highly-effective support for governors through the Governor Development Unit, officers and inspectors. It succeeds in its aims to achieve high levels of personal contact, a responsiveness to schools' needs and speedy responses. In addition to the extensive course programme, training is provided for individual governing bodies and cluster groups that is tailor-made to their identified needs. Schools particularly appreciate the latter service. All schools purchase governor services, many at the full service level. In addition to the course programme, concise and authoritative termly governor briefing papers and seminar booklets are sent to governors.
145. In recent years a termly briefing for chairs of governors with the Director of Education, Libraries and Arts has been instituted and governor representatives are invited to the strategic planning seminars that are held each term. Following proposals made by a group of governors, the LEA has established a Governor Forum to enable formal representations to be made and for governors to be elected to LEA working groups and committees.
146. Elected members play an active role in supporting school governance, ensuring that LEA governor appointments are made. LEA liaison officers provide an effective link to policy decisions and support governing bodies and cluster groups. In nearly all schools visited the work of the liaison officer was praised for its responsiveness and clarity of communication. In two secondary schools the Liaison Officer role was felt to be less helpful, citing a reluctance to interpret policy and to communicate governors' concerns to the LEA. Pastoral inspectors work closely with governing bodies of many schools, while in others they rarely meet governors. Most importantly, in these schools they do not provide feedback to governing bodies on the outcomes of the annual review and this is too dependent on the headteacher taking action.

## SECTION 8:

### APPENDIX 1: FUNDING

#### EDUCATION RESOURCES IN SOLIHULL

***Solihull has the fourth lowest local school budget per pupil in England***

	LEA	Metropolitan authorities	England
Local school budget £ per pupil	£2374	£2598	£2625
Delegated school budget £ per pupil	£2031	£2121	£2162

*Source DfEE analysis of Section 52  
LEA budget returns 1999/00*

***In 1995/96 the Council spent 11 per cent more than the education SSA, but in the last three years education spending has converged towards the SSA***

	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
Budget £000	80 539	84 457	88 412
SSA £000	77 509	82 747	87 988
Budget as % of SSA	103.9 %	102.1 %	100.5 %

*Source LEA Form 2 returns for inspection*

***Solihull gives a high priority to expenditure on education for children under five***

	Under 5s	Primary	11 to 15	Post 16	Other	Total
Budget £000	9 156	35 617	39 814	3 036	789	88 412
SSA £000	5 284	37 488	40 118	2 978	2 120	87 988
Budget as % of SSA	173.3 %	95.0 %	99.2 %	101.9 %	37.2 %	100.5 %

*Source LEA Form 2 returns for inspection*

**The LEA currently delegates the twelfth highest percentage of the local schools budget to schools. Delegation was also high in previous years**



	LEA	Metropolitan authorities	England
Percentage of the local school budget delegated to schools in 1999/2000	85.5 %	82.0 %	82.4 %
Percentage of the General School Budget delegated to schools in 1998/99	85.9 %	79.4 %	79.2 %
Percentage year on year increase in funds delegated to schools	3.3 %	6.2 %	6.1 %

*Source DfEE Analysis of Section 52  
LEA budget returns 1999/00*

**Net central LEA budget is £13.56 million, 15.8 per cent of the local school budget**

	Net expenditure (£000)	Percentage of Local School Budget
Strategic management	3 793	4.4
Specific grant	1 186	1.4
Special education	4 329	5.0
School improvement	746	0.9
Access	3 507	4.1
Total	13 561	15.8

*Source DfEE Analysis of Section 52  
LEA budget returns 1999/00*

**Central expenditure per pupil in most areas is low compared with other metropolitan authorities and the whole of England**

	LEA (£ per pupil)	Metropolitan authorities (£ per pupil)	England (£ per pupil)
Statutory and regulatory duties	45	51	49
Other strategic management	41	58	48
Special education	118	136	152
School improvement	20	19	22
Access	54	112	82
Home to school transport	40	41	69
Non-devolved specific grant	21	47	41

*Source DfEE Analysis of Section 52  
LEA budget returns 1999/00*

**The majority of school funding is pupil led. For the first time in 1999/2000, a social deprivation allowance of £250,000 was used to provide extra resources for schools in the north of the Borough.**

	Budget (£000)	% of school budget (ISB)
<b>Primary and secondary</b>		
Age-weighted pupil units	53 952	74.6 %
Social deprivation allowance	250	0.35 %
SEN funding	2 642	3.65 %
Other factors	7 986	11.0 %
Site specific factors	4 564	6.3 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>69 394</b>	<b>96.0 %</b>
Special schools	2 911	4 %
<b>Total school budget (ISB)</b>	<b>72 305</b>	<b>100 %</b>

**Schools bought-back services worth £2.8 million from the LEA in 1998/99 and are projected to buy-back similar levels in 1999/2000. This represents around 3.3 per cent of the Local Schools Budget.**

Function	Expenditure bought back 1998/99 (£000)
Curriculum support	637
Training (INSET)	234
Libraries	16
Music service	377
Financial support	212
Personnel	108
ICT support	133
Security, cleaning equipment and caretaking	202
Swimming	160
Supply cover	732
Governor training	30
Total	2841

*Source LEA Form 2 returns for inspection*

**Total Expenditure On Meeting Special Educational Needs Was £11.1 Million, 12.7 % Of The Local Schools Budget.**

	Budget (£000)	Percentage of Local Schools Budget
Central LEA expenditure	4,329	5.0 %
SEN funding for primary and secondary schools	2,748	3.1 %
Special schools funding	2,911	3.4 %
SEN school transport	1,180	1.5 %
Total	11,168	13 %

**Source Section 52 return to DfEE**