



**OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
WIGAN
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

June 2001

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

CONTENTS

PARAGRAPHS

INTRODUCTION 1 - 3

COMMENTARY 4 - 12

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context 13 - 16

Performance 17 - 20

Funding 21 - 24

Council structure 25 - 27

The Education Development Plan 28 - 33

The allocation of resources to priorities 34 - 38

Approach to Best Value 39 - 43

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions 44 - 45

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention 46 - 50

Collection and analysis of data 51 - 54

Support for literacy and numeracy 55 - 56

Support for literacy 57 - 60

Support for numeracy 61 - 63

Support for information and communication technology 64 - 71

Support for schools causing concern 72 - 76

Support for governors 77 - 83

Support for school management 84 - 91

Support for early years education 92 - 95

The arts advisory and support service Best Value review 96 - 101

Recommendations

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning 102 - 107

Partnerships 108 - 110

Management services 111 - 112

Financial support services 113 - 114

Personnel support 115 - 116

Grounds maintenance 117

School meals 118

Cleaning and caretaking 119

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy 120 - 121

Statutory obligations 122 - 125

School improvement 126 - 129

Value for money	130
Best Value Review of inclusive education (Special Educational Needs) Recommendations	131 - 135

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places	136 - 139
Admissions	140 - 142
Asset management planning	143 - 146
Attendance	147 - 150
Behaviour support	151 - 155
Provision of education otherwise than at school	156 - 160
Health, safety, welfare and child protection	161 - 162
Children in public care	163 - 165
Ethnic minority children, including Travellers	166 - 168
Measures to combat racism	169 - 170
Gifted and talented children	171
Promoting social inclusion	172 - 173
Recommendations	

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection is 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 (September 2000)* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.
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 members, 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 143 schools. The overall response rate was 85 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one nursery school, 12 primary, six secondary and two special schools. In addition, a visit was made to the pupil reintegration service at the Park Centre, to the Drumcroon art centre and to Robin Park, a learning through sport curriculum centre. These visits tested the views of governors, 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 was also drawn from other HMI visits to schools in the LEA as part of their national monitoring work.

COMMENTARY

4. Wigan serves a population of 310,000. It forms the most westerly part of the Greater Manchester conurbation. There are pockets of significant deprivation across the borough. Despite the improvement in the borough's comparative economic performance, unemployment remains high, particularly amongst young people.

5. Wigan council's strong commitment to education is reflected in the long held belief that high standards and good quality education are essential to improving the life chances of young people, and to the regeneration of the borough as a whole. Funding has been substantially above the education Standard Spending Assessment for many years. The council has been imaginative and energetic in its pursuit of external funding and has been very successful in attracting substantial additional resources for schools.

6. Standards on entry to school are rather below the national average, but throughout schooling standards are in line with national averages. The rate of improvement is generally below the national trend except in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2, and for one or more A* to G grades at GCSE, where the rate of improvement is in line with the national trend. Rates of attendance, unauthorised absence and exclusions are all broadly in line with national figures, except for secondary schools where the rate of exclusions is below average. The percentage of primary and secondary schools judged to be good or very good is in line with the national average.

7. Partnership working is embedded in the council's values, priorities and modernised political structure. Senior elected members and officers consult widely and are highly regarded by schools. They value and recognise the importance of headteachers as senior managers within the authority. The director of education provides strong leadership and has created a climate of trust in which a willingness to listen and to be challenged are key features. Relationships between the LEA and schools are of exceptionally high quality. Effective collaboration with external agencies and the private sector is a strong feature of the education service and has contributed to school improvement, most notably in the work-related curriculum. Partnership with the Education Action Zone (EAZ) is strong and productive, particularly in the joint working to support schools causing concern.

8. The LEA's strategy for school improvement is a major strength, although the recent changes introduced by the school effectiveness branch have yet to impact fully on the overall rate of improvement. The LEA's very good support for school management and self-evaluation is actively promoting the autonomy of schools, and has firmly established a shared commitment to continuous improvement. Evidence from primary schools that have been inspected twice indicates improvement in the quality of education, school climate and management. Recent improvements in the quality of performance data are enabling link advisers to achieve a more effective balance between challenge and support. However, the current allocation of link adviser time is not sufficiently differentiated and does not allow self-improving schools to purchase the service according to need. The LEA intends to review its pattern of provision.

9. Wigan is a good LEA. Its strengths are significant and far outweigh the few weaknesses. The following functions and services are performed very effectively:

- the Education Development Plan;
- provision of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention;
- support for literacy and numeracy in primary and special schools;
- support to governors;
- support for school management;
- support to schools causing concern;
- support for early years education;
- corporate planning;
- the leadership of elected members and senior officers;
- partnership working with schools and other agencies;
- financial support services;
- personnel support;
- support for attendance; and
- support for children in public care.

10. Although the LEA has prioritised its strategy for inclusion and has begun to tackle the weaknesses in its provision for Special Educational Needs, weaknesses still remain. The following functions are not performed adequately:

- strategic planning; and
- value for money of the provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

11. Moreover, the LEA's provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school is poor. The legal status of the centre which receives excluded pupils, or those at risk of exclusion, is unclear and consequently is not accountable or subject to external scrutiny.

12. The LEA however, is in a strong position to meet the challenges it faces. The LEA's partnership with schools is securely established. Its commitment to promoting greater social inclusion is shared by schools. Senior officers and members have demonstrated that they have the capacity, capability and drive to take forward their plans for further improvement.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13. Wigan is the twelfth largest metropolitan district covering an area of 77 square miles. It brings together a number of communities grouped around the larger towns of Wigan and Leigh, and forms the most westerly part of Greater Manchester. The population is approximately 310,000. There are concentrations of significant deprivation in some parts of the borough, but the general picture is one of small pockets located in every town within the borough. The authority is ranked 57th most deprived on the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation. Unemployment is above the national average and is ranked ninth on the basis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation unemployment scale. It is particularly high amongst young people.

14. The proportion of pupils in Wigan schools eligible for free school meals at 17.4 per cent is broadly in line with the national average. About one per cent of the pupil population is of minority ethnic heritage, which is well below the national average of 11.7 per cent. There are approximately 4.0 per cent of primary and 5.7 per cent of secondary aged pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN). These figures are well above the national average. The percentage of pupils attending special schools is 1.9 per cent which is also well above average.

15. There are 145 schools in the borough. Fifty six per cent of schools are aided which is the highest percentage in any LEA nationally. Wigan maintains two nursery, 112 primary schools (30 of which have nursery provision), 21 secondary and ten special schools. The LEA, together with The Wigan Partnership, produced and shaped the bid for the Leigh Education Action Zone (EAZ) which has been operational since January 1999. The EAZ involves 21 primary schools, two secondary schools and three special schools. The LEA offers a place in school to every four-year-old whose parent wishes it. Currently places are also available for 80 per cent of three-year-olds in a variety of settings.

16. Two of the secondary schools provide sixth form education. The majority of students who remain in education post-16 attend either one of the two sixth form colleges or the local college of further education. The proportion of Year 11 pupils (60 per cent) staying on in full-time education is significantly below the national average of 68 per cent.

Performance

17. The LEA's data indicate that children enter school attaining levels that are rather below the national average. At the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, standards are in line with national averages, although in mathematics at Key Stage 2, pupils' attain rather better than the national average. Results at the end of Key Stage 3 and at GCSE are broadly in line with the national averages.

18. Standards are rising but generally the rise is not in line with the national trend. The rate of improvement in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2, and for one or more A* to G grades at GCSE, is broadly in line with the national trend. In most other instances, the rate of improvement is below the national trend. At Key

Stage 3 the rate of improvement in English is well below the national trend. At A-Level, the average points score of pupils is broadly in line with the national average but the rate of improvement is below the national trend.

19. The rates of attendance and of unauthorised absence for primary and secondary schools are broadly in line with the national averages. The exclusion rates are broadly in line with the national figure for primary schools and below that for secondary schools.

20. OFSTED inspection evidence shows that the proportions of primary and secondary schools judged to be good or very good are broadly in line with the national averages. Evidence from schools that have been inspected twice indicates that improvements have been made at the primary level with regard to the quality of education, school climate and management. In secondary schools, inspection evidence indicates that improvements have been made with regard to the school climate. Currently, following OFSTED inspections one school is in special measures, four have been judged have serious weaknesses and two have been categorised as under-achieving. The LEA has identified five further schools as causing concern and eight as vulnerable. There are four Beacon schools.

Funding

21. The resources per pupil in Wigan from the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) are among the lowest in metropolitan authorities. The council has compensated for this by funding education substantially above the education SSA for many years. Over the last six years, the local authority has cumulatively spent around £45m more than the education SSA. In 2000/01, it spent £8.3m more than the SSA. Education spending has been protected and enhanced at a time when other local authority services have faced serious reductions in expenditure.

	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
Budget/ actual (£ million)	118.9	117.4	124.7	131.7	138.8
SSA (£ million)	110.1	109.4	119.5	125.3	130.5
Budget/ actual as % of SSA	108%	107%	104%	105%	106%

22. Wigan delegates a higher than average percentage of the local schools budget (LSB) to schools; 87.3 per cent compared to a metropolitan average of 84.9 per cent and an England average of 84.2 per cent. The delegation of school meals to primary schools and the substantial resources in special schools are significant factors in this high level of delegation.

23. Wigan LEA's spending per pupil on central administration costs and in almost all areas of central expenditure is lower than average, and in some cases, is substantially lower. The only exceptions are expenditure on the arts which is

considered further in Section 2 of this report, and historic premature retirement costs, where current and future costs are now effectively controlled.

24. The council has been imaginative and energetic in its pursuit of external funding thereby attracting substantial additional resources for education in Wigan. Success in this area includes:

- LEA support for secondary schools seeking to become specialist colleges. Seven out of 21 secondary schools are now specialist colleges;
- LEA support for establishing the Leigh Education Action Zone;
- additional resources into schools through the Coalfield Challenge and Single Regeneration Budget;
- active partnerships with local businesses which have brought significant resources into education, notably the development of curriculum centres; and
- higher than average level of resources into capital investment in school buildings through the New Deal for Schools (NDS) and other sources.

Council structure

25. Wigan council consists of 72 councillors: (70 Labour, one Liberal Democrat) and one Conservative. In May 2000, the Council adopted an informal cabinet of ten members, comprising the leader and nine portfolio holders. The cabinet structure reflects the importance of partnership working within Wigan, with seven of the ten cabinet portfolios matching the seven strategic partnerships in the borough.

26. Work of the cabinet is shadowed and complemented by a number of panels made up of councillors and other co-opted, non-councillor members. Panels have both a policy development and scrutiny role. The lifelong learning panel reviews the council's education and lifelong learning policies and performance. A clear and appropriate timetable of scrutiny for the panel began in September 2000. Evidence from discussion and documentation indicates that elected members have a good understanding of the major educational issues for the borough, but as yet the scrutiny role is not fully established. This is currently under review.

27. Within the education department there are three divisions headed by the director of education: school effectiveness, pupil and student services, and management and development.

The Education Development Plan

28. The LEA has a good Education Development Plan (EDP) that is the product of a wide and appropriate consultation process and a thorough audit of local needs.

29. The plan's priorities are costed and feasible. They are:

- raising standards of literacy in all schools;
- raising standards of numeracy in all schools;
- raising standards of information and communication technology (ICT) in all schools;
- inclusive education;

- improving leadership and management in all schools;
- improving teaching and curriculum provision in primary schools;
- improving teaching and curriculum provision in Key Stage 3; and
- improving teaching and curriculum provision: 14-19.

30. The priorities have little obvious local colour as they are nationally accepted areas for improvement, but the schools were consulted well and strongly support the plan as relevant to their needs. There is some local emphasis in the literacy priority and in Year 2 of the plan, for example in inclusion and strategies for disseminating good practice.

31. The EDP's targets are challenging but achievable, and were established by a clear process. The activity plans are clear and focused, with sensible timescales. The actions to be taken are appropriate for successful completion of the activities. Originally, there was insufficient differentiation of target groups within some activity plans but this has been addressed in the Year 2 plan.

32. The LEA is making sound progress overall in implementing the EDP. In relation to improving leadership and management, the progress has been good. However, there have been some delays in the implementation of activities in the inclusive education priority due to reconsideration of the LEA's inclusion strategy. The monitoring is a thorough and well-managed process, based on quantifiable and qualitative criteria that have been improved further in Year 2, with the help of an external consultant. A new system of programme monitoring and impact evaluation involves the analysis of internal and external data and information. The correspondence between school improvement plans with the EDP is monitored by the link advisers and in the schools visited, is close. The impact of individual programmes is checked in a sample of schools. The schools are also effectively involved in monitoring and development through 13 working parties of wide representation. All in-service training provided by the LEA is linked to EDP priorities and some is focused on individual schools.

33. The LEA is making appropriate plans for Year 3 of the current EDP and for the first year of its second plan. Sensibly, it is seeking to co-ordinate the EDP's planning cycle with those of the schools and of the school effectiveness branch (SEB). Strong links are established between the EDP and operational service plans.

The allocation of resources to priorities

34. The processes for the allocation of resources to priorities are generally effective with only one area of significant weakness. Disproportionate resources have been allocated to Special Educational Needs (SEN). Resources have been particularly concentrated on provision within special schools and in out of borough placement costs, both of which are above average, and on provision for the high number of pupils with statements. In addition, £3.1m has been delegated to schools to meet additional educational needs. The council is now making positive efforts to re-focus resources into earlier intervention and preventative work in schools. Currently, however, the LEA does not have a long-term financial strategy for the re-distribution of these resources.

35. The council has very effective mechanisms for consulting schools on the distribution of education resources. Schools feel that they are clear on where resources are allocated, that their views are listened to in the consultation process, and that the LEA is committed to ensuring that resources are passed on to schools in the borough.

36. The council has made positive efforts to speed up the process for notifying schools of their budget share and was one day away from meeting the Government target of 1 March. At the time of the inspection however, schools had not been notified of the resources available for the early identification of Special Educational Needs under the new school-based identification system (SIS) which began on 1 April 2001.

37. The funding formula for schools is clear and has been subject to extensive consultation with schools. Following consultation, the LEA has developed a formula to base teaching costs on actual rather than average salaries in the primary sector.

38. The positive support provided to individual schools on budget planning has helped to avoid significant problems with budget deficits for those schools with falling rolls. The level of surpluses in some schools is too high, particularly in the primary sector. For the last three years, total balances have been around £5m, approximately five per cent of the schools budget. Primary balances have been around £3.5m, 7.3 per cent of the overall primary school budget. The LEA has clear mechanisms for schools to account for their plans for surpluses of greater than £25,000 in primary and special schools and £50,000 in secondary schools. It also has a loan scheme in place to allow schools to borrow against surpluses in other schools.

Approach to Best Value

39. The local authority has developed effective processes for Best Value with a strong commitment to challenge services. In 1999, a residents' survey was an early important influence in deciding how the council would review its services under Best Value. The audit of Wigan's Best Value Performance Plan in 2000 demonstrated that the council's approach to the plan was satisfactory. All LEA services are covered within the plan.

40. The council has in place a process using performance indicators to inform its selection of services for Best Value review. Most of these indicators were gathered in a borough-wide survey which was also part of a wider and more cost effective survey across Greater Manchester. Education services received positive ratings by residents in the survey. The SEN services were chosen for review because performance indicators in this area are seriously out of line with other authorities, hence review of the services was a high priority for the LEA. The arts services were also chosen for early review since expenditure on the arts in Wigan is significantly higher than in most other authorities.

41. The processes for challenging services subject to Best Value reviews (BVR) are generally strong in Wigan. Elected members with a Best Value responsibility, the chief executive and corporate staff all play a very strong role in the initial scoping

process for a BVR and in the final challenge to the findings. An initial day is held to ensure that the review process has adequate scope. Application of these processes however, within the two education BVRs seen as part of this inspection, was more variable. For example, the review of the arts advisory and support service failed to consider fully the option of other providers as part of the review process.

42. Comparative information is used intelligently during the review process. This includes positive attempts to develop information beyond the headline information readily available for services. In common with all authorities, further work is needed to make comparative information more sophisticated, particularly in areas where traditionally such data has not been available. The local authority is making efforts to ensure that all services start to collect this information and is about to purchase a central information management system to assist with this process.

43. Extensive consultation with schools has been carried out as part of the Best Value reviews and has been used as part of the process of coming to conclusions. Consultation with end-users, however, has been insufficiently developed to date. In individual reviews, such as the arts advisory and support service BVR and the inclusive education (SEN) BVR, there has been no involvement of pupils or their parents.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

44. The LEA's commitment to partnership working is having a positive impact on school improvement. Collaboration with The Wigan Partnership has resulted in the development of curriculum centres in a wide range of business settings. They provide staff and pupils with unique opportunities for teaching and learning within the work related curriculum. Effective multi-agency working within programmes funded through Coalfield Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget has contributed to raising attainment and promoting social inclusion within the primary sector.

45. The school effectiveness branch plays a key role in implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement. Recent improvements in the quality and use of performance data are enabling link advisers to provide more effective challenge to schools. The management services of the LEA are generally aligned well to the school improvement agenda; in particular, the finance and personnel sections provide efficient and effective services, which are responsive to the needs of headteachers and governing bodies. Currently there are weaknesses in the LEA's strategy for inclusion, and provision for pupils who are excluded from school is unsatisfactory.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

46. The LEA's provision for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention is good. Its effectiveness is illustrated by the clear improvement in the quality of primary schools between their first and second OFSTED inspections. This follows the LEA making primary school improvement a high priority in recent years.

47. Several features of the provision are very strong. The LEA has developed a clear view, agreed with schools, of its role in school improvement. The relationships between the LEA and the schools are of exceptionally high quality. They know and trust each other well and agree that a close, supportive but challenging relationship is beneficial. The schools are well informed and the LEA genuinely and effectively consults them.

48. The LEA's monitoring is effective. It is carried out primarily through the analysis of data by all branches and through the visits of link advisers to schools. These have recently been supplemented by a system of interim reviews of schools' capacity for self-improvement. This desk-based exercise is carried out at the mid-point in a school's OFSTED inspection cycle. Overwhelmingly, the schools value the six half-day visits annually by their link advisers. The first two are given to the setting of priorities and target-setting, the next three follow an agenda agreed between the LEA and the school, and the final visit takes the form of an annual review. The link advisers achieve an effective balance between support and challenge and there is little evidence of cosiness or paternalism in their work with the schools. However, the core allocation of six annual visits to all schools, regardless of the quality of their performance or the extent of their needs, does not fit well with the LEA's intention to help schools to be autonomous. In practice, some differentiation does take place. For example, a highly successful secondary school has requested and receives only

two link adviser visits annually whereas schools in difficulty benefit from considerably more than the core allocation. It is also the case that the LEA's monitoring, challenge and support are well targeted to schools' individual needs and circumstances. Nevertheless, the blanket allocation of link adviser time does not allow self-improving schools to purchase the service according to their need for it. It is appropriate that the LEA intends to review its pattern of provision for schools and the link adviser role.

49. The LEA's intervention in schools causing concern and those with short-term problems is clearly defined, rigorous and effective, although in two schools it has not been early enough. This weakness has now been addressed by the recent introduction of the interim review strategy.

50. There is a high level of buy-back by schools of the advisory services. The work of the advisers is highly valued by schools. Their levels of expertise, experience and commitment are very high, they are well managed and their deployment is increasingly closely linked to the EDP process. The arrangements for performance management are sound. All members of staff have been trained as appraisers and appraisees and their targets and personal development plans are reviewed annually. Important improvements are taking place, including audits of skills and expertise and the revision of job descriptions. Very good opportunities are provided for continuing professional development, and the effective induction programme for newly appointed advisers includes work shadowing and paired visits.

Collection and analysis of data

51. The provision of data and the support to schools for their use have some strengths and few major weaknesses. This is an improving aspect of the LEA's support for school improvement.

52. The EDP makes clear the LEA's intention to improve the use of performance data. In response to the EDP audit, a new information and planning unit was formed in September 2000. The unit provides a comprehensive range of relevant data, which enables schools and secondary subject departments to analyse their performance, including comparisons with others in the LEA. Understandably, some schools find the amount and presentation of the data forbidding and would like more written guidance on their use. However, the LEA provides an extensive and thorough training programme on the use of data for senior managers, teachers and governors centrally, in clusters and in individual schools. Advisers are also trained.

53. A developing strength of the service is that individual pupil data are used and shared by the LEA and schools; especially by primary and increasingly, in secondary schools. The LEA has developed good value added measures for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, and work is in progress for KS4, using a process of multi-level analysis from a neighbouring LEA. The value-added measures, based on individual pupil data and including an appropriate element of challenge, are used increasingly systematically and effectively in target-setting discussions between headteachers, governors and link advisers. This was a necessary improvement as previously the target-setting process had lacked precision; some schools had impossibly high targets and for others, the targets were unambitious. In 2000, the primary schools' aggregated

targets for Key Stage 2 literacy fell roughly five per cent short of the LEA's targets whereas their results exceeded them by a similar margin. The fit between LEA and school targets is now improving. Special schools however, are not yet sufficiently well supported in the target-setting process.

54. The information and planning unit has recently produced a management profile for each school, which uses data to indicate strengths and weaknesses in performance and alerts the school and LEA to areas of concern. The document provides an important focus for discussion between headteachers and link advisers and within senior management teams.

Support for literacy and numeracy

55. Support for literacy and numeracy in primary and special schools is good. The EDP identifies a range of appropriate activities for literacy and numeracy and makes appropriate links with other identified priorities.

56. Support for secondary schools however, has been limited. The advisers have offered support through regular meetings for heads of department. Representatives from all English departments in secondary schools have attended initial training based on materials from the Key Stage 3 national pilot. However, targeted support for those secondary schools with an identified need to improve attainment in English at Key Stage 3 has not been available. Many heads of mathematics departments and Year 7 teachers have observed daily mathematics lessons in Year 6 and about two thirds of primary schools have arranged reciprocal visits. Improvements however, are planned in line with the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies at Key Stage 3. From May 2001, two Key Stage 3 consultants, one for literacy and one for numeracy, have provide an intensive support to secondary schools.

Literacy

57. In 2000, the results of statutory assessment in English show that by the end of Key Stage 1 pupil attainment is in line with the national average. At Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 or above has shown steady improvement from 68 per cent in 1998 to 76 per cent in 2000. This rate of improvement is broadly in line with that found nationally. The LEA set the challenging target of 85 per cent for 2002 in order to demonstrate the priority which it gives to improving standards in literacy. However, there was a gap of five per cent between its target of 75 per cent for 2000 and the aggregated schools' targets. The LEA was required by the DfEE to produce an action plan in which the work of the consultants was targeted appropriately on schools with low targets. Results for 2000 exceeded the LEA target.

58. Results at Key Stage 3 show a slower rate of improvement from 64.7 per cent in 1998 to 66.7 per cent in 2000. At GCSE, the proportion of pupils gaining a C grade or above in English has risen from 51 per cent in 1998 to 55.7 per cent in 2000.

59. The LEA's 'Gender and Achievement' project, which is not specific to English, recognises and attempts to address the discrepancy between the achievement of

boys and girls, which increases (in English) as pupils get older. Between 1999 and 2000, the gap at the end of Key Stage 3 reduced from 19 per cent to 15 per cent. Family literacy projects are targeted at pupils entering reception class. There are useful links between the work of the literacy and early year's teams, and with the special needs support service, to ensure clear and consistent messages.

60. The management of the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy is efficient and effective. Clear and appropriate criteria have been used to identify schools for intensive support. The work of the consultants is good and they are highly valued by schools for their expertise, knowledge and practical advice. The quality of training is good. Joint analysis of statutory tests by schools and consultants has confirmed that the national priority of raising attainment in writing is also a priority for Wigan.

Numeracy

61. Attainment in mathematics is improving in all key stages. At the end of Key Stage 1 over 90 per cent of pupils achieved Level 2 or above in 2000. This is in line with the national average and shows an improvement of three per cent from 1999. At the end of Key Stage 2, almost 75 per cent of pupils achieved Level 4 or above. This is above the national average of 72 per cent but it represents a gain of only 0.8 per cent on Wigan's 1999 achievement. However, in the previous year, results rose by nine per cent. The 2002 target of 80 per cent remains realistically achievable. Aggregated school targets are in line with the LEA target. At Key Stage 3 attainment is in line with the national average with 65.8 per cent of pupils achieving Level 5 or above. At GCSE, almost 46 per cent of pupils achieved at least a C grade in mathematics compared with 43 per cent in 1998.

62. Wigan was part of the National Numeracy Pilot project, prior to the implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS). The development of a numeracy resource centre has been much appreciated by schools. Appropriate links are made with information and communication technology and family numeracy initiatives.

63. The management of the implementation of NNS is efficient and effective. Clear and appropriate criteria have been used to identify schools for intensive support. The work of the consultants is good. During visits to primary schools their expertise, knowledge and practical advice were consistently praised. The quality of training is good. The joint analysis with schools of the outcomes of statutory tests has resulted in a concerted effort to improve pupils' use of calculators and their ability to solve mathematical problems. These two areas have become the focus for training, for consultants' work in schools and for the demonstration lessons provided by leading mathematics teachers. NNS consultants have provided additional training for teachers in individual year groups. This has been appreciated by schools and has been welcomed by teachers who would otherwise have no contact with consultants. Schools visited commented on the responsiveness of the consultants, whether or not the school was receiving intensive support.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

64. LEA support for the development of curriculum and administrative ICT in schools has some strengths and few major weaknesses. Significant progress in the quality and extent of the support has been made recently. Evidence from OFSTED inspection reports indicates that the progress in ICT of primary pupils is broadly in line with the national picture, although fewer Wigan schools make above average progress than in the nation as a whole. The progress in secondary schools is better than that found nationally.

65. The schools were consulted thoroughly about the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) priorities and the LEA has provided an appropriate level of support to help schools, particularly in the primary phase, to take advantage of resources. In developing equipment levels, the LEA has achieved an appropriate balance between advising on purchase and leaving schools free to take decisions. In most cases, this has produced a configuration of equipment on which schools can build for the future. As part of the investment, all schools have been provided with ISDN lines. The LEA web site is in operation, contains helpful curriculum material and provides links to school web sites and a range of other useful sites.

66. The ICT priority within the EDP was based on a local audit, which revealed that while standards in ICT in secondary schools were above national averages, those at Key Stages 1 and 2 were below. The priority includes sensible and realistic ways of improving performance but the activity plans for their implementation, although satisfactory, lack sufficient focus. The LEA's support has been concentrated mainly on primary schools where the need was greatest. However, appropriate attention is now being given to Key Stage 3 and a part-time advisory teacher for the secondary phase has been appointed.

67. Link advisers carried out an audit of ICT provision in most primary and special schools in Spring 2000. Schools are kept informed and consulted through termly ICT co-ordinators' meetings, headteachers' groups, the EDP working party on ICT and a termly newsletter. The LEA prioritises support for ICT in the curriculum and has recently strengthened its advisory support, chiefly through secondments from its schools. The good range of courses provided for schools receives positive evaluations. Schools also benefit from specialist advisory visits, an annual ICT exhibition and effective links with externally-funded projects. An appropriately strong emphasis is placed on sharing good practice.

68. The LEA provided effective advice on ICT development planning and the LEA judges that all schools now have at least adequate development plans. The schools have also been helped to develop schemes of work, based on the LEA's own scheme which links well with that produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). A major weakness in the LEA's support is that, apart from information from OFSTED inspection reports, the LEA has an insecure grasp of pupils' standards of attainment and progress in ICT. Currently, schools lack adequate advice from the LEA on assessment. In addition, support for the use of ICT across the curriculum, and especially in literacy and numeracy, is at an early stage of development.

69. The authority provided appropriately objective advice to schools in relation to New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training. Roughly half the schools have started the

training or fixed a date for its commencement. However, in about 60 per cent of schools, no teachers have received training in basic ICT skills.

70. The LEA has provided sound support to the development of administrative ICT in schools, but is not currently at the forefront of developments in this area. The school financial systems function adequately and are about to be upgraded. Pupil databases are functioning in schools. Some, but not all, schools are making use of the range of software to manage assessment, attendance and other management issues in schools. All schools have successfully piloted the DfEE electronic pupil census in the last few weeks. The LEA is in the forefront among authorities in successfully implementing technology for primary schools which enables administrative software to be held centrally on LEA servers. The most important benefit of this is that it allows administrative software to be upgraded simultaneously in all schools over the course of a weekend.

71. All schools have the basic infrastructure to develop electronic communication with the LEA, but schools vary in the use they make of this facility. Currently, management information on the range of LEA responsibilities is held on around a hundred separate databases and data is not routinely transferred between schools and the LEA. There is a clear plan, however, for the development of an integrated education database which can link with schools, and provide a basis to meet the DfEE requirements for the electronic transfer of information to schools.

Support for schools causing concern

72. LEA support for schools causing concern is a strength, with a number of particularly good features. The LEA's record in supporting schools requiring special measures is a good one. Since 1993, six schools have been judged to require special measures; two special schools and four primary schools. Five of these schools have been removed from special measures, all within two years and in the case of one school, in only seven months.

73. Since 1997, eight schools have been judged to have serious weaknesses. Seven of these schools have since been monitored and judged to have made satisfactory progress against key issues in the action plan. Two further schools - one secondary and one primary have been formally identified as underachieving schools. In the case of the secondary school, highly effective partnership working between senior LEA officers and three secondary headteachers has resulted in an innovative approach to school improvement, involving a meticulously planned consultancy programme for the newly appointed headteacher. Although in the very early stages of development, there are encouraging signs of improvement, such as in attendance. Prior to this project, the LEA had been slow to intervene but since the school's formal identification, intervention and support have been strong, well focused and appropriate to the needs of the school. The project has been enthusiastically supported by all of the partners involved and with support from the chief executive is being incorporated into the council's neighbourhood renewal strategy.

74. The LEA consulted fully with all of its key partners in the development of its policy and procedures for identifying schools causing concern. In 2000, this policy

was strengthened by the development of a framework of performance criteria designed to support this identification process, together with a range of 'alerts' for use amongst all LEA staff. The range includes a strong representation of outcome indicators such as attainment, progress including value added, attendance and exclusions data, alongside qualitative data on teaching, leadership and management, personnel issues and parental complaints, amongst others. The application of these criteria is already resulting in earlier identification and a more effective targeting of schools requiring intervention and support; in particular for those schools in the lowest category of LEA concern, identified as 'vulnerable' schools. There are currently five schools causing serious concern and eight 'vulnerable' schools identified by the LEA. Schools visited during the inspection welcomed the greater transparency in the LEA's procedures. Schools surveyed for the inspection rated highly the LEA's support for support schools causing concern.

75. Advisers regularly monitor the progress of schools against an agreed action plan and report clear judgements to the governing body. Support for each school is reviewed systematically by senior officers and headteachers are required to produce a written report on progress against issues in the plan. For schools requiring special measures, there is also detailed follow-up by the link adviser to the outcomes of monitoring visits by HMI. Whilst the lead member for lifelong learning receives regular reports on schools causing concern, since the establishment of the lifelong learning panel, there has not been a replacement for the former school effectiveness committee of the education committee. Consequently, there is no wider reporting on schools causing concern to elected members. This situation has been acknowledged by the LEA and is currently under review.

76. In many instances, the LEA has been prepared to intervene and to take robust action when needed. In this regard, LEA advisers and personnel staff have worked together effectively in confronting issues of headteacher or teacher incompetence and in ensuring that governing bodies are supported appropriately. The LEA has been very successful in negotiating the secondment of senior staff from successful schools to assist such schools. In two schools visited however, the LEA had been slow to raise concerns regarding school performance. This situation has now been addressed through the introduction of the interim review strategy.

Support for governors

77. The LEA provides very good support to governors. In the pre-inspection survey, Wigan schools' evaluations of governor support were the highest of the 77 LEAs surveyed.

78. The governor services team's planning is of high quality and its activities are well targeted to meet its statutory duties, the LEA's priorities and the needs of governors. In six months, the proportion of vacancies on governing bodies has been reduced from 11.3 per cent to 8.6 per cent, which is below the national average. The LEA has a range of effective recruitment strategies that place it on course to meet its target for vacancies in the current academic year of six per cent.

79. The LEA has a variety of effective methods for informing and consulting governors. There are termly briefing meetings for governing body chairs and for LEA

governors with the director of education and the portfolio holder for lifelong learning. The governor planning and development group gives guidance on planning. The governors forum was established by governors, with the LEA's assistance, and is now an independent group that represents governing bodies in discussions with the LEA. An informative and well-presented termly newsletter keeps governors and governing body clerks up-to-date with current issues. Advice is available through a telephone helpline.

80. Training is provided through a straightforward service level agreement that is purchased by every school. The evaluations of those who attend are almost entirely positive and the increasing demand for training has led to the appointment of an additional member of staff in the governor support team. In a sensible attempt to increase the range of governors attending training, the LEA has started to provide courses for area clusters of schools. New governors report that their induction is excellent. An annual conference is always over-subscribed and attracts 350 governors to hear speakers of national repute.

81. An appropriately strong emphasis in the training is given to monitoring, self-evaluation and interpretation of data. The governor services team estimates that 60 per cent of governors are involved in school self-evaluation but the level of involvement varies and the LEA rightly intends to invite governors to participate in its annual reviews of schools. Three governing bodies have successfully piloted, with LEA support, a self-review process that has enabled them to identify strengths and weaknesses and to develop their roles.

82. If required, the LEA will recommend governing body clerks. A helpful handbook and regular training sessions are provided for clerks and, in response to requests from some schools, a peripatetic clerking service is to be piloted under a service level agreement.

83. Governors of schools in special measures report strong, challenging support from the LEA, which has a number of experienced governors whom it calls on to act as additional governors for schools in difficulty.

Support for school management

84. The LEA provides very good support for leadership and management, which is valued highly by the schools. Evidence from OFSTED inspections shows that the quality of management and efficiency is broadly in line with national figures and is improving, particularly in primary schools.

85. The EDP priority to improve leadership and management is based on a thorough audit which highlighted aspects of leadership and management that needed to be improved in order to raise standards, in particular self-evaluation, improvement planning and professional development. The priority's five activities constitute an appropriate programme for improvement. Good progress is evident in, for example, more systematic target-setting by schools, more firmly established self-evaluation processes, and closer links between the EDP and school improvement plans.

86. The relationships between the LEA and school managers are excellent and procedures for information and consultation are well established. The headteachers meet senior officers regularly and primary school heads value the half-termly cluster meetings with link advisers. Annual residential conferences for primary heads and for secondary heads are jointly planned with the LEA, as is the annual non-residential conference for primary heads and their deputies. The recent introduction of a regular forum for deputy headteachers has been particularly welcomed by schools. Link advisers play a crucial role and work effectively with personnel and finance officers in supporting school management.

87. The LEA's training provision for senior managers is of high quality. Short courses, for example on personnel and finance, are provided centrally and supplemented by in-school support if necessary. A post graduate degree course in educational management, funded by the Teacher Training Agency, is currently oversubscribed (by established and aspirant senior managers) and includes important research elements linked to the EDP. The LEA's own intensive residential and non-residential senior management courses also include beneficial school-based research projects. Working with a local university, the EAZ and private consultants, the LEA has established a pilot project in two schools that builds on the approach of the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) and will be offered to other schools later in 2001. The LEA gives strong support to the LPSH and the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and good numbers of candidates are involved. The LEA is not a learning programme provider for new headteachers (HEADLAMP) but new heads in Wigan schools benefit from the LEA's sound knowledge of other providers.

88. There is a scheme for mentoring newly appointed heads, but visits to schools during the inspection indicated that its implementation was of mixed effectiveness. However, a very positive example of experienced heads providing support for a newly appointed colleague in a challenging school is evident in a project funded jointly by the LEA and the DfEE. This project also illustrates very good co-operation between the authority, headteachers and governors, and is an example of the LEA's effective use of the good practice in its schools.

89. The support for middle managers has been a priority in recent years and is a very strong feature of the LEA's provision. In addition to subject advice, teachers in charge of curricular areas receive effective training in self-evaluation and their regular meetings with advisers have a standards-raising agenda that includes improvement planning and target-setting. The LEA's support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and their mentors meets national requirements and is highly regarded by schools.

90. The programme of courses provided by the LEA is closely linked to the EDP and to national standards. Appropriately, the current curriculum priorities include Key Stage 3 and personal, social and health education (PSHE). There is no established system of brokering but the LEA does suggest quality assured alternative providers when it cannot offer training itself. The schools almost always choose the LEA's provision when it is available. All the primary schools and 95 per cent of the secondary schools purchase the service level agreement for in-service training.

91. The LEA is an accredited provider of the OFSTED self-evaluation course. So far, the heads and deputies of two-thirds of the primary schools, all the special schools and most secondary schools have received this training. Appropriate targeting has ensured that the primary senior managers most in need of the training have been included. The LEA has appropriately adapted its own self-evaluation processes to take account of the OFSTED course. The Wigan self-evaluation framework helps schools to assess their position on a series of management measures in a location profile. The quality of monitoring and self-evaluation in the schools is not yet sufficiently consistent; it is currently stronger in secondary schools. The LEA's framework is used with increasing effectiveness by senior managers and link advisers in primary schools, and is sensibly being extended to departmental managers in secondary schools. Nine advisers have trained in aspects of performance management in order to keep up-to-date with developments, for the benefit of schools.

Support for early years education

92. Support for early years education is good and there is a well co-ordinated and coherent approach to ensuring appropriate early years education and childcare within the borough. The LEA's strategy is clearly set out in the early years development and childcare plan which has been fully approved by the DfEE. Provision is available for all four-year-olds and currently for 80 per cent of three-year-olds whose parents want it, within a mixture of maintained, private and, to a lesser extent, voluntary settings.

93. Composition of the early years development and childcare partnership (EYDCP) is appropriate. The independent chair of the EYDCP is highly regarded, and working relationships within the partnership and across other sectors are very productive. The recent annual consultation seminar on future plans for the EYDCP was well attended by all of the key partners, including parents and children, whose views were also sought. There are close links with the recently established Sure Start project and with the Leigh Education Action Zone.

94. The LEA is making a positive contribution to raising standards in early years settings through the strong focus on training and quality assurance. A comprehensive cross-sector training programme has been established, some of which is accredited through the national framework for vocational qualifications (NVQs). Training for the introduction of the Foundation Stage was delivered in-house with almost 100 per cent take up from providers in the borough. The training was based on existing good practice and the course evaluation was very positive. The EYDCP has set minimum standards for early years training which are monitored by The Wigan Partnership.

95. OFSTED inspection data on nursery education in 1999/2000 show that 92 per cent of settings were judged to be acceptable. A self-evaluation package is currently being piloted in five schools within the EAZ and in a number of other schools across the borough. Community advisory teachers provide support for pre-schools and playgroups registered with the partnership. All OFSTED reports are monitored and follow-up support for post-OFSTED action plans is provided. There are good

examples of intensive support in both maintained and private settings where weaknesses had been identified during an inspection.

The arts advisory and support service Best Value Review

96. Since 1974, Wigan LEA has been committed to securing the arts as an important part of the education provision within the borough. In 1995, the arts advisory and support service was established as an integrated service for the visual and performing arts. The service provides a wide range of support activities including a visual arts centre, a performing arts centre, instrumental teaching provision through a flexible service of 65 self-employed instrumental music teachers and extensive opportunities for pupils to access the arts. The service already brokers arrangements between local schools and a wide range of services from external agencies and independent professional artists and performers. The key areas of the service not subject to this approach are advice and support to schools.

97. The cost per pupil of the music service in Wigan is around the average for metropolitan authorities, but the expenditure on the visual and performing arts other than music is around £10 per pupil compared to a metropolitan average of £1 per pupil. The council has succeeded in obtaining external funding for part of the work of the service, but the majority of the cost is funded from central LEA resources. Some work was done on disaggregating the costs of different elements of the service in other LEAs, as part of the review process. Only three of Wigan's statistical neighbours fund an arts service beyond provision for music. Comparative information in this area is therefore limited.

98. The service has not been effectively challenged as part of the Best Value review process. There was no consideration of other providers or other ways of providing a service. Challenge has been largely through a comparison of entries and results in GCSE subjects with those of the LEA's statistical neighbours. More pupils in Wigan schools, and from a broader ability range, continue to study arts subjects at Key Stage 4 than in the LEA's statistical neighbours. GCSE results in drama, music and visual art in Wigan compare favourably with those of their statistical neighbours. For example, in drama the success rate at A* to C grades was the third highest; and in music it was the second highest. In visual art, the percentage of pupils gaining A* to C grades in 2000 was three per cent above the national average. The action plan recognises the need for further work on the impact of the service on raising standards.

99. Schools were fully consulted on their views of the service as part of the review process; of these, 52 per cent responded to a questionnaire. The results of this consultation and visits to schools as part of the LEA inspection demonstrate that schools value the service and see positive links between the work of the service and pupil attainment. Beyond schools, however, consultation during this review was limited. There was no attempt to consult with pupils or parents as consumers of the service. This has been recognised by the LEA as a weakness of the review.

100. The arts advisory and support service is a good service and contributes to raising standards of attainment in the arts. However, the best value review process has not been sufficiently rigorous nor has it provided a fundamental challenge to the

LEA as the provider of arts advice and support to schools. The major outcome of the review is to retain the service but to re-structure it in order to ensure significant savings in both cost and efficiency. It is also proposed to delegate the base budget for the service to schools and to introduce buy-back arrangements by April 2002. This should enable the service to respond more effectively to the needs of schools.

101. Despite some weaknesses in the review process, the action plan is appropriate and will contribute to further improvements in the service. In particular, the plan clearly identifies a commitment to develop performance indicators for the whole service by December 2001 and to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation. The plan, however, does not identify challenging or quantifiable targets in terms of the impact of the service.

Recommendations

In order to improve the provision for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:

- differentiate the allocation of core link adviser time according to the needs of individual schools.

In order to improve the monitoring and evaluation of standards in ICT, it will be necessary to:

- support and monitor schools effectively in assessing what pupils know, understand and can do.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

102. Corporate planning is a major strength of the authority and takes place within an agreed policy framework adopted by the full council. Raising educational standards and promoting social inclusion are key elements within the borough's corporate plan 2000-2001, and the interim community plan which was published in April 2001. The council's long-standing commitment to education is reflected not only in the level of resourcing but in the long-held belief, shared by elected members, that raising standards and the quality of education is essential to improving the life chances of young people and to the regeneration of the borough.

103. Partnership working for the benefit of the whole community is one of four political principles underpinning the corporate processes and has been a strong feature of Wigan. There are seven strategic partnerships within the borough involving the public, private and voluntary sectors, one of which is education and lifelong learning. These partnerships are linked directly into the political management of the council, matching seven of the ten cabinet portfolios for the same policy areas. The leader's forum co-ordinates the work of the strategic partnerships (the partnership network) and sets the long term vision and context for the five-year community plan. In the future, it is intended that the community plan will be one of the key influences on corporate planning.

104. The corporate plan 2000-2001 is a clear, coherent and accessible document that sets out the main elements of the council's agenda for the year linked to other major plans of the authority, such as the Education Development Plan. Extensive consultation, including staff and residents' surveys, has been undertaken to both inform and improve the quality of planning within the authority. The council is committed to continuous improvement of its services and has adopted the European Excellence model (EFQM). The procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans are very good.

105. Planning processes are well established within the education department and ensure that service plans are directly linked to the corporate plan in their targets and objectives. The department management team (DMT) has developed an education strategic plan and service planning is also linked to the principles and strategic objectives within the plan. Earlier internal review indicated weaknesses in the monitoring of departmental plans. The recent introduction of a framework for monitoring and evaluation, based on the experience of monitoring the implementation of the EDP, is designed to bring greater consistency of practice across the department.

106. Strategic leadership of the LEA is very good. Senior elected members and officers of the council consult widely and are highly regarded by schools. They clearly value and recognise the importance of headteachers as senior managers within the authority, and relationships are characterised by mutual trust and respect. This is strongly reflected in the annual consultations on the budget. Elected members receive good advice from officers. Reports are well written and present an

appropriate range of options, as in the case of a recent proposal for a school closure. Decision-making is open and effective with all of the statutory plans and strategies in place. However, it is acknowledged that there is further development required in order for elected members to carry out fully their scrutiny role within the modernised council structure.

107. Leadership of the education department is strong and this is widely recognised by schools. The genuine commitment to partnership, long espoused by the director, has created a climate in which openness and a willingness to listen and to be challenged are key features. It is this spirit of partnership that is now enabling the LEA to take forward the long overdue but critical changes required in the strategy for Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Partnerships

108. Effective partnership working is a major strength of the council and of the education directorate. There is effective collaboration at the corporate level between education and social services, health and the police on a wide range of initiatives. Partnerships with schools and governors are strong and operate effectively. A number of LEA working groups have been established some of which link to priorities and activities within the EDP. Membership is broad and includes officers, headteachers, elected members, teacher association representatives, governors and, in some areas, diocesan representatives. Their functions are both consultative and developmental, and provide a structured opportunity to develop LEA policy and strategy. The LEA enjoys good co-operative relationships with the diocesan authorities and there are examples of particularly effective joint working to support schools causing concern.

109. The Wigan Partnership, set up ten years ago, is a unique and early example of an effective public-private partnership with a clear focus on regeneration and inward investment for the borough. The Partnership includes the education business partnership which has made a significant contribution to the development of the work-related curriculum at both primary and secondary levels. Most notable, is the development of 'classrooms in companies' where joint sponsorship and facilities from local private companies have enabled the establishment of 12 curriculum centres across the borough. Seconded teachers work alongside staff from industry and business to provide teaching. On average, 14,000 pupils per year have access to this experience. A recent evaluation by a local university of the impact of the curriculum centres reported on the raised self-esteem and motivation of pupils who had been involved. Equally successful is the partnership with the careers service and with the local further education college involving non-attenders and pupils at risk of exclusion in accredited vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and progression on to post-16.

110. The LEA has played a major role in the development of all Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programmes and manages the education strategies for SRB1 'Coalfield Challenge' and SRB4 'Opportunities for Excellence' which focuses on two areas of the borough not previously targeted for funding. The SRB programmes are excellent examples of effective multi-agency working to tackle cross cutting issues such as social inclusion, raising standards of attainment and tackling

crime and drug abuse. Much of the early successful work within SRB1 has been sustained and in some cases further developed by the Leigh EAZ, in particular the INSPIRE programme for young children and their families. The LEA has a close working relationship with the EAZ. The EAZ director is a member of the senior management team of the LEA. There are examples of very effective collaborative work between the LEA and the EAZ to support schools causing concern, in particular the targeting of literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) and management support for schools.

Management services

111. The quality of management services delivered to schools ranges from satisfactory to very good. The LEA has established a good network of school user groups which provide regular feedback on the quality of individual service provision. In some instances, this feedback has led to real improvements in the quality of service, such as in the grounds maintenance service.

112. The LEA provides clear information to schools about the services provided and their costs. At present, there is limited choice regarding the level of service provided and limited information on alternative suppliers of services. The LEA is reviewing future service agreements in consultation with schools.

Financial support services

113. The LEA provides excellent financial support services to schools. Schools that have faced budget reductions due to falling school rolls particularly value the high quality of support which is provided to them in managing their budget. The service has helped to ensure that there are no major problems with deficit budgets in Wigan schools. A peripatetic bursar service is available for schools to purchase if they require it. Small schools in particular value the service, which is of a high quality.

114. The LEA has provided schools with benchmarking information for the last three years. This has been particularly beneficial for schools undergoing a staffing re-structure. There is effective cross-service working between finance and personnel staff and link advisers when required. Finance staff have provided useful training for school link advisers. The capacity and effectiveness of schools who manage resources from different funding streams is being enhanced by encouraging schools to focus expenditure in relation to functions rather than separate funding streams. In some instances, schools have been targeted for such support.

Personnel support

115. Personnel support services to schools, provided jointly by the education department and the borough personnel department, are excellent. Schools value the quality of the advice they receive on difficult personnel issues; in particular, those schools which have been subject to restructuring felt that the advice had been handled positively and sensitively. The service provides comprehensive guidance on the full range of personnel issues faced by schools.

116. For the last three years, the service has run an initial screening process for the recruitment of newly qualified teachers on behalf of primary schools. Until recently, teacher recruitment has not been a difficult issue in Wigan. In recent months, however, some schools have experienced difficulties with reduced numbers of applications and in recruiting for certain subject specialist teachers. A working group has been established and the personnel service is now collecting information on recruitment issues and developing a recruitment strategy.

Grounds maintenance

117. The grounds maintenance service provided to schools by the Direct Service Organisation (DSO) used to be poor and was unresponsive to the needs of individual schools. As a result, some schools now obtain a service from private contractors. Following discussions with school users, significant improvements were made to the quality of service provided. Schools continuing to receive the service from the DSO consider that it is now satisfactory.

School meals

118. School meals resources have been delegated to primary and secondary schools and will be delegated to special schools in 2000/01. All schools, apart from one secondary school, purchase the service from the in-house provider. The service provided to schools is satisfactory overall and in a number of schools, liaison arrangements have resulted in the improved flexibility of the service. The lack of investment in kitchen and dining-room facilities is an issue in some schools. Take-up of paid meals in the primary sector is in the lowest quartile among metropolitan authorities.

Cleaning and caretaking

119. Cleaning and caretaking services are provided through a mixed economy of the council DSO, a private sector contract and school self managed arrangements. The service provided to schools is satisfactory.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

120. The LEA maintains ten special schools, issues a much higher than average number of statements of Special Educational Needs, and has more pupils in out of borough special schools than in comparative LEAs or nationally. Over the last 12 months, the LEA has begun to revise its strategy for Special Educational Needs (SEN) in a vigorous and determined manner. However, there are significant areas where schools do not have sufficient information to be able to understand fully the strategic direction. The policy for SEN has been significantly revised to take full account of national policy and the local context. This draft policy which has been the subject of extensive consultation with schools, is built on a strong vision for inclusion and has the full commitment of officers, elected members and schools. However, the SEN strategy is insufficiently detailed and does not set out clearly the long-term model of provision that the LEA intends to adopt.

121. Schools visited during the inspection acknowledge and support the initial stage of the LEA's strategy, in particular the move in April 2001 to a school-based identification system (SIS); an improved procedure to identify pupils with SEN at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice. However, the subsequent stages of the SEN strategy relating to the establishment of local inclusion centres, the development of agreed protocols for multi-agency working and the future role of support services are far from clear to schools and some of the LEA's key partners. A plan to address the financial implications of the strategy is in place for the first year. Beyond that, financial planning is less clear; in particular, there are no mechanisms in place to reduce the number of special schools and to redirect the costs towards increased inclusion. In addition, future training needs to ensure the appropriate levels of expertise in mainstream and special schools have not been identified; in particular, training to meet the needs of pupils with autism and associated communication disorders.

Statutory obligations

122. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations. For a considerable time, statements have taken far too long to complete. Significant progress has been made in recent years. The number of statements prepared within time limits set by national guidelines is 61 per cent overall and 53 per cent when no other agencies are involved. The LEA recognises that the situation is unsatisfactory and statutory provision has been the focus of a recent Best Value review. Recent targets set by the LEA for the timeliness of the issuing of statements are appropriate, but are unlikely to be met without further improvements in the LEA's management of the procedures.

123. The percentage of pupils with a statement issued by the LEA is almost the highest among metropolitan authorities at 4.5 per cent of the school population. The number of new statements increased steadily between 1996 and 1999. New criteria for statutory assessment were introduced in January 2001. As yet, schools' demand for statements is not being sufficiently well managed. An SEN panel, including representatives from schools and other stakeholders, moderates borderline and

contentious cases. The LEA is planning to cease to maintain the statements of approximately 600 pupils. Alongside this, the LEA is planning to provide more support at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice in order to reduce the demand for new statements. This is long overdue.

124. The quality of statements has improved during the last two years from a very poor baseline. However, they do not consistently provide sufficient detail to enable schools to design individual education plans. Despite effective moves to cease to maintain statements where appropriate, the LEA does not have a comprehensive response to the monitoring of annual and transitional reviews. The LEA currently attends Year 9 transitional reviews and others identified by the school as being possible contentious cases.

125. There is an effective parent-partnership service, which benefits from good communication networks within the authority. It has good regional links for advocacy training and conciliation services. Consultation with parents regarding the LEA's plan to cease to maintain the statements of 600 pupils was late and of a limited nature.

School improvement

126. Support for school improvement is generally sound but special schools, in particular, lack access to a range of specialist advice on curricular issues and individual target setting for pupils.

127. The educational psychology service (EPS) has experienced difficulties with staff recruitment and retention. The service works mainly with pupils who have been identified for statutory assessment and within these constraints allocates its time satisfactorily on the basis of need. However, the amount of time needed for statutory work severely limits the involvement of educational psychologists in early intervention strategies. The service plans to move to a consultative model following the introduction of the new procedures for assessment. Schools generally value the support of the service; in particular, where preventative work has been carried out.

128. Wigan education support services (WESS) currently provides a range of SEN services to schools. A team of the link teachers provides advice and support for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and headteachers, including individual pupil assessment. LEA provision also includes the sensory services and a buy-back service for specific learning difficulties. Evidence from school visits indicates that these services are generally effective in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN. However, the basis of their deployment is not well communicated to, nor understood by, schools. In addition, schools are not clear about the future role of the support services, and in particular that of the link teacher, within the proposed inclusion strategy.

129. The LEA provides a suitable range of training for governors, specialist teachers and learning support assistants. The support network for SENCOs is highly valued by schools. However, training for SENCOs does not relate to the national SENCO standards and does not provide accreditation.

Value for money

130. The current management and maintenance of the statutory assessment provision is very costly. A significant element of the LEA's budget for SEN in 2000/2001 was spent on the relatively high proportion of pupils in special schools and on out of borough placements, primarily within the emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and autistic spectrum sector, costing over £1.75 million. Resources are delegated to mainstream schools for individual pupils with statements. Currently, the use of resources, both centrally and in schools, and the link between the resources used and the outcomes obtained in terms of pupils' attainment and progress are not monitored effectively by the LEA. A low proportion of resources is currently targeted towards early intervention. The value for money obtained from the SEN resources is currently unsatisfactory.

Best Value review of inclusive education special educational needs (SEN)

131. A Best Value review of inclusive education (SEN) was completed in February 2001. The LEA rightly saw this review as both a strategic and operational priority. However, during the course of the review, the scope was narrowed from that of the inclusion strategy to a focus on the statutory provision and the associated resourcing. A review of the support services and the inclusion strategy has now been re-scheduled for 2002. Whilst the review has been rigorous in its collation and analysis of the evidence, the narrowing of the scope of the review means that a less coherent review of SEN provision has been presented.

132. In all aspects of the review, Wigan's performance was compared appropriately with national data and that of statistical neighbours where available. The LEA plans to set up a local benchmarking club in the region to facilitate the future collection of comparative data. The review included extensive comparative information on trends in spending, numbers of statements, timescales for the assessment, and the number of special school and out of borough placements. A random sample of over 150 case files were analysed in order to review and evaluate the statementing process. All of this information was used effectively to challenge and inform the review process.

133. Extensive consultation was carried out as part of the review process with a range of key stakeholders. However, the consultation did not extend sufficiently to include the views of parents, children and young people. This lack of consultation with end users has been acknowledged in the report.

134. The element of competition was considered in the review although the absence of a viable local market for statutory assessment services constrained this aspect of the process. Outsourcing of the service was justifiably rejected on the grounds that the LEA wanted to maintain sufficient educational psychologist (EP) expertise for non-statutory work necessary to support its inclusion strategy.

135. The review process has resulted in an action plan that focuses clearly on those aspects most in need of development in order to meet the council's objectives. Challenging targets have been set in terms of the proposed reduction in statements, the completion of statements within 18 weeks and a reduction in the special school

population; all of which are geared to upper quartile performance. The action plan clearly identifies responsibilities, resources, target dates and the monitoring and review procedures, and will contribute towards the required improvements.

Recommendations

In order to improve the provision for special educational needs:

- continue to reduce the number of statemented pupils and to improve the efficiency of the statutory assessment process; and
- reduce the number of out of borough placements in collaboration with key stakeholders and develop more expertise within the borough.

In order to improve the implementation of the strategy for inclusion:

- develop clear timescales and plans for the achievement of the medium and long term objectives within the Special Educational Needs (SEN) strategy, in particular, for the future pattern of provision in special and mainstream schools;
- ensure that parents, teachers and governors in both mainstream and special schools and other key stakeholders have a shared understanding of the subsequent stages in the implementation process; and
- ensure that training for Special Educational Needs co-ordinator (SENCOs) is related to the national standards for SENCOs and provides the opportunity for accreditation.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

136. The LEA manages the supply of school places effectively in both the primary and secondary sectors. It has continued to tackle difficult issues relating to the decline in the primary population in some areas of the borough and to the variations in popularity of some secondary schools. The high proportion of voluntary aided schools in Wigan has an impact on the decision-making process in relation to school places. The school organisation committee has been established, is well serviced by the LEA and has agreed a clear, well-written school organisation plan for 2000/01 to 2004/05. The LEA and diocesan authorities work together effectively on the plan.

137. Primary rolls will decrease by around 12 per cent over the next five years, with significant declines in some parts of the borough. Reorganisations are currently taking place to remove 625 places and a rolling programme of further area-based reviews is planned. Currently, there are gross surplus places in the primary sector of 7.8 per cent. Ten primary schools have greater than 25 per cent surplus places.

138. The class size plan was implemented successfully and all infant pupils were in classes of 30 or less by September 2000. In January 1998, 4,692 infant pupils were in class sizes greater than 30. Twenty-five new classrooms have been added in order to implement the plan.

139. The number of pupils in the secondary sector continues to rise, and overall there are currently 4.6 per cent surplus places. In recent years there has been pressure on places in secondary schools in some parts of the borough; a total of 830 additional places are currently in the process of being provided in the secondary sector. Despite the pressure in some parts of the borough, there are two small secondary schools which have greater than 25 per cent surplus places. In the case of the community school, the LEA has in place an innovative programme to improve educational attainment and the attractiveness of the school to parents and pupils.

Admissions

140. The LEA handles admissions for community schools and the voluntary aided schools handle their own admissions. Information provided to parents is clear and the LEA handles the process very effectively.

141. Admissions criteria for primary schools are appropriate. Appeals are low in number and resolved in a timely way. Admission criteria are clear in secondary schools. The expansion of capacity at some secondary schools has reduced pressures on the admissions system. The number of appeals for community secondary schools is reducing. Secondary appeals are completed by the end of May.

142. Although the annual admissions process is handled very effectively, there are problems with the placing of pupils who have been excluded from secondary schools

during the year. Too many excluded pupils are placed in a small number of schools, with a consequent impact on the management of pupil behaviour in these schools.

Asset management planning

143. The local authority has carried out effective stewardship of the condition of school buildings. Continued preventive maintenance investment has been a high priority for the local authority and as a result, the levels of maintenance backlog are low.

144. The local authority has surveyed the condition of school buildings every five years prior to asset management planning requirements. Building condition information is stored on a programme developed in-house. This met the requirements of the DfEE for submission of information, but still requires improvements in the summary information it can produce. The LEA submitted information on both building condition and suitability within the DfEE timescale and the checks carried out by the DfEE showed that the information was satisfactory.

145. Asset management planning information has been provided to all schools and roadshows were run for headteachers and governors. Most schools visited were pleased with the quality of surveys carried out, the information provided and the assistance with planning of future maintenance expenditure. The capital planning process is linked effectively with the school organisation plan, and the programme of area reviews with the provision of additional places and the removal of surplus places.

146. There is an active headteacher working party on property issues. The quality of service provided by borough lands and property has been discussed at this working party. Headteachers reported that although the quality of technical support and contractor supervision had improved overall, there continue to be some unsatisfactory variations in quality of service provided.

Attendance

147. The LEA's support for attendance is good. Levels of attendance and unauthorised absence are in line with national figures in both primary and secondary phases. Expenditure in this area is below the national average, is increasingly aligned to priorities and provides good value for money.

148. Promoting attendance and reducing unauthorised absence are identified aims within EDP priority on inclusive education. The education welfare service (EWS) action plan has clearly identified links with the EDP and a commitment to further improvements in the deployment of resources to reflect the needs of schools.

149. The LEA offers schools a defined level of service through an annual service level agreement (SLA). This identifies appropriate aims and objectives for the EWS and clearly outlines LEA and school responsibilities with regard to attendance. Criteria for referral to the EWS are clear. There is a well-staged procedure leading to the serving of a school attendance order. The percentage of prosecutions for

irregular school attendance is twice the national average reflecting the LEA's determination to adopt a vigorous stance. The majority of schools visited judged that the level of service was well matched and responsive to their needs. Three secondary schools are now using Pupil Retention Grant funds appropriately to purchase additional support from the EWS.

150. The newly established information and planning team has recently produced good comparative data on absence for schools. Appropriate targets for increasing attendance and reducing unauthorised absence by 2002 have been agreed with every school. The EWS provides good guidance on a range of strategies to meet these targets and on the development of school attendance policies. Co-operation with the police is good. A truancy sweep in an area of identified need is planned for March 2001.

Behaviour support

151. The sufficiency and effectiveness of support for improving behaviour and reducing exclusions is very good for pupils and schools in the primary phase, but is limited in amount and quality in the secondary phase.

152. Until recently, the LEA's support for behaviour lacked strategic direction. The provision is fragmented with support and guidance available from a number of different services within the LEA. The recent creation of a principal officer post for social inclusion is intended to bring greater coherence to these services and to help schools to identify those most relevant to their needs. There is a recognised need for the early identification of pupils with behavioural difficulties. The school-based identification system currently taking place in all schools will identify pupils with both learning and behavioural difficulties, and provide schools with earlier access to funding for their support. The behaviour support plan outlines the various services and offers schools guidance and examples of good practice.

153. In primary and secondary schools, levels of permanent and fixed term exclusions are lower than the national average. Permanent exclusions have reduced by 50 per cent over the last three years. The EDP recognises that issues related to behaviour and exclusions are major concerns for headteachers, particularly at secondary level. The proposed strategy is sound. It includes developing the work of the behaviour support team (BST), promoting the use of pastoral support plans and ensuring the effective use of the Pupil Retention Grant to create a wider range of provision at school level. The LEA is currently working with secondary headteachers to agree a strategy for exclusions and re-integration. The LEA is also working with special schools to reduce levels of exclusion which have, until very recently, been above the national average. Data for the current year show a significant reduction.

154. The BST focuses very effectively on early intervention in primary schools. A service level agreement (SLA) identifies a clear distinction between the roles and responsibilities of schools and those of the team. The team provides helpful advice to schools on the production of (PSPs), offers good support to individuals and groups of pupils and provides effective staff training in a range of behaviour management techniques. The pupil referral service (PRS) has a small number of places for

primary age pupils who continue to be at risk of exclusion and the BST offers support for their re-integration. Several of the schools visited during the inspection had received support from the BST. Headteachers praised the quality of support received by the school which had enabled children to remain in mainstream schooling and had equipped staff to manage children with behavioural difficulties in the future.

155. The educational psychology service and the PRS offer advice in the production of PSPs but there is insufficient practical support for individual pupils or staff in secondary schools. Secondary schools have expressed the desire to use some of their Pupil Retention Grant to access the recognised expertise of both the BST and the PRS. Currently, the service does not have the capacity to support secondary school staff involved in the re-integration process or to provide training on behaviour management. It is not clear at this stage how the LEA intends to meet the needs of secondary schools.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

156. The LEA's support for pupils out of school is poor. Overall, there is insufficient provision for permanently excluded pupils. The legal status of The Park Centre, which houses the PRS, is unclear. It is not registered as a school or as a pupil referral unit in accordance with Section 19 of the Education Act 1996. Consequently, it is not subject to the accountabilities of a governing body or external scrutiny by OFSTED.

157. The number of pupils receiving alternative provision is below the national average. Referral systems for permanently excluded pupils are clear. The PRS aims to identify provision within a fortnight of the ratification of an exclusion. A significant minority of cases take longer. The PRS is staffed by teachers and social workers employed by the education department. Centre-based provision of between nine and 16 hours of education per week is available for up to 24 pupils at Key Stages 2 and 3 who are either at risk of permanent exclusion or permanently excluded. There is an appropriate emphasis on raising standards of literacy and numeracy and on the re-integration process but due to the lack of time, the curriculum provided is insufficiently broad and balanced. Effective collaboration with external agencies provides up to 25 hours of education and work-related training for pupils at Key Stage 4. However, for the 35 per cent of pupils who receive less than ten hours per week, this provision is unsatisfactory. The PRS also works effectively with the pupil support team, located in social services.

158. Until recently, too many pupils were excluded from special schools. This included 32 pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties who are in out-of-borough placements. A recent report commissioned by the LEA sensibly argued that many of these pupils could be successfully educated 'in-borough' at a lower cost and with better monitoring of quality and attainment.

159. The future strategy for education otherwise than at school is inextricably linked with the LEA's inclusion strategy which proposes the delegation of all relevant funds to schools and localities. Models of provision are at an early stage of development. At the time of the inspection, the LEA had no satisfactory strategy in

place to meet the requirement for full time education by September 2002. The LEA has been slow in its attempts to agree procedures with its secondary schools about the reintegration of excluded pupils. Few secondary schools have surplus places. As a result, a small number of schools, usually those already in challenging circumstances, are receiving a high number of pupils excluded from other schools.

160. Provision for pupils who are out of school for reasons other than exclusion is sound. The LEA has satisfactory procedures in place for monitoring the education provided for pupils whose parents choose to educate them at home. Educational support for pregnant schoolgirls and teenage mothers is effective.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

161. The LEA takes appropriate steps to meet its statutory obligations to protect children from significant harm. Schools receive good guidance on the management of emergencies in schools, security and on general health and safety issues. The LEA has developed an effective risk management policy working jointly with insurers and schools. This has, over a period of years, produced significant reductions in insurance premiums.

162. LEA support for child protection is satisfactory. Liaison between the LEA, social services and health is good at a strategic level although at a school level, liaison with social workers is not always effective and is adversely affected by staff turnover and recruitment difficulties. Within education, there is a designated officer responsible for the oversight of child protection and the LEA plays a full role in the area child protection committee. Useful guidance on policies and procedures has been issued and appropriate systems are in place in all schools. The LEA maintains an up-to-date list of designated teachers and provides a range of opportunities for training for teachers and governors. The take-up of training is well monitored. The local authority is working with the NSPCC to provide further training. The LEA provides appropriate advice concerning bullying with useful suggestions and recommendations for schools.

Children in public care

163. Provision for children in public care (CiPC) is good. There are well-established working relationships between the EWS in the education department and the pupil support team in social services. A joint protocol for the education of CiPC was launched in May 2000 with the aim of raising standards of attainment and identifying any special learning needs.

164. All children in public care have a personal education plan. All schools have identified designated teachers who have been supplied with guidance. A multi-agency group provides training for designated teachers and governors. Schools visited were clear about their responsibilities. The pupil support team, which is jointly funded by education, runs training sessions for foster carers on how to support children in their education. Future plans include the appointment of two part-time teachers to support homework in children's homes and to act as links with primary schools. This team also provides support for children in public care who are at risk of exclusion or disaffection.

165. Children in public care achieve comparatively well at Key Stage 1. At the end of Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in English is above the national average for CiPC. In mathematics, attainment is in line with national figures. The 2002 target in the EDP was for 75 per cent of CiPC to gain at least one GCSE or equivalent qualification. The LEA recognises that this target now looks unambitious as in 1999, 65 per cent of young people left care with such a qualification. Information on children in public care, including those in out of borough educational placements, is regularly updated. However, the sharing of information and the monitoring and analysis of children's attainment and progress have been significantly hampered by the incompatibility of the two departments' databases.

Ethnic minority children, including Travellers

166. Over recent months there have been significant improvements in the LEA's support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage and provision is now satisfactory. Earlier weaknesses in strategic management have been addressed and a well targeted and comprehensive strategic plan has been produced. Effective collaboration with the recently established information and planning unit has resulted in clear plans for the collation of data on the performance of minority ethnic pupils, and this should enable effective target-setting and tracking of individual pupils' attainment, attendance and exclusions.

167. Support for minority ethnic pupils and Traveller education is provided through the Wigan education support services (WESS) which incorporates a small English as an additional language (EAL) team and the Travellers education team. Both teams currently operate on an open referral system by schools, or in some cases, by parents. The service supports between 50 and 60 Traveller pupils throughout the year, with a specialist education welfare officer (EWO) who visits both official and unauthorised sites to establish and maintain contact with families and to organise where necessary, a school place. Support teachers work with headteachers and class teachers in assessing children's needs and designing appropriate intervention programmes. There has been appropriate targeting of Year 6 pupils in order to raise attainment in English and mathematics and to ease the transition to secondary school.

168. The EAL team provides support in about 30 schools for approximately 140 pupils whose first language is not English. Following an initial assessment of the pupil's level of language by the team co-ordinator, the level of intervention and support is negotiated with the school. Schools surveyed and visited during the inspection reported general satisfaction with the support provided by the LEA.

Measures to combat racism

169. There has been an appropriate corporate response to the recommendations arising from the report of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. A race equalities network working group has been established with a wide ranging membership and a remit to involve the minority ethnic community within the borough. Following consultation with schools, appropriate procedures to monitor incidents of racial harassment have

been developed. Multi-agency training involving the police and the community safety team has taken place to support the introduction of these monitoring procedures.

170. An equal opportunities working group has been established within the education department. The results of a borough-wide survey of equal opportunities practice within schools are being collated by this group and will further inform the work on the departmental action plan. Progress reports on the action plan are presented every three months to the corporate centre. Further training for central LEA staff and schools is scheduled for later this year.

Gifted and talented children

171. The LEA has provided or supported a range of activities which are intended to meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils. These include summer schools, enrichment activities in the arts and targeted early years programmes. However, to date, there has not been a co-ordinated strategy for supporting gifted and talented pupils across the LEA. Clear plans are in place to undertake an audit of provision and to develop a policy and associated training programme.

Promoting social inclusion

172. The original audit for the EDP identified inclusive education as a major priority for development. Appropriate targets were set to reduce unauthorised absence and exclusions, and to improve attendance. Following further discussion and consultation, the LEA now sees its new inclusion strategy, which incorporates the provision for SEN, as the most important area for development. Until recently, the pupil and student services branch lacked sufficient strategic capacity to take forward the planned developments. The review of progress of the EDP also identified that some slippage occurred, as significant elements of the original plan were reconsidered in light of the new strategy. The LEA's strategy aims to re-direct key resources to points of maximum need and to devolve responsibility for access and inclusion to groups of schools together with the main contributory agencies. The majority of schools support the principle of inclusion. However, they are increasingly frustrated by the lack of detailed plans for its implementation.

173. In relation to the EDP targets, those for exclusions and for the attainment of children in public care have been exceeded. Although the percentage of unauthorised absences has fallen at both primary and secondary level, the LEA has not met the targets set.

Recommendations

In order to improve education for excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion:

- increase the provision for these pupils to full time, in line with the recommendations of DfEE Circular 10/99. Set out an action plan with clear timescales for this purpose;

- register the Park Centre as a pupil referral unit in accordance with Section 19 of the Education Act 1996; and
- ensure appropriate provision for pupils excluded from special schools.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- complete negotiations concerning exclusions and re-integration with secondary schools in order to develop and implement an agreed 'Exclusions Strategy';
- determine the levels of support which the LEA will continue to offer following the implementation of its inclusion strategy and the resultant costs to schools; and
- monitor and evaluate the use of funds delegated to schools through the school-based identification system (SIS) and the Pupil Retention Grant.

In order to improve support for children in public care:

- establish compatible databases in the education and social services departments to ensure that data is readily available to support the monitoring and analysis of the educational attainment of children in public care; and
- set a more ambitious EDP target for the percentage of young people leaving public care with 5 + A* to G GCSE grades or equivalent.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the provision for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:

- differentiate the allocation of core link adviser time according to the needs of individual schools.

In order to improve the monitoring and evaluation of standards in ICT, it will be necessary to:

- support and monitor schools effectively in assessing what pupils know, understand and do.

In order to improve the provision for special educational needs:

- continue to reduce the number of statemented pupils and to improve the efficiency of the statutory assessment process; and
- reduce the number of out of borough placements in collaboration with key stakeholders and develop more expertise within the borough.

In order to improve the implementation of the strategy for inclusion:

- develop clear timescales and plans for the achievement of the medium and long term objectives within the Special Educational Needs (SEN) strategy, in particular, for the future pattern of provision in special and mainstream schools;
- ensure that parents, teachers and governors in both mainstream and special schools and other key stakeholders have a shared understanding of the subsequent stages in the implementation process; and
- ensure that training for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) is related to the national standards for SENCOs and provides the opportunity for accreditation.

In order to improve education for excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion:

- increase the provision for these pupils to full time, in line with the recommendations of DfEE Circular 10/99. Set out an action plan with clear timescales for this purpose;
- register the Park Centre as a pupil referral unit in accordance with Section 19 of the Education Act 1996; and
- ensure appropriate provision for pupils excluded from special schools.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- complete negotiations concerning exclusions and re-integration with secondary schools in order to develop and implement an agreed 'Exclusions Strategy';
- determine the levels of support which the LEA will continue to offer following the implementation of its inclusion strategy and the resultant costs to schools; and
- monitor and evaluate the use of funds delegated to schools through the school-based identification system (SIS) and the Pupil Retention Grant.

In order to improve support for children in public care:

- establish compatible databases in the education and social services departments to ensure that data is readily available to support the monitoring and analysis of the educational achievements of children in public care; and
- set a more ambitious EDP target for the percentage of young people leaving public care with 5 + A* - G GCSE grades or equivalent.

© Crown copyright 2001

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

Tel: 020 7421 6800

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

A further copy of this report can be obtained from the Local Education Authority concerned:

**Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council
Department of Education
Gateway House
Standishgate
Wigan
WN1 1AE**

A copy can also be obtained from the OFSTED website: www.ofsted.gov.uk