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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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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* (July 1999) 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 discussions with LEA elected members, focus groups of headteachers and governors, staff in the education department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 122 schools. The response rate was 84 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to eight primary schools, one junior and one infant school, one nursery, seven secondary schools and one special school and one pupil referral unit (PRU). The visits tested the views of headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools in the LEA was also considered.

## COMMENTARY

4. Wolverhampton is an urban authority in the West Midlands, serving an ethnically diverse community with relatively high levels of disadvantage. The schools' performance is generally below the national average, but is improving in line with the rate nationally. Results in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and in mathematics at Key Stage 2 are improving at faster than the average rate.

5. There are considerably more strengths than weaknesses in the LEA's support for school improvement; the weaknesses are nevertheless important. The majority of functions are exercised satisfactorily.

6. The following functions are carried out well:

- Partnership working with schools;
- Management support services, particularly financial monitoring;
- Support for performance data and target setting;
- Support for primary literacy and numeracy;
- Support for governors;
- Support for schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses;
- Support for early years education;
- Support for Travellers' children.

7. The following functions are not exercised adequately:

- Support for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the curriculum;
- Support for attendance;
- Meeting statutory requirements to produce statements of special educational needs in time;
- Arrangements for pupils temporarily without a school place.

8. Overall, the Education Development Plan represents a sound strategy for school improvement. It reflects national priorities well, but does not take sufficient account of the need to improve attendance and the attainment of certain minority ethnic groups. It rightly includes a focus on the need to improve the relatively high proportion of schools causing concern to the LEA.

9. In order to help it carry out its school improvement functions, the LEA has made significant improvements in its ability to monitor, challenge and support schools and to intervene when necessary. It has recently strengthened its procedures, and crucially, strengthened the primary inspection team. Schools now rate the challenge and support provided by their link inspectors highly, but, until fairly recently, the LEA lacked sufficient knowledge of some of its primary schools and the ability to support them. Partly as a result of this, the LEA now has a relatively high proportion of schools requiring special measures or with serious weaknesses. These schools are now receiving support that is largely effective. Some improvements to the general systems of monitoring and support are still needed; for

example, unsatisfactory teaching is not always tackled and governing bodies are not routinely alerted to the LEA's concerns about schools.

10. The LEA makes termly monitoring visits to all schools. This policy should be reconsidered as it should not be necessary for all schools, particularly in the light of the improvements being made in school self-review. There is scope for further delegation of funds to schools, so that successful schools can decide for themselves how much support they wish to purchase. On the evidence of this inspection, many would choose to buy the support of their link inspectors from the LEA.

11. The Council demonstrates its commitment to education by consistently spending above the level of the Standard Spending Assessment. It also has a good record of working with external partners to draw in extra funding, as part of its focus on regeneration. Elected members provide stable political leadership, with a cross-party consensus on the importance of raising standards and implementing agreed policies. They have shown an increasing willingness in recent years to tackle some difficult issues, such as school closures and reorganisations, but they have until recently failed to employ rigorous enough controls over the use of early retirement.

12. The Director and members provide good leadership. Partnership working with schools is now particularly well developed. The School Improvement Partnership Board, made up of senior officers and elected headteachers, has significant spending powers ceded to it by schools, and this in turn has had a notable impact on a range of improvement strategies. For example, three of the recently appointed primary inspectors are funded by the Partnership. Imaginative solutions have also been found for certain of the schools in special measures. There are still some areas, for example ICT in the curriculum, where the LEA has not taken sufficient initiative in tackling weaknesses. However, the LEA has the capacity to make further progress and deal with the recommendations made in this report.

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

### **Context**

13. Wolverhampton is a compact urban authority on the north-western edge of the West Midlands conurbation. The population overall is declining and is currently about a quarter of a million people. The proportion of primary and secondary pupils who are eligible for free school meals is approximately average, but unemployment is higher than the UK average. Overall, levels of disadvantage are higher than is the case nationally.

14. Nearly 30 per cent of pupils are from ethnic minorities, which is well above the national average, and 16.5 per cent of pupils speak a language other than English at home. The largest minority ethnic group is Indian, and the second largest is African Caribbean. There are 67 pupils from Gypsy/Traveller communities. The proportion of pupils with statements of Special Educational Need, and the proportion educated in special schools, are both about average.

15. The school population is 43,242 pupils. In the primary phase there are 91 schools, of which 15 are infant, 15 are junior and 61 are all-through primary. Pre-school provision is made in eight nursery schools and 62 designated nursery classes in infant and primary schools. There are 18 secondary schools, six special schools and three PRUs. All but one of the 18 secondary schools offers post-16 provision. One foundation secondary school is single sex and selective. In addition, the borough is home to six independent schools, one college of further education and one university. In 1998, 64 per cent of students stayed on into full-time post-16 provision in schools and colleges, which is below the national average.

### **Performance**

16. The following general statements illustrate the performance of the schools and the nature of the task facing the LEA.

- Attainment at Key Stage 2 is below average in English and science and well below average in mathematics. It is similar to statistical neighbours in English and science but below in mathematics.
- At Key Stage 2 the rate of improvement between 1996 and 1999 was average in English and science but above average in mathematics. There was a particularly significant improvement in mathematics between 1998 and 1999.
- The rate of improvement at GCSE between 1996 and 1999 was significantly above that found nationally. The proportion of pupils attaining 5 A\*-C is still below average, although the gap has narrowed. However, the proportion of pupils attaining one A\*-G and 5 A\*-G is now average, and above the average for statistical neighbours.
- At age 18 results (average points score per pupil for those entering two A-levels/advanced GNVQs) are below average, but are improving at much the same rate as nationally.

- The LEA's own analysis shows that African Caribbean boys are the worst performing group at GCSE. They significantly under-perform. The next lowest performing group is white boys. The highest performing groups are Pakistani and Indian girls.
- Attendance in primary schools is poor. It has been well below average in each of the years from 1996 to 1999. Unauthorised absence remains above the national average at 0.9 per cent compared with the national average of 0.5 per cent. Attendance at secondary schools is below the national average but the gap has closed over the last two years. Unauthorised absence was approximately average in 1999, at 1.4 per cent compared with 1.1 per cent nationally.
- Based on the most recent national data, the rate of permanent exclusions is close to the average. In primary schools the LEA's rate of 0.4 per 1000 pupils for 1998 was the same as that found nationally. In secondary schools the rate was 4.3 per 1000 pupils compared with a national rate of 3.4.
- OFSTED inspection evidence shows that Wolverhampton has more primary schools requiring substantial improvement than have statistical neighbours and LEAs nationally. Fewer primary schools were deemed to be good or very good than is the case nationally or in statistical neighbours.
- This pattern is repeated at secondary level. Fewer schools were deemed to be very good or good compared with the picture nationally or with statistical neighbours. Seven schools required some improvement and three schools required much improvement - both categories are higher than for comparator LEAs or schools nationally.
- Inspection evidence shows that a smaller proportion of teaching is judged satisfactory or better than is the case nationally in primary and secondary schools. Teaching has improved more than average in secondary schools which have been re-inspected.
- Nine schools are currently subject to special measures.

## **Funding**

17. Wolverhampton's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) is above average for Metropolitan boroughs and it has consistently spent above SSA on education as shown in Table 1. The LEA's plans, which are currently being consulted upon, demonstrate a commitment to do so for the foreseeable future.

TABLE 1:

Financial Year	SSA (£M)	Budget (£M)	Variance %
1997/98	97.8	103.4	+5.7
1998/99	106.6	109.6	+2.8
1999/00	111.9	116.2	+3.8
2000/01*	116.8	121.5	+4.0

\*proposed at the time of inspection

18. As part of its well developed strategy for funding schools the following features are significant.

- Spending on Under 5s is significantly higher than SSA.
- The Council's commitment to lifelong learning is reflected in spending on Adult and Youth/Community activities which is high in comparison with similar councils.
- 80.0% of the Local Schools' Budget (LSB) is delegated to schools, which is broadly similar to the averages for Metropolitan boroughs (80.2%), councils nationally (80.8%), and its statistical neighbours (79.8%).
- Delegated per pupil funding in primary schools is £1581 compared to the Metropolitan average of £1583. In secondary schools it is £2521 per pupil compared to the average of £2334; the difference is largely due to the delegation of school meals and SEN resources to secondary schools.
- Schools were also allocated £4.9M of devolved Standards Fund monies, one of the highest *per capita* amounts nationally; the LEA has achieved the matching of funds without reductions in delegated budgets.
- Significant amounts of other, grant-related funds were also secured by the Council.
- Capital allocations have regularly been supplemented by contributions from revenue; for 99/00 this was £1.6M.
- When compared to other Metropolitan boroughs, in respect of the main blocks of centrally retained funds under the Fair Funding regime, the amount spent on Strategic Management and SEN is average, Access is below average, Standards Fund is highest and School Improvement is third highest, primarily due to the EDP costing almost twice as much as that of statistical neighbours.
- Within these main blocks of expenditure there are some important cost comparisons to be made - Wolverhampton is a relatively modest spender on statutory and regulatory duties, 'education otherwise than at school', education welfare and discretionary awards. However, it is a relatively high spender on music, outdoor education, educational psychology service, pupil referral units and

premature retirement costs. The existing premature retirement costs are the third highest nationally, exceeded only by two London boroughs.

- Plans are well advanced to meet the Government's targets for controlling central costs and to pass budget increases into delegated pupil funding.

## **Council Structure**

19. Wolverhampton Council consists of 60 members (40 Labour, 17 Conservative and three Liberal Democrat). The Council at present has 13 committees, of which education is one. Joint working parties have been established to oversee matters which impinge on the functions of two Service Departments and Committees, for example the Joint Education and Social Services Working Party. Education has three sub-committees: Curriculum and Monitoring; Finance and Administration; and Special Needs Placements and Awards.

20. A decision has been made to respond to the Government's agenda for modernisation; changes will be made in May 2000. The Leader plus Cabinet model has been chosen, with scrutiny committees, including one for Lifelong Learning. There is to be a portfolio for Education.

## **The Education Development Plan**

21. Overall, the Education Development Plan (EDP) represents a sound strategy for school improvement. One of its strengths is that it reflects national priorities, such as literacy and numeracy, very well. It also takes account of some local needs, such as the need to improve the relatively high proportion of schools causing concern. However, other local priorities, such as the need to improve attendance and the achievement of certain ethnic minority groups, although featured in the plan, are not represented strongly enough. This in part stems from the audit, which gives general conclusions but lacks a sufficiently precise analysis of weaknesses in support of each priority.

22. The targets in the plan are challenging and realistic. The LEA negotiated an increase to targets in schools where those set originally were below the LEA's minimum expectation. Good progress is being made towards meeting the targets for attainment at Key Stage 2 and GCSE. Particularly good progress in reducing permanent exclusions means this target has already been exceeded. However, there has been no progress so far in reducing unauthorised absence in primary schools.

23. The priorities set are:

- A. Pupils' Progress.
- B. Helping Under-Achieving Pupils.
- C. Teaching and Management.
- D. Early Years Education and Care.
- E. Literacy and English.
- F. Numeracy and Mathematics.
- G. ICT.
- H. Helping Schools in Need.

24. The planned actions support the priorities which in turn support progress towards achieving the targets. Some activities are clearly targeted at schools most in need; others are less precisely targeted. The majority of the activities started in April 1999, but the start date for two important activities, concerned with improving the quality of teaching, was inappropriately set at April 2000 or later. The plan is feasible.

25. Success criteria are identified. There are clear arrangements for monitoring the plan, which are being conscientiously implemented. Monitoring reports indicate satisfactory progress across the majority of activities but in a few places, for example concerning ICT and attendance, there has been slippage. The quality of the evaluation is not consistent across the priorities, in that in some cases the emphasis is on whether tasks have been completed rather than on outcomes.

26. The draft plan was subject to wide consultation and there is a good degree of commitment to it. Schools regard the priorities as appropriate and also value the clear and accessible layout of the plan. They are increasingly reflecting the priorities of the EDP in their school development plans. Consultation on the roll forward to the second year is planned and about to take place. The plan is consistent with the Strategic Plan for Education 1999-2002, and with the other statutory plans such as the Behaviour Support Plan and the SEN action plan.

### **The Allocation of Resources to Priorities**

27. Overall, Wolverhampton's performance in securing and targeting resources is good. In most areas of detail, this also holds. However, there are a few instances where, for various reasons, targeting is not sharp enough; these are reported on in the relevant sections.

28. Wolverhampton has robust mechanisms for identifying, costing and consulting on its priorities. Members are kept well informed and the Director of Finance has a deputy dedicated to the Education Department. Furthermore, there is an established process of widespread, timely, consultation which constitutes a genuine attempt to seek the views of stakeholders. Members are committed to maximising the resources delegated to schools and minimising the resources held at the centre; in general terms this has been achieved. Budgetary monitoring and control are strengths at all levels of the organisation where, by and large, outturn figures match planned expenditure.

29. An important feature of funding in Wolverhampton is the role played by the school improvement partnership board. This group of senior officers and elected headteachers has had significant spending powers ceded to it by members. Every school contributes 20 per cent of its School Effectiveness Grant, matched by the LEA, for the Board to spend on shared priorities. This has had significant effects on a range of improvement strategies, and takes the concept of 'partnership' onto a practical level seen in few other LEAs.

30. Wolverhampton's EDP is considerably more expensive than those of its statistical neighbours. The analysis underlying the targeting of activities within the

EDP has not been sufficiently rigorous. Greater precision in targeting would enable the release of funds for successful schools to manage.

31. Increased delegation due to Fair Funding has not been a major issue for Wolverhampton, because most of the relevant services were already delegated. Schools are generally satisfied with the services they receive and in some cases they have chosen to spend extra on the services, over and above the amount specifically delegated. Although mechanisms exist for schools to comment on traded and non-traded services, a more structured approach will be needed to comply fully with Best Value criteria. Although schools generally feel that they are getting good value for money, without details of how each service performs against potential competitors, they have no means of testing this with any rigour.

32. Wolverhampton Borough Council prides itself on being a caring employer. This is fully endorsed by all the stakeholders in the education service; and the policy of avoiding compulsory redundancy wherever possible is appreciated. However, the exceptionally high expenditure on early retirement points to this having been used too often as an easy option to effect a range of personnel-related objectives. Only two councils in England (both London boroughs) have higher costs. Over the last three years there have been, on average, £500,000 of new commitments per year and the estimated cost of existing commitments for the 2000/01 financial year is £2.7M. This equates to over £65 per pupil. However, there are encouraging signs that the situation is changing and that more appropriate actions are being taken to resolve personnel issues. The latest estimate shows that the new commitments for the current year are a little over half the average for the last three years.

33. Members have given officers a firm steer on accessing Standards Funds, encouraging bids for all categories, supported by a pledge to provide matched funds without reducing delegated budgets. Officers have also been asked to track Private Finance Initiative developments; but the LEA does not, at present, feel it appropriate to take more positive steps whilst the building stock is relatively sound and revenue sources can still be found to supplement capital allocations.

34. Music and Outdoor Education are both Council priorities and are accordingly well funded. The provision made by the LEA for these two areas was not covered by the inspection.

35. The Council is taking appropriate action with regard to Best Value. It has invested considerable resources in preparation for the Best Value regime. All departments have nominated officers, several pilot reviews have been undertaken and a practical handbook for employees has recently been published. The council's external auditors are working with officers to ensure the tight deadlines are met.

## **Recommendations**

36. In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- Revisions of the EDP should take more account of the need to improve attendance and to improve the attainment of certain minority ethnic groups (paragraph 21).

37. In order to meet the Best Value criteria:

- The LEA should devise a more structured mechanism for evaluation, and provide stakeholders with more performance data, particularly in relation to non-traded services (paragraph 31).

38. In order to control retirement costs:

- There needs to be a debate, involving all partners, about the most appropriate mechanisms for tackling personnel issues (paragraph 32).

## **SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Implications of other functions**

39. The Council provides good support for school improvement by prioritising spending on education. Management support services are efficient and effective, and also make a significant contribution to school improvement. School improvement is in general reasonably supported by the LEA's activities in relation to SEN and access. However, there are important weaknesses in these areas, for example in support for attendance, in some aspects of the provision made for pupils without a school place, and in the speed with which statements for pupils with SEN are prepared.

40. The inspection judged the overall effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement to be at least satisfactory in all but one of the 20 schools visited, and to be good in nine. There are some specific weaknesses within this positive overall picture. More detailed judgements are given in the rest of this section.

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

41. The LEA has developed a fairly clear view of its role in monitoring, supporting, challenging and, where necessary, intervening in schools, although there are aspects where further refinement is needed. The two EDP priorities "Pupils' Progress" and "Helping Schools in Need", in which the LEA is investing most heavily, set out a programme largely consistent with the Code of Practice on LEA - School Relations. Since the beginning of 1999, there has been a framework of staged support based on systematic monitoring of all schools to confirm effective practice and provide early warning of schools requiring additional support. In many respects this has been effective. It leads, where necessary, through three degrees of concern and further support, which can result in a formal warning to the governing body if improvement is not being achieved.

42. The criteria for placing schools in the various categories have been amplified recently and are currently subject to consultation. However, the high proportion of schools designated as a cause for concern, particularly at the lowest level of concern, casts doubt on the suitability of some of the criteria. At present, information on schools causing concern is not sent automatically to the chair of governors, as well as the headteacher.

43. The monitoring includes the scrutiny of data and other evidence. It is supplemented by three formal visits each year, undertaken by link inspectors, with the following focuses: target setting; annual review and school development plan; and planning related to the priorities in the EDP.

44. Link inspectors have won the respect of the schools; all the schools visited praised the quality of the support and challenge given by their link inspectors. In particular, the primary team of six, created over the last three years, has achieved a sea change in the extent to which schools are known, challenged and supported. The new team has relevant expertise, including headship experience covering the nursery, infant and junior age ranges.

45. Effective co-ordination of information and action is achieved across the Education department through regular meetings of the school monitoring and review team (SMART). SMART includes specialist expertise in planning, buildings, personnel, equal opportunities, finance, professional development and behaviour management. It also establishes task groups for schools causing concern, alerts the Director as appropriate and reports on a regular basis to the Curriculum and Monitoring sub-committee.

46. Given the high proportion of schools requiring intervention, the LEA has rightly targeted its resources to helping schools in need. This focus is supported by the school improvement partnership board. The partnership is a distinctive and very effective feature of this LEA's approach to school improvement. All schools subscribe to the partnership and the board is not just consulted, it allocates resources to priorities and initiatives. As detailed in paragraph 29, schools have agreed to contribute a portion of their delegated Standards Fund allocations for the board to redistribute according to identified needs. This has enabled all schools to be allocated an entitlement of three days of support, in addition to the routine monitoring visits, for aspects agreed with the link inspector. Schools who feel no need for extra support at present can bank it for use later. Three of the primary inspector posts are funded through the partnership board, an example of the response of the schools and the LEA to the lack of sufficient and appropriate staff to monitor and support the primary schools. The board also funds three advisory teachers for inclusion, Key Stage 2/3-transition and primary mathematics, and a headteacher secondment for post-16 development.

47. All schools are at present given three monitoring visits each year, irrespective of their success. This blanket approach should be reviewed in the near future. It should not be necessary for all schools, not least because of the emerging success of the LEA's management development and school self-review programmes. These are helping headteachers and senior managers in schools to make improvements in school development planning and in-house monitoring.

48. The leadership and management of the inspection service are mainly good. The Assistant Director (schools and continuing education executive) fulfils the role of chief inspector. He is well supported by effective senior phase inspectors for early years, primary and secondary education, and by the head of the professional and curriculum development team (PCD). There is good co-ordination between the twin arms of support for school improvement, with the inspection team able to commission resources from PCD. Effective practical working is aided by regular communication and co-location of services in the Jennie Lee centre. The teams are deployed on the basis of termly plans to meet identified needs and commitments and keep good records of their activities. Although schools value the expertise of their link inspectors, the quality of subject support is felt to be more variable. Appraisal of advisory and inspection staff has only recently been introduced and is not yet securely embedded. Overall, costs are relatively high but the service provided is good; value for money is satisfactory.

## **Collection and Analysis of Data**

49. Performance data and guidance on its use are strengths of Wolverhampton LEA. The LEA produces a well-developed range of performance data to supplement those provided nationally. It has commissioned consultancy from Sheffield University on added value in secondary schools. There is comprehensive guidance and training for schools on using the data to monitor performance and set targets. The LEA is continuing to refine the data it provides, for example by supplying more detailed information this year on the performance and progress of minority ethnic groups at school as well as LEA level. While three of the schools visited were actively targeting groups of pupils to improve their attainment, the LEA is in a position to take a clearer lead in this now that the requisite analysis of performance is available.

50. The provision of data and guidance on its use are highly rated by schools; in the school survey 95 per cent of primary schools rated the provision of data as good or very good. All the schools visited also valued the professional and challenging use of data by link inspectors in the target-setting process. In the EDP the LEA identified schools where agreement had not been reached on targets and provided extra support to these schools. The improvement in 1999 Key Stage 2 results in these schools was nearly three times the LEA average improvement.

## **Support for Literacy**

51. Attainment at Key Stage 2 is improving at much the same rate as nationally, although it remains below average. At Key Stage 3, improvement is above average, but at Key Stage 4, the gap between the LEA and national averages is not closing. The EDP priority covers a range of activities including supporting continuity in learning across key stages.

52. Support for literacy in primary schools is good. Wolverhampton has a longstanding commitment to improving standards of literacy through a range of Single Regeneration Budget funded initiatives spanning the last five years. These include family literacy, training for teachers, and the provision of reading support teachers. This range of activity has been very helpful in preparing the authority for the National Literacy Strategy. The literacy team is competent. The consultant and advisory teachers provide high quality practical support to schools which is well regarded. A Literacy Centre has been established which functions well, and there are good links with the schools' library service. Improvements in schools which have received intensive support include more focused teaching, with higher expectations of pupils. Last year the consultant was also able to visit all the schools identified for moderate support, which was beneficial. However, there is still a proportion of unsatisfactory teaching in a number of schools which is proving slow to improve, and which goes beyond the remit of the literacy team.

53. Support for secondary schools is less extensive, but is in general regarded by schools as satisfactory. Six secondary schools had summer literacy schools last year. The schools involved found the training provided helpful, although support for the associated intervention programme with Year 7 pupils was less well regarded. All secondary schools have had the opportunity to apply for an SRB-funded initiative aimed at improving transition from the primary schools. Early feedback from these

projects is positive. In two of the schools visited, support for literacy was not effective.

### **Support for Numeracy**

54. Attainment at Key Stage 2 is below average, but there was a very significant improvement in 1999; 14 percentage points compared with ten points nationally. At GCSE attainment also remains below average, but the gap is narrowing.

55. Primary schools are receiving good support. The recently appointed numeracy team, which includes an advisory teacher funded by the school improvement partnership board as well as two numeracy consultants, is well organised and highly regarded by schools. Schools identified for intensive support have received good quality support, including the opportunity to observe the numeracy consultants teaching, be observed and receive feedback, and take shared lessons with the consultants. The LEA has bought in well regarded external training for teachers in mental and oral mathematics, an aspect identified as a weakness following the 1998 Key Stage 2 tests. It has identified leading mathematics teachers, and provided them with lively and effective training. Evaluations from teachers show that they value the opportunity to observe these leading teachers. Improvements in teaching following support and training include better pace, and improvements in the use of mathematical language and in mental and oral skills. There is also a new Numeracy Centre, and cluster group meetings for numeracy co-ordinators are held regularly and valued by participants.

56. There is less activity in secondary schools although some of the actions in the EDP are specifically aimed at this sector. Schools generally regard support as satisfactory, although in one school visited it had not been effective. Two schools are receiving support to run Key Stage 3 numeracy initiatives. Two other schools have projects connected with improving transfer from primary school. There were three summer numeracy schools, and there are termly network meetings for all heads of department.

### **Support for ICT**

57. Although there is a clear need in schools for support for ICT, the support provided by the LEA is poor. The LEA's audit for the EDP identified the need for improvement in the use of ICT to support pupils' learning. Analysis of judgements in OFSTED inspections shows the LEA's schools performing less well than statistical neighbours and nationally. When grant funding for advisory teachers ceased, investment in ICT was left to individual school decisions, which has resulted in a wide range of facilities and expertise. There is no strategic LEA target for improving the ratio of computers to pupils, simply an aggregation of schools' own forecasts. Until comparatively recently, inspectorial support was combined in one post with science and technology. It was appropriate therefore to have an EDP priority devoted to ICT and to link its activities to the LEA's corporate ICT plan, the development of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) and New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training. In addition to one full-time inspector with responsibility for curriculum ICT, there are now two advisory teachers in post and schools have prepared development plans for NGfL bids.

58. Schools rate support for ICT as poor; a view shared by the inspection team. The LEA has not taken sufficient initiative or offered good enough leadership in this area. Schools visited report serious problems with the delivery and installation of NGfL hardware and software, a shortage of appropriate training and insufficient guidance on the choice of training providers available to schools. The LEA had not adequately followed up weaknesses in schools where OFSTED Section 10 reports in 1998 had identified ICT as an issue. Schools have insufficient guidance on devising policies and plans. Three schools noted some recent improvement in support, including that provided by the two recently appointed advisory teachers. Even these schools felt that the LEA was not keeping up with the pace of change and that the existing staff were overloaded. Two of the schools visited have taken out a contract with a major provider to replace LEA support and it is perhaps surprising that more schools have not followed this path. Improvements are urgently needed. The diversity of arrangements which schools have made, together with the need to secure Best Value, suggest that the LEA should consider with particular care how much of the support needed by schools it should seek to provide itself.

### **Support for Schools Causing Concern**

59. Wolverhampton currently has seven primary schools, one special school and one secondary school in special measures. One primary school and two secondary schools are designated as having serious weaknesses. In addition to these schools, the LEA has 37 schools on its own list of schools causing concern, although 22 of these are at the lowest level, which is essentially a watching brief. Support for schools causing concern is a major priority in the EDP.

60. The LEA has well-developed strategies for supporting schools requiring special measures and with serious weaknesses, which are largely effective. This is recognised by the schools, who rate the support highly. Some solutions have been bold and imaginative. There are in all schools in special measures appropriate arrangements for co-ordinating the support given and for maintaining an overview of its effectiveness. A task group is created which includes the link inspector and representatives from relevant departments of the LEA, and which meets half termly. Link inspectors play a pivotal role, working closely with senior management teams and governing bodies and offering good support, for example in drawing up action plans.

61. The LEA consistently uses its powers to appoint additional governors, a strategy which successfully strengthens and supports governing bodies. School management is strengthened by the use of seconded and consultant headteachers and deputy headteachers. This is often very effective, and several schools have benefited by being paired with the secondee's own successful school. Occasionally, the LEA does not act quickly enough or the temporary managers installed do not have the capacity to move the school forward. The LEA is playing an important part in helping the schools to develop effective procedures for self-review and evaluation. Subject support from inspectors, advisory teachers and consultants is usually well-regarded and valued by schools. The LEA's support for staffing matters, such as recruitment and competence, has been very helpful in some schools. Occasionally, longstanding staffing issues have been slow to resolve.

62. Schools in special measures receive extensive support. The LEA monitors the progress of the schools and the cost of support, and inspectors have a view of which measures are most effective. However, they do not specifically evaluate the cost effectiveness of particular actions.

63. In general, the schools are making good, or in some cases, satisfactory, progress. During 1999, four schools were removed from special measures. However, during 1999 and early 2000, two schools were found by OFSTED to require special measures, and one to have serious weaknesses. In 1998, because either the LEA did not know the school, or the school was not receptive to advice, or although action had been taken it had not yet been sufficiently effective, six schools went into special measures. The advent of the primary team means that all schools are now well known. The LEA has also improved its procedures for intervention in schools causing concern. These two factors together give the LEA a good platform from which to provide schools that are at risk with an effective level of support.

### **Support for Governors**

64. Support and advice for school governing bodies are good. The training programme is well balanced and governing bodies are invited to request tailor-made training for the whole body. The LEA has a set of triggers to enable it to target governing bodies where further support is needed. Officers are responsive and helpful and clerking effective. The governors advisory forum has monthly meetings with the Director and colleagues. The partnership is valued and felt to be influential. This positive picture of LEA relationships with governing bodies is reflected in the school survey.

### **Support for School Management**

65. Support for management is satisfactory, although within this overall picture there are stronger and weaker features. There is a clear need for support in this area. Evidence from inspections and the LEA's own audit point to weaknesses in teachers' expectations, planning, classroom management and in the teaching of some subjects. Accordingly, in addition to the support for school management provided under the EDP priority H, Helping Schools in Need, priority C, Teaching and Management, sets out an extensive course of action.

66. In 1998, the LEA relaunched, after some years of little activity, its central programme of professional and curriculum development. The most prominent and successful features of this programme are management development courses for headteachers, senior and middle managers led by the principal inspector and other inspectors. They are helping schools to monitor classroom practice more effectively and to improve development planning. The school-based projects are proving particularly useful. The approach taken on the management courses is coherent with and reinforces the LEA's support for self-review and that provided during link inspectors' monitoring visits. Ninety per cent of schools have so far taken part in the courses, often with two or three staff attending from the same school, which has enhanced the impact. In the school survey this support was rated good by nursery, special, primary and secondary schools, a view borne out by all the school visits.

67. Other aspects of support for management are less well developed. The induction and mentoring of new headteachers has been patchy and very little headteacher appraisal has taken place in the last two years.

68. The LEA arranges several professional networks for middle managers and subject leaders, with the primary deputies group seen by schools as well focused on important current concerns. Support for newly qualified teachers is good, with both the teachers and their mentors, in school visits, giving examples of useful courses and valuable networking. The teachers particularly praised courses such as those for literacy and numeracy, which gave practical advice they could use in the classroom.

69. The professional and curriculum development programme offers training across the whole curriculum and involves collaboration with higher education and other LEAs where the LEA does not have particular expertise. However, the take-up is not consistent. Half the schools visited could cite experience of recent high quality training, for example in science, assessment, behaviour management, modern foreign languages and technology. However, a substantial number of courses are cancelled each year for lack of support. One of the factors quoted by the schools was the perceived unsatisfactory quality of some of the LEA's own providers. An additional factor is that the analysis of training needs at present lacks some rigour. It takes account of evaluations by those who attend courses but there is insufficient use of schools' development plans to inform planning for the central programme. As a result, there is insufficient targeting of teachers whose skills and knowledge need improving. The project being set up by the partnership board for schools and link inspectors to evaluate the impact of in-service training on the quality of teaching in the classroom over time is a positive development.

### **Support for Early Years**

70. Early Years education is a strength in Wolverhampton. The LEA has a good record of providing early years education in nursery schools and classes. Nevertheless, based on its audit of standards and the introduction of the Early Years partnership, it included improvement in early years provision as an EDP priority, with an emphasis on achieving consistent quality across all maintained settings.

71. There is a good range of activity. The Early Years and childcare development plan includes extending provision for three-year-olds and enabling nursery schools to widen the opportunities beyond part-time attendance, to meet the needs of families. The adult education service supports family numeracy activities with parents in nursery schools. An Early Excellence Centre is being developed in a former nursery school. The LEA has Sure Start Trailblazer status in the Bilston and Ettingshall areas. Relationships with Social Services, Health, voluntary and private providers are constructive at policy and operational levels. All settings in receipt of grant commit themselves to a statement of guarantee regarding equal opportunities, quality and training. The Early Years team is very effectively led, with a clear drive for further improvement. The nursery schools in the school survey rated support for improving quality as very good.

## Recommendations

72. In order to improve LEA support for school improvement the LEA should:

- as school self-review develops, reconsider making monitoring visits to all schools and delegate more centrally held resources to schools, so that schools can decide for themselves how much support they want;
- send communications about schools causing concern as a matter of course to the chair of governors as well as the headteacher;
- review the suitability of the criteria for schools causing concern (paragraphs 42 and 47).

73. In order to provide better support for ICT the LEA should:

- reconsider its role in supporting ICT in the curriculum with a view to outsourcing where this would provide a more effective and efficient service to schools;
- give firmer guidance to schools on NOF providers;
- identify and actively target schools requiring more intensive support;
- set targets for the provision of computers in schools (paragraphs 57-58).

74. In order to improve the support given to schools causing concern the LEA should:

- improve its quality control procedures to ensure that all senior managers seconded into schools with weaknesses are of suitable quality, and ensure that it acts quickly enough to resolve staffing issues;
- improve its procedures for evaluating the cost effectiveness of its actions in support of schools requiring special measures (paragraphs 59-63).

75. In order to improve the support for management the LEA should:

- be more rigorous in its analysis of training needs which should be more clearly based on needs identified within schools' development plans;
- take steps, in consultation with headteachers, to target ineffective teaching;
- take steps to improve consistency of quality in in-service training providers (paragraphs 65-69).

## **SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

### **Corporate Planning**

76. The Council demonstrates its commitment to the Education Department by consistently spending above SSA, even in years when this results in hard decisions about other services. Members give stable political leadership. There is a good degree of cross-party consensus and a pragmatic concern to deal with issues and implement policies which will help to raise standards. In recent years, there has been an increasing willingness to tackle difficult issues, such as school closures and reorganisations. Officers give members sound advice. Some of the decisions made, for example with regard to schools in special measures, and the promotion of partnership, indicate strong and clear leadership by members and officers. However, until recently members have failed to employ rigorous enough controls over the use of early retirement. Within the Education Department, members regard schools as the main priority. Hence, over a number of years there were cuts at the centre in order to protect school budgets.

77. Relationships between senior officers and members are good; they reflect the LEA's strong emphasis on partnership. Delegation to officers is at an appropriate level. Officers are left to implement agreed policies, but suitable checks and balances are in place.

78. The Education Department has very recently been restructured. The new structure followed consultation and an external view was sought. It consists of a central directorate, a schools and continuing education executive and a pupil and student executive. The aims of the two executives are to provide challenge and support to institutions and to promote social inclusion. Links between the executives are strengthened by five cross-departmental working groups. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new structure, but there are concerns about the allocations of work and workloads of senior staff within the pupil and student executive (see paragraphs 100 and 125).

79. The Council has produced clear guidelines for performance management within the Education Department. Formal staff development is well established in the non-curriculum and administrative branches, but this is not the case in areas such as the advisory and inspection service and the psychological service, where it is not yet firmly embedded. The Department is now working towards Investors in People.

80. Corporate plans show a good degree of coherence. The Chief Executive has produced a document outlining the authority's vision and values. The Education Department sees its work reflected in this and confirmed by it. There is also a corporate regeneration strategy document, which sets out strategic objectives and shows how they inter-relate. It is a well produced and usable reference document, and clearly shows the links with the Education Department. The main document in the Education Department is the strategic plan for education 1999-2002. This provides a clear and succinct overview of the activities of all the various plans. It functions as the department's service plan, and is used at a corporate level to monitor progress. Other plans, for example the Early Years and childcare development plan and the behaviour support plan, are clear and realistic.

81. The focus of the Department's work is expressed in the departmental mission statement as follows:

"Working in partnership with schools, parents, other local agencies and community groups to promote access, quality and achievement for all in education across the borough."

82. This is not simply rhetoric. There is now a very real sense of partnership between the Department and its schools, which has gradually evolved over the last few years. This is exemplified particularly by the school improvement partnership which was created in 1998, is supported by all the LEA's schools and which makes a very effective contribution to school improvement. As explained in paragraph 29, all schools have agreed to contribute to the school improvement partnership board in order to fund school improvement initiatives. All the schools visited during the inspection do so willingly, having been persuaded of the partnership's value by their own perception of the benefits to schools and by the advocacy of the Director and headteachers who sit on the board. Schools stressed their desire to be part of the local partnership, which is seen as important even for successful schools. Details of the improvement initiatives funded by the partnership board are given in paragraph 46.

83. An important and effective aspect of the work of the partnership board is to act as a forum where senior officers and headteachers can develop ideas and discuss proposed initiatives in an atmosphere of trust and candour. Schools and officers are able to put forward ideas. The board may ask officers to rethink, and in particular helps to make proposals practicable for schools. The idea for the successful management development programme, for example, came from a cross-phase working group of the partnership board.

### **Partnerships with other agencies and local government departments**

84. The LEA has forged good links at a strategic and operational level with a range of other agencies, in accordance with its focus on partnership. There are close working relationships with partners such as the Chamber of Commerce, Prospect Careers Service, Wolverhampton College and Wolverhampton University, who work together with the LEA and others in a range of partnerships such as the Education Business Partnership, the Life Long Learning Partnership and the recently established Education Action Zone (EAZ). Examples of effective collaborative working with the above institutions include support for disaffected pupils in Years 10 and 11, work experience placements for pupils, the provision of governors for schools in special measures from the business community, and the management development programme. The LEA has been fully involved in the EAZ from the planning stage. The aim is to create a culture where learning is valued.

85. The Education Department plays a full part in the Early Years development and childcare partnership, including leading the bid which secured Sure Start for a deprived area of the borough. Other examples of effective work which also involve the health authority include initiatives such as the development of breakfast clubs in three schools, and the work being undertaken in schools to tackle the issue of teenage pregnancies.

86. Good strategic links exist between the Education and Social Services departments. A strategy and co-ordinating group for children was set up about two years ago to meet the demands of Quality Protects. The Education Department has also contributed appropriately to the childrens' services plan. A multi-agency care management group, including both Health and Social Services, has been established to meet the needs of children with the most complex medical, emotional and learning needs. This is a timely move as meeting the needs of such pupils is a particular concern for some schools. At school level, liaison with social workers is weak. Apart from in early years provision, schools report difficulties in accessing support from Social Services for individual pupils and their families.

87. Partnership working with the Diocesan authorities is productive. There is a lot of goodwill between the Wolverhampton Race Equality Council (WREC) and the LEA and arrangements are in place for regular liaison between the two groups. Positive outcomes of this include the recently published guidance for schools on racial harassment. The LEA is also actively supporting the WREC's Teacher Training Agency-funded project aimed at improving the recruitment and retention of teachers from minority ethnic communities. However, the WREC still has concerns, for example, over the high level of exclusions and low levels of attainment of African-Caribbean pupils. It would also like to be involved at an earlier stage in consultation, for example, over the EDP.

88. There are good relationships between the police and the LEA, who liaise in connection with the youth offending team pilot and other work. However, despite some good examples of collaborative working, the liaison between the police and the LEA has not been as productive in terms of practical outcomes as hoped for by the police. Following earlier problems, Truancy Watch is about to be relaunched in the borough.

### **Management Services**

89. The range of services inspected are largely delegated, have developed a customer focus and demonstrate considerable expertise; as a result they are well regarded by school managers. All relevant statutory processes are carried out at modest cost. These features, and the fact that some of the better practices in performance management and customer evaluations within the LEA are taking place here means they provide good value for money and make a significant contribution to school improvement.

90. **Personnel services** have developed a range of service level agreements (SLAs) with schools, primarily to perform administrative functions. All schools buy in at various levels, customer surveys are positive and the service benchmarks its performance; these are all indicators of a well-run service.

91. The personnel manager is relatively new in post and has plans to further improve the contribution the service makes to school improvement. There is increasing involvement in headteacher and deputy recruitment procedures, including the improvement of quality control for the selection of teachers for the National Professional Qualification for Headship. A new ICT system has been commissioned with the aim of providing schools with advice on absence management. Evidence

from school visits suggests that school managers are being encouraged and supported in the application of more appropriate procedures to solve personnel issues than was the case hitherto.

92. The LEA's **Property services** and the associated council technical services have been largely delegated to schools for some time, and schools are generally satisfied with the support they get. Schools where crises have occurred are particularly impressed with the response. There are good records of the building stock, based on recent condition surveys. The LEA has been reasonably successful in securing capital grants, which, together with the regular allocation of revenue funds means that the building stock is generally sound.

93. The detailed data being gathered for the Asset Management Plan (AMP) has sharpened the LEA's ability to prioritise the spending of resources, and the condition surveys are providing schools with a medium-term, costed programme of maintenance work. One particular feature of Wolverhampton's approach to enhance its AMP has been to ask schools to provide details of property related issues from their school development plans to link more closely the AMP with school improvement. The LEA is currently working with the DfEE on the development of a national approach to assessing the fitness for purpose of its school buildings as a key element of AMPs.

94. **Finance and Information Services** carry out all relevant statutory duties and provide traded services to schools in finance and some associated ICT applications. Schools rate the financial services highly and their increasing contributions have paid for additional staff to enable the SLA to be annually upgraded to meet their changing demands. Links with the council's finance department are good and the traded services they provide to schools are similarly well regarded.

95. School budgets are clearly presented. Balances are not excessive, but where they are above 10 per cent of the budget share, governors are required to provide a plan for their use. Apart from four cases, deficits are modest; but in all cases they are known, subject to recovery plans, monitored and regularly reported to the relevant committee. Financial issues are subject to scrutiny by SMART.

96. The service manager is also responsible for the development of and support for administrative ICT systems; these are largely non-traded. Within the narrow context of supporting basic ICT administrative systems in schools, the service has been successful. The service is about to take a significant step forward in order to enable it to support a more ambitious and up to date range of functions. An external provider has been commissioned to develop an ICT system with specifications to enable electronic exchange of management and pupil data within the LEA and between the LEA and schools. The plan is for the system to be in operation by early Spring. The service manager has a clear view of the work needed to raise the awareness of users to the potential of the system to ensure value for money. Unlike other aspects of ICT in Wolverhampton's education service, all schools are signed up to a common approach to administrative ICT. An important task for the LEA in its attempts to solve other ICT problems will be to clarify the role and status of this aspect of the service as part of its broader strategy.

## **Recommendations**

97. In order to improve the effectiveness of partnership working with other agencies the LEA should:

- use its links with Social Services at a strategic level to press for improvements in the arrangements for liaison between social workers and schools;
- translate its good relationship with the police into more practical actions (paragraphs 86 and 88).

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

### **Strategy**

98. Essentially, the LEA has a sound approach to inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and much good practice on which to build. However, the associated documentation is too fragmented and the future strategy not entirely clear.

99. The LEA has moved a considerable way towards the inclusion of pupils with SEN. There is an extensive range of well established and valued SEN provision, including six special schools and a good range of resource bases in primary and secondary schools. There is also support in mainstream schools for pupils with statements, which is funded centrally. The extent of inclusion in the mainstream host school for the pupils in the resource bases varies quite widely, but is often good. The pupils in some resource bases, for example those with hearing and visual impairments, and those with moderate learning difficulties, are integrated into mainstream classes for almost all of their lessons. However, the degree of integration is much less for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Special schools have for a number of years liaised with mainstream schools over the needs of particular pupils; this work is beginning to be supported by the advisory teacher for inclusion.

100. A recently produced consultation document entitled 'Developing a Wolverhampton Policy on Inclusion' helpfully sets out the general and local context. However, it does not include a clear strategy or plan, and is not widely known in schools. The LEA's brief general statements concerning the promotion of inclusion whenever possible, and segregation only where necessary, are generally known and accepted. However, schools lack clarity over what exactly the LEA wants to achieve in this area and how it intends to proceed. At present, elements of the LEA's strategy concerning SEN are to be found in several different documents, including the EDP, the SEN action plan, and the outcomes of various working parties. These developments need to be brought together and an overarching strategy document and action plan produced. At present, the Assistant Director with responsibility for special needs is overloaded, with additional service management responsibilities in other areas; the development of strategy for SEN and for inclusion has suffered as a consequence.

101. The LEA has recently changed its strategy for funding SEN in mainstream schools. Funding is now uncoupled from the SEN audit and is linked to numbers of pupils who are entitled to free school meals, and indices of socio-economic deprivation related to individual pupils' home addresses. The change is understood by schools and is an improvement as it is likely to result in a more appropriate allocation of funds. However, schools are concerned that their figures for the numbers of pupils taking free school meals are not an accurate representation of entitlement. The LEA's administration of free school meals does not encourage parents to take up their entitlement; for example, parents cannot obtain the necessary forms from schools but have to make a special journey to the council offices. The LEA needs to do more to encourage parents to register.

102. It was clear from visits to schools that some schools are being asked to account for how they spend their money allocated for SEN. However, such monitoring is not systematic. Also, the effectiveness of the spending in the resource bases, which are well funded, is not systematically monitored by the LEA. For example, LEA inspectors only report on them if they are identified as key issues in OFSTED Section 10 reports.

103. As part of the recent restructuring of the Education Department, services working to support schools, children and their families have been reorganised into area teams. These teams consist of educational psychologists, members of the reducing disaffection and learning support teams and education social workers. The remit of the teams includes offering in-service training to clusters of schools, advice and support for pupils at stages 1-3 and individual support for pupils with a statement. Schools in principle welcome the multi-agency approach, but in these early stages, not all schools are fully clear about the reasons for the changes or how the teams will work in practice. At present, the teams' remit does not include a specific focus on raising standards of achievement for pupils with SEN; nor are there clear mechanisms for liaising with link inspectors. The LEA has not yet detailed how it will measure and assess the success of the development.

### **Statutory Obligations**

104. The LEA takes reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory obligations for special educational needs except in regard to the completion of statements. Only 55 per cent of statements were completed in 1998-99 within the statutory 18-week period, and the forecast for the current year is only 60 per cent. One reason for the delay has been lack of assessments by educational psychologists. Last year the LEA had a severe shortage of educational psychologists, which has now mainly been rectified. There have also been administrative delays. This is an area where the LEA needs to improve.

### **Improvement and Value for Money**

105. Overall, the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which supports school improvement and provides satisfactory value for money. Support for SEN was judged to be effective in all but two of the 20 schools visited; it was good in seven. Most weaknesses relate to the long time needed to produce statements and to the length of time some schools were left without support from the educational psychology service.

106. The LEA has given good support for the training of special school staff. As well as training for teachers, there is a well established programme of training for Learning Support Assistants, and a number of nursery nurses have been trained as speech and language therapy assistants.

107. Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) receive good support. For example, they have access to a comprehensive handbook, a newsletter and regular SENCO network meetings. The special needs inspector also gives schools helpful advice for example on devising a special needs policy. The SEN audit is moderated by a panel of headteachers, who also look at the school's individual

education plans. SENCOs find the feedback given by the panel useful. Although the time taken to produce statements is too long, arrangements for reviews of statements and for transition review are satisfactory.

108. Most schools value the quality of support provided by their allocated educational psychologist. However, last year's acute shortage of educational psychologists caused schools severe problems. Although the LEA made arrangements to provide cover for priority cases, some schools were without for more than a year. All but one of the vacant posts have now been filled. The service aims to provide more preventative than statutory assessment work, but in many schools this has not yet been achieved. The educational psychology service development plan is weak, with insufficient focus on targets. This reflects a more general weakness in SEN service planning.

109. Schools value the support given to individual pupils by learning support staff. Support from the hearing impaired and visually impaired support teams is very good. Staff are well qualified and experienced. The service offered by the Parent Partnership office is a strong feature of the LEA's work and has helped to reduce the number of cases that are taken to the SEN Tribunal. The indications are that value for money overall is satisfactory.

## **Recommendations**

110. In order to improve the support for, and management of, SEN the LEA should:

- Make efforts to meet statutory requirements for the completion of statements within an 18 week period;
- bring together the various action plans, policies and work groups to produce an overall strategy and plan for SEN and for inclusion that enables schools and the LEA to know where they are going over the next few years;
- put in place arrangements to ensure schools are more accountable for the work of the resource bases;
- give greater focus to the role of the area teams in raising standards of attainment for pupils with SEN;
- improve the quality of SEN service planning (especially for the education psychology service) to become more specific about meeting targets;
- make it easier for parents to register for free school meals (paragraph 101).

## **SECTION 5: ACCESS**

### **The Supply of School Places**

111. The LEA now has a well co-ordinated strategic approach to the planning of school places, following the establishment of the strategic planning group of senior officers. The School Organisation Plan (SOP) is a well written testament to this new approach and provides a very clear picture of the LEA's intentions.

112. Overall, the proportion of surplus places is not high in the borough, but nevertheless, officers have taken advice from recent independent auditor's reports and there are statutory proposals in train to reduce these further to recommended levels. The methodology for forecasting places is sound and is likely to improve with the new ICT developments mentioned in paragraph 96. Forecasts for individual schools are given to secondary schools but not to primaries; school visits showed that time could be saved in some primary schools where headteachers are calculating their own forecasts. Giving such data to schools would also enable them to improve their medium term financial planning. Auditors have made this and other suggestions to the LEA; the LEA has responded positively in terms of planned developments.

113. The main challenge for the LEA is to provide enough secondary places for the predicted, short term expansion in secondary pupil numbers. The difficulty is compounded by surplus places in a small number of currently unpopular secondary schools, which would prejudice capital bids. The LEA's strategy is well conceived and is based on the strong partnership ethos within the borough, a drive for school improvement to change parental perceptions, improvements in admissions information and modest expansion where necessary. Evidence from the "fresh start" King's school suggests that this strategy is likely to be successful.

114. In January 1999, of the 18 secondary schools in the borough, 17 had sixth forms, but of these 14 had less than 160 pupils. Officers, headteachers and the principal of the college have developed a radical plan to work towards the concept of a Wolverhampton Sixth Form. This is evolving by the establishment of consortia around the borough as an interim step. Secondary heads are signed up to this approach and have appointed one of their number as a secondee using partnership board funds to progress the project.

115. The Key Stage 1 class size plan was approved on time and the recent internal monitoring report to the DfEE indicates that the LEA is confident it will meet the DfEE's pledge in September 2000. The LEA has taken on the administration of admissions in primary schools in order to assist schools to manage this issue.

### **Admissions**

116. The provision of admissions information to parents is good. It follows the letter and the spirit of the code of practice, apart from not including details about why some parents were not successful. One of the first tasks the newly constituted admissions forum set itself was to improve these documents further to make them accessible to a wider audience. This, together with changes to the timing of

deadlines for applications, is one part of the strategy to increase admissions to less popular secondary schools. It is being approached in a spirit of co-operation.

117. Ninety two percent of parents get their first choice of school and the number of appeals is low, in part owing to the ability of parents to make representations to the LEA in advance of a potential appeal. The most recent auditor's report pointed to some specific examples of good practice. Improvements in the efficiency of admissions procedures have resulted in most appeals now being heard in May. Plans are being developed to improve further the admissions service using the new IT system.

### **Provision of Education Otherwise Than At School**

118. Overall, the LEA's provision for education otherwise than at school is unsatisfactory. Although there are strong features, these sit alongside some areas of significant weakness. Among the positive features is the LEA's policy of Zero Rejection, which aims to minimise the numbers of pupils without a school place and has gained widespread support in schools. The LEA has a good range of alternative provision for pupils, including three pupil referral units (PRUs), tuition, work experience placements, college courses and part-time provision from voluntary sector providers. It also has a good record of reintegrating excluded pupils into full-time education.

119. However, LEA statistics indicate that for some pupils there has been an unacceptably long delay before a placement is made. Furthermore, the average time of 4.25 hours of provision for pupils who are awaiting full-time placement is low. The LEA still has some considerable way to go achieve its target of full time provision within 15 days of exclusion by 2002; there is no action plan detailing how this will be achieved, although there are some developments underway.

120. The primary and secondary PRU each provide places for pupils with behaviour problems. A third unit includes home and hospital education and part-time provision for children with long term medical and/or emotional difficulties. Schoolgirl mothers can also access part time educational support through this unit.

121. Provision at the secondary PRU is heavily oversubscribed. The majority of pupils are acknowledged to have long term emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and only a small number are reintegrated back into mainstream schools. By default, the unit functions as a special school for pupils with EBD, which is inconsistent with the aims of reintegration normally associated with a PRU. It also contributes to the long delay in establishing alternative provision for excluded pupils highlighted by schools in the survey for this inspection.

122. Although the LEA can identify all pupils without a school, PRU or college place, the comprehensive database identified within the behaviour support plan is not yet up and running. This needs to be established as soon as possible to ensure effective tracking of pupils' progress.

## **Attendance**

123. Overall, support for attendance is unsatisfactory. Although there are some good features, there are also weaknesses; the support provided has not been sufficiently effective. Attendance in Wolverhampton primary schools has been well below the national average for the past four years. Unauthorised absence has remained high at 0.9 per cent during that period. In secondary schools there has been a slight improvement but overall rates are still below average. The LEA has identified within the EDP a range of activities designed to improve attendance levels, with specific targets for reducing unauthorised absence by 2002. There has been slippage, however, in the delivery of some of the planned activities, including the introduction of a central database of weekly attendance and the establishment of school targets for a reduction in unauthorised absence.

124. Most schools are satisfied with the work of their education social worker. However, of the sixteen school visits where attendance was a focus, there was evidence of some ineffective targeting of resources, of inconsistency in the way Education social workers carry out their role and of a failure in one school to deal with specific issues identified by the school's OFSTED report. Conversely, there were also examples of good practice where additional, well targeted support for schools in special measures has resulted in significant improvements in levels of attendance. A strong feature of this support is the multi-agency approach which has been developed over a number of years by the Wolverhampton improving school attendance – reducing disaffection (WISARD) project, involving collaboration with the police and other agencies in preventing and responding to truancy. Dissemination of this good practice, however, has not been systematic and, for some schools, the service fails to provide a consistent and strong enough lead on ways to improve attendance.

125. The education social work service is funded below the average for metropolitan authorities and, at the time of the inspection, carried one vacancy. It is not able to provide cover for schools if education social workers are absent. The service manager, who is an Assistant Director with a wide ranging brief for Children's Services, is over-stretched. Service level agreements have been operating for some time in secondary schools, but are still being established within primary schools. There are weaknesses in the performance management of the service in that there is not enough consistency in the delivery of the service or fully effective targeting of need.

## **Behaviour Support**

126. The LEA's support for improving behaviour is satisfactory. There is considerable need for such support, as OFSTED reports indicate that there are significant levels of behavioural problems in the schools. Similarly, exclusions, particularly for African Caribbean/Mixed Race pupils in secondary schools, have been high.

127. The behaviour support plan is a thorough and comprehensive plan, which has been subject to extensive consultation with schools and other key partners. The plan

includes a policy of Zero Rejection, involving collaborative casework and the use of pre-exclusion planning meetings. These are having a positive impact on the drive to reduce exclusions; unconfirmed figures for 1998/99 show a 40 per cent decrease in permanent exclusions from 77 to 46. However, the number of fixed term exclusions in 1998/99 remains high.

128. Schools are familiar with the LEA's strategy as outlined in the behaviour support plan. They value the work of the reducing disaffection team, although some schools expressed concern about the time delay involved in accessing support for individual pupils. As detailed in paragraph 103, this team along with other services is now part of the new area team structure. It is too soon to assess the effectiveness of these teams but, in principle, there is widespread support amongst headteachers for what is seen as a coherent approach, with the potential for increased flexibility and responsiveness.

129. Additional pupil support initiatives have been established within pupil development units. These in-school referral units are based in secondary schools, the first being established in 1992. More recently Home Office funding, through its crime reduction programme, has enabled the establishment of three more units bringing the total now to twelve. Evidence from one school visited, formerly in special measures, indicates that the unit has helped to reduce fixed term exclusions. The authority aims to have effective in-school systems in all secondary schools by the end of 2000.

130. Training in assertive discipline has been provided by the educational psychological service and is highly regarded by schools. Advanced skills training for pastoral approaches and the management of pupil behaviour is also being offered in targeted schools as part of the EDP programme to improve behaviour in schools.

### **Health, Safety, Welfare, Child Protection**

131. The LEA fulfils its statutory duties in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection. The LEA regularly updates its policy on health and safety and comprehensive guidance is provided to schools. Training for school staff in Child Protection takes place and is well regarded.

### **Looked-After Children**

132. The LEA receives regular information from Social Services on children who are looked after by the authority. It knows which schools the children attend, and is currently seeking data from the schools on the children's attainment, in order to set targets and monitor individual progress. At present the Social Services Department's database is not compatible with systems in the Education Department. The LEA is in the process of setting up a comprehensive database, including any information relating to SEN, attendance or school exclusion. There has been some slippage in the programme for this; it is now due by the summer term 2000.

133. In a positive move, the LEA and the Social Services Department have collaborated effectively to create a jointly funded post for a specialist Educational Psychologist with responsibility for looked-after children. This officer provides a

psychological service to two LEA resource centres (formerly children's homes) together with advice to social workers, foster carers and schools. Schools with pupils who are looked after by the authority have welcomed this support. Schools are establishing designated teachers for looked-after children and the LEA is piloting the use of personal education plans for all looked-after children.

### **Ethnic Minority Children**

134. Support for minority ethnic pupils is satisfactory: within this overall picture there are both strengths and weaknesses. Wolverhampton reflects the national picture in that there is an increasing differential between ethnic groups as pupils move through the school system. By GCSE there is significant underachievement by African Caribbean pupils, particularly boys.

135. The multi-cultural education service (MCES) manages the authority's funding through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) and effectively secured the transition from Section 11 funding. The transition to a bought-back service has proceeded smoothly. The support and training provided by the service are good and are highly regarded by schools. This includes good support on target setting for individual pupils. The allocation of EMAG funding this year was based on a formula related to pupil numbers rather than to identified need. The authority has recognised this weakness and has now developed a formula that enables more effective targeting of resources to meet the attainment needs of different ethnic groups. There are effective systems for the monitoring and evaluation of the devolved service.

136. The authority has a strong commitment to raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils. This commitment, however, is not adequately demonstrated within the EDP in terms of the audit of need, target setting in relation to different ethnic group attainment, resource allocation or in the specificity of its improvement programme. A Section 11 project on the achievement of African Caribbean pupils was initiated by the authority in 1998/99 in response to concerns raised by black parents. In the changeover to EMAG, this focus has been maintained. However, the EMAG action plan does not include specific strategies related to raising the attainment of African Caribbean pupils, or clearly set out targets in relation to different ethnic groups. Despite the project, performance data by ethnicity have not been used effectively by the education service to ensure a coherent response to the under achievement of African Caribbean pupils, in particular boys.

137. There is a disproportionately higher percentage of exclusions for African Caribbean/ Mixed Race pupils, particularly, but not exclusively, at secondary level. In response to a government initiative, the LEA has produced a detailed and well-focused action plan. The plan builds on outcomes of the Section 11 project and activities within the EDP and the behaviour support plan, in order to meet the challenging targets which the authority has set for 2002.

138. The West Midlands Consortium Service for Traveller children is based within Wolverhampton and currently supports pupils in eight schools. Support overall for meeting the needs of Traveller children is well organised and effective. A recent HMI inspection judged the service to be excellent value for money. Members of the

service are appropriately involved in other LEA initiatives, including Sure Start, the EAZ and with the multi-cultural education service.

## **Social Exclusion**

139. The LEA has a strong commitment to cross departmental and multi-agency working in order to prevent social exclusion and is developing with its partners a wide range of effective initiatives which are helping schools to reduce the risk of disaffection among pupils. The LEA has provided a strong lead on the development of modified timetables and disapplication of parts of the National Curriculum in order to provide a sharper focus on vocational education for disaffected pupils at Key Stage 4. It has identified the pupil groups at risk and through the delivery of its Behaviour Support Plan is providing a continuum of support, which is beginning to have an impact in reducing permanent exclusions.

140. To date, there has been a measured response by the LEA to the *Report of the Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence* (Macpherson Report 1999). Senior members of staff within the department have taken part in training on the implications of the report's recommendations and an action plan has been prepared. The action plan has not yet been published; the LEA needs to do this and ensure that key partners, such as the schools, governing bodies, parents and the Wolverhampton Council for Race Equality, fully subscribe to its aims, strategies and timescales. The recently published guidelines for schools on dealing with racial harassment are timely; there are also plans to update the policy on equal opportunities. Senior officers of the LEA are also involved at a regional level with the Council for Racial Equality in developing quality standards for local authorities. A guidance document for schools is to be launched later this term.

## **Recommendations**

141. In order to improve support for attendance the LEA should:

- be more focused in targeting needs supported by up to date attendance data;
- strengthen procedures for ensuring greater consistency in the quality of support through its education social work service;
- establish school targets for attendance;
- take steps to disseminate good practice and to provide schools with effective guidance on how to improve attendance (paragraphs 123-125).

142. In order to improve support for excluded pupils the LEA should:

- increase tuition hours for excluded pupils awaiting placement and improve the efficiency with which alternative provision is established;
- reconsider the role and function of the PRUs; as part of this review the LEA should make proper arrangements for securing long-term provision for pupils with EBD;
- implement proposals to establish the comprehensive database on pupils speedily (paragraphs 122).

143. In order to improve provision for minority ethnic children the LEA should:

- encourage schools to make more use of performance data to set targets for the attainment of different ethnic groups, and implement specific strategies to help raise the attainment of underachieving groups (paragraphs 138).

## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement the LEA should:

- Revise of the EDP to take more account of the need to improve attendance and to improve the attainment of certain minority ethnic groups (paragraph 21).

In order to meet the Best Value criteria the LEA should:

- devise a more structured mechanism for evaluation, and provide stakeholders with more performance data, particularly in relation to non-traded services (paragraph 31).

In order to control retirement costs the LEA should:

- initiate a debate, involving all partners, about the most appropriate mechanisms for tackling personnel issues (paragraph 32).

In order to improve LEA support for school improvement the LEA should:

- as school self-review develops, reconsider the policy of making monitoring visits to all schools. More centrally held resources should be delegated to schools, so that schools can decide for themselves how much support they want;
- send communications about schools causing concern as a matter of course to the chair of governors as well as the headteacher;
- review the suitability of the criteria for schools causing concern (paragraphs 42 and 47).

In order to provide better support for ICT the LEA should:

- reconsider its role in supporting ICT in the curriculum with a view to outsourcing where this would provide a more effective and efficient service to schools;
- give firmer guidance to schools on NOF providers;
- identify and actively target schools requiring more intensive support;
- set targets for the provision of computers in schools (paragraphs 57-58).

In order to improve the support given to schools causing concern the LEA should:

- improve its quality control procedures to ensure that all senior managers seconded into schools with weaknesses are of suitable quality, and ensure that it acts quickly enough to resolve staffing issues;
- improve its procedures for evaluating the cost effectiveness of its actions in support of schools requiring special measures (paragraphs 59-63).

In order to improve the support for management the LEA should:

- be more vigorous in its analysis of training needs which should be more clearly based on needs identified within schools' development plans;
- take steps, in consultation with headteachers, to target ineffective teaching;
- take steps to improve consistency of quality in in-service training providers (paragraphs 65-69).

In order to improve the effectiveness of partnership working with other agencies the LEA should:

- use its links with Social Services at a strategic level to press for improvements in the arrangements for liaison between social workers and schools;
- translate its good relationship with the police into more practical actions (paragraph 88).

In order to improve the support for, and management of, SEN, the LEA should:

- make efforts to meet statutory requirements for the completion of statements within an 18 week period;
- bring together the various action plans, policies and work groups to produce an overall strategy and plan for SEN and for inclusion that enables schools and the LEA to know where they are going over the next few years;
- put in place arrangements to ensure schools are more accountable for the work of the resource bases;
- give greater the role of the area teams in raising standards of attainment for pupils with SEN;
- improve the quality of SEN service planning (especially for the Education Psychology Service) to become more specific about meeting targets;
- make it easier for parents to register for free school meals (paragraph 101).

In order to improve support for attendance the LEA should:

- be more focused in targeting needs supported by up to date attendance data;
- strengthen procedures for ensuring greater consistency in the quality of support through its education social work service;
- establish school targets for attendance;
- take further steps to disseminate good practice and to provide schools with effective guidance on how to improve attendance (paragraphs 123-125).

In order to improve support for excluded pupils the LEA should:

- increase the tuition hours for excluded pupils awaiting placement and improve the efficiency with which alternative provision is established;
- reconsider the role and function of the PRUs; as part of this review the LEA should make proper arrangements for securing long-term provision for pupils with EBD;

- implement proposals to establish the comprehensive database on pupils speedily (paragraph 122).

In order to improve provision for minority ethnic children, the LEA should:

- encourage schools to make more use of performance data to set targets for the attainment of different ethnic groups, and implement specific strategies to help raise the attainment of underachieving groups (paragraphs 134-138).

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**Office for Standards in Education  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE**

**Tel: 0207 421 6800**

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