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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of Local Education Authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the education department and in other representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 100 schools. The response rate was 75 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to nine primary, six secondary, and three special schools. The 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 provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to school improvement and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. The Borough of Trafford, to the south west of Manchester, is a very diverse area. Overall social and economic indicators suggest it is, in terms of prosperity and ethnicity, typical of the nation as a whole but these are averages masking a reality of great contrasts between areas of inner city deprivation, bleak municipal housing estates and highly affluent suburbia.

5. The schooling system is equally diverse. Nearly a third of the schools are denominational. In the primary phase there is a mixture of infant, junior and five to 11 schools. In the secondary phase there are grammar schools and high (secondary modern) schools; some are single-sex schools and others are mixed. Half of the secondary schools were formerly grant maintained and two of them had been independent schools before obtaining grant maintained status. In the north of the borough there is an Education Action Zone (EAZ) which also covers part of the neighbouring borough of Salford.

6. Given this pattern of diversity, it is hardly surprising that there are wide contrasts in the performance of the schools. For the borough as a whole, however, standards are never less than the national average, and at the ages of 11, 14, 16 and 18 they are above average. On the whole, Trafford's schools are successful but they have widely differing needs for support. Responding to diversity is the major task facing the LEA.

7. Recently the LEA has undergone great change. New officers have been appointed, the education department is being reorganised and the Borough Council's political structure has been reformed in response to the government's modernising agenda. In many respects the changes have been successful in providing structures through which elected members and senior officers are exercising clear leadership. They have a commitment to raising standards and have established a culture of self-review which has rightly identified weaknesses and set targets to deal with them.

8. On balance, the LEA's strengths outweigh its weaknesses, but there remains much to be done. The Borough Council has not made explicit the priority it attaches to education. The LEA has only just produced a strategic plan and there is no consistent, formal system of service planning and evaluation.

The following functions of the LEA are exercised particularly effectively:

- support for numeracy;
- support for governors;
- personnel services;
- working with external partners;
- managing school admissions;
- support for attendance; and
- support for early years.

The following functions are carried out in a satisfactory way, but require some improvement:

- asset management;
- meeting statutory duties in respect of special educational needs (SEN);
- support for looked-after children;
- support for minority ethnic pupils;
- support for literacy;
- support for school management;
- financial support for schools;
- support for schools causing concern;
- the Education Development Plan (EDP); and
- the provision of school places.

The following functions are not exercised adequately:

- guidance on the analysis of performance data;
- the provision of management information;
- the provision of technical support for information and communication technology (ICT);
- support for behaviour and the provision of education for excluded pupils; and
- the strategic management of support for SEN.

9. The LEA is in a good position to act on the recommendations made by this report. Trafford's schools, the primary rather more quickly than the secondary, are improving in partnership with the LEA. The changes in management, staffing and culture in the organisation, together with the success of most of the schools, provide a context in which positive change can take place. Trafford is a low-spending LEA and, with the exception of its support for SEN, its services provide sound, and often good, value for money.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

10. Trafford Metropolitan Borough was formed in 1974. It lies to the south west of Manchester and has a population of 219,000. The LEA predicts that the number of young people aged under 19 will reduce from 55,671 in 1999 to 49,000 in 2016. The borough encompasses areas of great affluence and of significant deprivation. There is considerable economic, social and cultural diversity between electoral wards, as the following table illustrates.

	Highest %	Lowest %	Overall %
Unemployment	6.6	2.0	3.3
Lone parents	11.0	1.3	3.8
Higher education qualifications	26.2	3.6	16.1
Owner-occupiers	84.4	44.9	72.9
Over-crowded homes	4.9	0.5	1.3

11. Overall, the proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals in primary and secondary schools (17.4 per cent and 20.6 per cent respectively) are similar to the national averages. The proportions of pupils with statements of SEN (2.4 per cent in primary and 3.1 per cent in secondary) are below the national average and the average in similar areas. Children from minority ethnic groups make up 9.4 per cent of the pupil population, a proportion which is broadly in line with the national average and that for similar LEAs.

12. The LEA currently maintains 100 schools: 12 infant; 12 junior; 52 primary; 11 high (non-selective); seven grammar; and six special. Twenty-eight are denominational schools. Two high schools and four grammar schools are single-sex. There are sufficient places in the nursery units attached to infant and primary schools for all children under five whose parents wish them to have one.

13. The Salford and Trafford Education Action Zone (EAZ) was set up in September 1998. It covers eight schools in the Old Trafford area of the borough, which borders on Salford.

Performance

14. A detailed analysis of the schools' performance was provided to the LEA in a statistical profile. The key features for 1998 are as follows.

- Pupils in Trafford's schools perform consistently well overall and their attainment is particularly high when account is taken of the proportion eligible for free school meals.

- However, there is considerable variety in the performance of individual schools; for example, in 1998, the average level attained in Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests in English varied from 2.94 to 4.39.
- Pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is broadly in line with national averages.
- Attainment across the 5-18 age range is never below national averages. At the end of Key Stage 1, it is average. At the ends of Key Stages 2 and 3, and in GCSE it is above average. In A-level and Advanced GNVQ, it is well above average.
- Girls consistently out-perform boys at all key stages.
- Attendance in both primary and secondary phases (93.6 per cent and 91.6 per cent respectively) is in line with that in similar LEAs and in the nation as a whole.
- While the rate of permanent exclusions from primary schools (0.5 per cent) is in line with national figures and those for similar LEAs, the rate from secondary schools (1.6 per cent) is lower on both comparisons.
- Only three schools, all primary, have been judged by OFSTED inspection to require special measures since 1993. However, two of these are recent, having been inspected in 1999. Only one secondary and two primary schools have been found to have serious weaknesses since 1997.

Funding

15. Funding per pupil in Trafford through the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) is considerably below the average for metropolitan authorities. This is primarily due to the borough's comparatively low average scores on the measures used by central government to calculate payment for additional educational need. The Council has, over the last five years, budgeted to spend more than the education SSA. The amount spent above the SSA, as shown in the table below, has reduced from 10.7 per cent in 1995/96 to 3.7 per cent in 1999/2000. As a result, the LEA was criticised by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) for not passing the full SSA increase into education spending in 1999/2000.

	1995/6	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
Budget £000	80214	83447	83580	90470	94510
SSA £000	72456	76735	78481	84872	91100
Budget as % of SSA	110.7	108.7	106.5	106.6	103.7

16. Trafford delegated 82.3 per cent of the local schools budget in 1999/2000 compared with an average for metropolitan authorities of 82 per cent. The individual school's budget (ISB) per pupil is £2,044 compared with the metropolitan authority average of £2,121. Strategic management, central school improvement and education welfare costs per pupil are lower than the average for metropolitan authorities. Expenditure on transport is in the highest quartile among metropolitan authorities, and expenditure on special education provision is slightly higher than average. Nearly half of the central special education resources are devoted to independent school placements and the expenditure per pupil on this is the highest of all metropolitan authorities.

Council structure

17. Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) has 63 members, of whom 33 are Labour, 26 Conservative, three Liberal Democrat and one Independent.

18. In response to the government's white paper, 'Modernising Local Government', the Council has reorganised its political and administrative structures, and has set up a cabinet system. Pending the necessary legislative change, the cabinet makes recommendations to the policy and resources committee and/or the full Council for decision. The other elements of the new political structures are scrutiny committees, dealing respectively with services to the people of the area and with environmental, land and property services, and four area boards which serve as forums for local consultation. The new structures provide for clear decision making and for the clear accountability of officers and members. However, it is too soon to judge their effectiveness, and at this early stage some members, particularly from the minority parties, are sceptical about them. They are concerned that policy is being formulated by a much smaller group of members than hitherto and that other members are not adequately consulted.

The Education Development Plan

19. Trafford's EDP has seven priorities.

- i. To establish a multi-agency service to support schools in improving behaviour and attendance.
- ii. School leadership, management and development.
- iii. To develop LEA strategy to support schools to improve the educational achievements of pupils with SEN.
- iv. To develop literacy and numeracy through and beyond the national strategies.
- v. To raise teachers' competence and pupils' skills in information and communication technology.
- vi. To identify and target for improvement, groups of underachieving pupils.
- vii. To develop high-quality, early years education to provide young children with a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

20. These priorities, for example those for developing SEN strategy and for identifying underachieving groups, address identified weaknesses which are

confirmed by this inspection (paragraphs 78 and 117). The first priority, that for attendance and behaviour, is strongly based on local views, particularly in the secondary phase. More generally, however, although the consultative groups of headteachers and other teachers formed to advise on the activity plans gave the plans a clear and practical thrust, they had much more limited success as a means of ensuring widespread knowledge of, and commitment to, the plans' proposals for action. The school visits showed that school managers and teachers broadly support the EDP as a strategy to raise attainment but most of them lack close knowledge of the planned activities.

21. The plan clearly shows the relationships between itself and other plans and initiatives which affect schools in the area. For example, it shows how its activity plans relate to the work of the EAZ and to activities funded under the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB).

22. There are weaknesses in the plan. The activity plans do not always relate clearly and systematically to the outcomes. For example, the activity plan for priority one is vague (paragraph 108) and the success criteria for priority seven do not relate clearly to the activities (paragraph 61).

23. The LEA is aware of, and beginning to tackle, the weaknesses. The first priority is currently being revised under the leadership of a seconded headteacher, in particular so that it places greater emphasis on the LEA's behaviour support service. There are also proposals for more general revision to provide a necessary strengthening of the activity plans to link them more clearly and systematically to the proposed outcomes.

24. This process of revising and improving the plan is linked to the LEA's arrangements for its evaluation. To date there have been three review reports on the implementation of the plan. The documents are clearly set out and offer clear evaluations. They are able to demonstrate progress to the intended timescale for the implementation of the plan. The involvement of teachers and a higher education institution in the longer-term evaluation of the plan is a strength of the process. The groups of teachers set up as part of the initial consultation arrangements are now beginning to play a role in the plan's evaluation. Eight teachers are working with a local university on a four-year-long action research project on the implementation of the plan. The project is part of the university's doctoral programme. These arrangements for evaluation have been planned well and the early indications are that they are effective.

The allocation of resources to priorities

25. The process for allocation of resources to education priorities has, until recently, been strongly centrally-driven and consultation with schools has not been effective. Changes are taking place and consultation with schools about resource priorities is improving. Extensive consultation took place as part of the 1999/2000 budget round on the Fair Funding formula for funding schools, both in relation to new delegation and to the factors involved in the existing delegation. The consultation highlighted the range of views of schools according to the impact of different factors on their budgets. Some changes have been made, including allocation of some new

resources to primary schools. Other decisions, such as changes to delegated SEN resources, have been delayed until further research is done.

26. In comparison with other authorities, in Trafford the gap between funding for secondary pupils, in particular those over 16, and funding for primary pupils is wider than normal. This is despite the recent distribution of some additional resources to primary schools. Within the secondary sector there are variations in the funding provided to different schools: one secondary school receives extra resources from the EAZ; two secondary schools receive substantial extra resources from small school funding; half of the secondary schools were formerly grant maintained and still retain transitional funding. In addition some resources are delegated to schools on the basis of secondary selection tests and free school meals.

27. The LEA has lacked formal performance review and has not systematically examined the outcomes from its activities and compared its performance with other authorities. The management information on outcomes and costs necessary to inform future priorities and to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of resources is currently weak. Poor departmental information technology and lack of electronic departmental information systems and electronic communication between the LEA and schools accentuate this problem.

28. This weakness will have to be addressed both by the department of education, arts and leisure (DEAL) and central departments which provide services to schools as part of the preparations for Best Value. Some initiatives are in place. For example, a start has been made on using the business excellence model as an evaluation framework and an information officer has recently been appointed to develop education information systems.

Recommendations

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

- improve the EDP by establishing consistently clear connections between proposed activities, intended outcomes and criteria for success; and
- improve management information so as to allocate resources to educational priorities more clearly.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

29. Several of the LEA's services, other than advisory, make a useful contribution to school improvement. This is so of management services, of support for attendance, and of the early impact of the LEA's work to combat social exclusion. It is not true, however, of its support for SEN, and its behaviour support, including its provision of tuition for many excluded pupils. The poor condition of a small number of school buildings and the growing need to remove surplus primary school places in some parts of the borough also detract from the LEA's work on school improvement.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

30. The number of advisers has been, and will continue to be, small. Until the restructuring, taking place at the time of the inspection, the advisory service has been trying to do too much and the coverage of both subjects and phases, although satisfactory overall, has been uneven in quality. The salaries paid were low and the post of senior secondary adviser had been vacant for two years.

31. With effect from May 2000, improved organisational and salary structures will be fully in place. The advisory service will, sensibly, concentrate on school improvement and will not attempt to provide full curriculum coverage, expertise for which will be bought in as required. The new structure of the service will be strengthened by recent experience of school management and will bring advisers' responsibilities more closely in line with the service's current priorities and activities. Schools were consulted about the changes and headteachers have been involved in the appointment of advisers.

32. Three-quarters of the schools visited during the inspection had received support from the LEA that was at least satisfactory in enabling them to improve their capability to manage school improvement. In about half these cases the support was good. It was particularly effective where schools had difficulties, where the assigned link adviser had enough expertise in school management, and where the school was implementing its own programme of school improvement. An effective attempt to compensate for the lack of expertise in the secondary phase was made in 1999 when the director of education and the assistant director for school improvement made a rigorous visit to every secondary school. Each visit resulted in a written report and an agreed grade indicating the level of LEA intervention required.

33. Until now the LEA has lacked a consistently effective system for monitoring its schools. The schools' performance figures (paragraph 14) show that the schools have widely differing needs for support but, currently, the allocation of link adviser time is undifferentiated; all schools receive three days a year. There is a case for this situation to continue temporarily in the secondary phase until the LEA has a thorough knowledge of all its schools, half of which transferred from grant maintained status in September 1999. However, the LEA has sufficient knowledge of its primary schools to know which are performing well and can be given a lighter touch and

which need more intensive support. With the general approval of its schools, the LEA is now introducing a self-evaluation framework and a system of “alerts” to identify schools which require additional support of varying degrees of intensity. The framework is particularly aimed at identifying schools causing concern (paragraph 54) but, with a little modification, these procedures would also enable the LEA to pinpoint those schools that are performing well or outstandingly. This would provide secure evidence for differentiated intervention according to need and would also enable the LEA more effectively to identify good practice for the benefit of all schools. Headteachers find the dissemination of good practice to be a current weakness of the LEA. Linked to the work of the advisers, the new scheme has the potential to provide the consistent monitoring system that the LEA has lacked hitherto.

34. The advisory service has not been large enough to provide advice on all areas of the curriculum and this is a common complaint from schools. However, the service has taken several effective steps to respond. Its “gold package” of training and support offers good value for money and enables schools, through negotiation with their link adviser, to purchase required expertise from the LEA or other providers if necessary. Advisory teachers have been appointed in some areas, such as music, which have no adviser, and the LEA is beginning to make use of expertise available within some of its schools to support others, for example in physical education.

35. The work of the advisory service, although of inconsistent quality, has been generally sound and has provided satisfactory value for money. However, with its limited resources, it has been over-stretched. Its recently devised, more focused structure and procedures together with its clear emphasis on school improvement put it in a better position to provide monitoring, challenge, intervention and support according to need. Currently, operational planning is not sufficiently in line with the EDP and the new strategic plan. The service has benefited from the strong and clear leadership of the assistant director for school improvement in the comparatively short time since her appointment. Increasingly, advisers are managed effectively and required to meet appropriate targets.

Collection and analysis of data

36. The LEA has operated a sound baseline assessment scheme since 1997 and for the past two years it has provided primary and secondary schools with profiles of data relevant to their phase. Special schools receive the profile fitting the age range of their intake. Schools in all phases were consulted about the data to be included and the ways in which they were presented. Consequently, the presentation in 1999 was more user-friendly than in the previous year. The profiles contain, for each key stage, various helpful comparisons, analyses and summaries. However, the school survey and the school visits confirmed that the profiles would be even more helpful if they included a wider range of comparisons, for example with similar schools in Trafford and other LEAs, and data on the performance of such groups as pupils with SEN, minority ethnic pupils, and looked-after children. Schools would also be helped if the profiles contained guidance on the use of the data, and questions and comments specific to the particular school and its circumstances. Currently, guidance on analysing the data in the profiles is given through courses, at which not

all schools are represented, and the quality of school-specific interpretation depends on the variable skills of link advisers.

37. The development of target-setting within the LEA began with the National Literacy Strategy in 1998. Since then, sound progress has been made by the small team with this responsibility but there is still some way to go. All schools have set targets within the LEA's indicative ranges and many have been provided with the necessary challenge. The staging of targets to 2002 is realistic. The LEA rightly intends to improve the quality of its own target-setting and of the consistency of support and challenge it gives to schools by developing and improving the range of data on which the targets are based.

38. The LEA has provided training on target-setting for headteachers, senior staff and governors. Most participants have found the quality of the training to be at least satisfactory but some primary schools visited had found that their discussion of data with an effective link adviser was the strongest influence on setting targets which were realistic yet challenging. It is not surprising that the secondary schools, which have had no senior phase adviser for two years, viewed LEA support in this area less favourably than the primaries. The LEA has worked closely with special school headteachers, the National Foundation for Educational Research and other LEAs on target-setting for special schools and progress, albeit slow, is being made in this difficult area.

Support for literacy

39. At the end of Key Stage 1, the performance of Trafford schools in reading and writing is above national averages and close to that in similar LEAs. At the ends of Key Stages 2 and 3, English results are above the averages for the nation and for similar LEAs. In 1999, the proportion of Trafford pupils attaining Level 4 in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests in English (76 per cent) very nearly matched the LEA's target for 2000 of 77 per cent and it is on course to achieve its 2002 target of 85 per cent. However, at the end of Key Stage 1, the 1999 results showed no improvement over 1998 and the LEA is rightly targeting this key stage during the current year. Its emphasis is, rightly, on phonics and writing.

40. Support for literacy is satisfactory. The adviser who manages the work is assisted by only one consultant. This consultant is over-stretched, but responds to all requests and queries. The LEA has now arranged to appoint a second consultant to extend the range and flexibility of support, for example by increasing the amount of direct classroom involvement of the consultants. In 80 per cent of the schools visited during the inspection, the LEA's support for improving literacy was at least satisfactory and in half of them it was good. Primary schools' responses to the school survey confirmed this judgement but, overall, secondary schools were rather less than satisfied with the support received so far.

41. The LEA has adopted an appropriate light touch with schools which perform well in literacy, and has had a positive impact in most of the schools chosen to receive intensive support. For example, in one school every child in Key Stage 2 progressed by at least two levels in 1999 because of improved teaching. In another school, standards rose after the LEA funded the release of the literacy co-ordinator

for a half-day weekly to develop the quality of teaching and evaluate its outcomes. The LEA has been highly responsive to the views of teachers in the literacy and numeracy consultation group. It has set up a useful book exhibition and an effective telephone advice service. Expert teachers in aspects of the Literacy Hour have only recently been chosen but the LEA is cooperating productively with a neighbouring LEA so that teachers can observe lessons in a range of schools. This cooperation also extends to joint teachers' working groups on matters such as planning for mixed-age classes. The remaining weakness is in supporting schools to improve their provision for higher-attaining pupils and those with SEN. The contribution of link advisers to raising standards in literacy varies in effectiveness and some schools need to be challenged more, particularly at Key Stage 1. Boys have not been performing as well as girls but schools are beginning to respond to the LEA's advice to attract their interest by using more non-fiction books.

42. Training for primary schools has received positive evaluations but it does not yet fully meet the needs of secondary schools where, in most cases, a clearer understanding of the Strategy is required. Three secondary schools have held successful literacy summer schools, but a scheme to encourage family literacy in Trafford has not gone well as parents felt it was not pitched at the right level.

Support for numeracy

43. At the end of Key Stage 1, the performance of Trafford schools in mathematics is in line with the averages for similar LEAs and for the nation as a whole. At the ends of Key Stages 2 and 3, the results are above the averages for the nation and for similar LEAs. In 1999, the proportion of Trafford pupils attaining Level 4 in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests in mathematics (72 per cent) almost matched the LEA's target for 2000 of 74 per cent and it is well on course to achieve its 2002 target of 81 per cent. The Key Stage 2 results for 1999 show a significant improvement of eight per cent over the previous year.

44. The LEA's support for numeracy has made a good start. The adviser in charge of it is assisted by two full-time consultants. In only one of the schools visited during the inspection, a secondary school, was the support for numeracy unsatisfactory, and in half of them it was good. In their responses to the school survey, the primary schools rated the support for numeracy as satisfactory to good, and the secondary schools judged it to be rather better than satisfactory.

45. The consultants are responsive to the needs of individual schools, and their support is built around their active involvement in the classroom. For example, one school implemented the approaches of the Strategy before it officially started and the results improved by over 30 per cent from 1998 to 1999. The consultants are helping the skilled and enthusiastic coordinator to maintain the improvement by working with her and the teachers on lesson observation, planning, team teaching and demonstration lessons. The consultants' meetings with numeracy coordinators and leading mathematics teachers are helpful and the leading mathematics teachers are already involved in demonstrating good practice to others. Productively, the LEA provides sufficient funds to allow time for teachers not only to observe the leading teachers at work but also to discuss fully what they have observed.

46. Training for primary schools has received positive evaluations. A programme for secondary schools has commenced and, importantly, will include observation of primary numeracy lessons. The mathematics adviser will take the main responsibility for booster class training to improve performance in order to aid transition from Year 6 to Year 7 and there is some concern in secondary schools about the maintenance of support for their phase after his retirement. In order to help its special schools, the LEA has recently entered into a cooperative arrangement with other LEAs in the region so that schools dealing with specific types of special need can work together on numeracy across LEA boundaries; this is a positive initiative. A family numeracy project has also commenced recently in three schools but its effectiveness can not be judged at this early stage.

Support for ICT

47. The LEA strategy for ICT development in schools is largely sound, but there have been significant weaknesses in its implementation. Support for schools has not always been related to need and there have been uncertainties in advice on hardware purchases. Developments in electronic communications have been slow, there has been a lack of clear responsibility for the different elements of technical support, and there has not been enough curriculum support.

48. The strategy for the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) is sound. Its implementation is satisfactory and it is leading to investment in equipment and communications in schools in three phases. The third phase will take place in 2000/2001. The fourth phase of NGfL will add to the resources in schools. Schools have been able to choose their own equipment suppliers, but the LEA has organised tendering arrangements for a preferred supplier. District Audit identified a number of weaknesses in the tendering arrangements for the first phase in 1998, but these were rectified for later phases.

49. The speed of development of effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in individual schools has varied considerably. Some schools, particularly secondaries, have driven the development themselves, having the necessary expertise within their staff. Other schools have needed the advice provided by the LEA but the levels of support have not always been related to need. Some schools have not had enough help. The support for ICT in the curriculum is sound in quality but small in quantity. Support is given to primary and special schools but only in a minor degree to secondary schools. The support for ICT was satisfactory or better in about two-thirds of the schools visited during the inspection. In the school survey, primary schools rated it as satisfactory but secondary schools were less satisfied.

50. Training for ICT is good, although some schools have to wait for its delivery. Much of the training has had to deal with the generally low level of expertise in ICT among the LEA's primary school teachers and has therefore not extended the competence of the more skilled. However, some more advanced courses are now planned.

1. The LEA has in past years been at the forefront of developing the use of administrative information technology in schools. As a result, many Trafford schools

routinely make effective use of the good range of packages that is available. Recent developments have not been rapid enough. The development of electronic links has been slow and as a result electronic communication of financial and other information between the LEA and schools is poor. This also hinders the transfer of curriculum information. The quality of technical support for administrative ICT in schools provided by an external contractor has been variable in effectiveness and some schools are concerned that this has slowed their development of administrative ICT.

Support for schools causing concern

52. Only three of the 100 schools in the LEA, all primary, have been found to require special measures since OFSTED inspections began in 1993. However, it is of some concern that two of these schools were inspected in 1999. Since September 1997, one secondary and two primary schools have been identified by OFSTED inspections as having serious weaknesses. One of the special measures schools was only confirmed to be in the category in January 2000 and has not yet been monitored. The other two are making satisfactory progress and the LEA expects that one will be removed from the category shortly. Two of the three schools with serious weaknesses have been monitored by OFSTED and found to be making satisfactory progress. The LEA has a further list of 10 schools which are causing it various degrees of concern. Of these, six are receiving close monitoring together with additional support. The other four schools are being monitored rather more closely than would usually be the case.

53. The LEA's support for schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses is strong. In the school survey, it was rated as good and, in the case of primary schools, significantly above the mean for the 25 LEAs surveyed. The headteachers feel supported and the LEA invests considerable time and money in bringing about improvements. Effective support includes regular advice, additional training, additional staffing if required, behavioural support and help with action planning. Expertise to deal with problems in primary classrooms has been insufficient, but standards are now improving. Under-performing teachers are supported well, but the challenge to incompetent teachers, although now improved, was initially slow. There has been no systematic policy for recruiting and training a pool of good teachers and the LEA is now seeking to rectify this. It has stated its determination to bring every school causing concern out of its category within two years and the EDP gives a detailed account of the support, intervention and resources available.

54. The LEA's own list of schools causing concern was devised in an attempt to prevent under-performing schools from falling into the special measures or serious weaknesses categories but, since June 1999, it has been unsuccessful in this aim in relation to three schools. In addition, a special school which had been given a fresh start with a new name and new accommodation was found to be causing concern when visited during the inspection of the LEA (paragraph 80). It is timely, therefore, that the LEA is developing its self-evaluation framework for supporting and challenging schools, including those with mediocre, as well as poor or failing practice (paragraph 33). This new procedure is a positive development which, together with

the re-structuring of the advisory service, demonstrates the LEA's renewed focus on school improvement. The system now needs to be implemented rigorously.

Support for governors

55. The LEA's support for governors is rated very highly by the schools both in the school survey and as shown by the level at which the traded support services are purchased by the governors and the level at which the former grant maintained schools bought into the service during their period outside the LEA. The school visits confirmed the picture. This is a first-rate service, strongly led and offering very good value for money.

56. The key to the success of the service is its excellent communication with governing bodies, both through the clerking service and the highly effective computer database. These arrangements keep LEA officers up-to-date with governors' needs for support and so able to respond to them rapidly. The readiness of officers to provide advice and information is much appreciated. Governors value the centrally provided training courses to introduce national and local educational developments. The induction programme for newly appointed governors is particularly well attended. Governing bodies also make considerable use of the bespoke training service which mounts courses for individual governing bodies. Last year 50 individual courses were run; that is to say, half of the schools in the LEA had this type of training for their governing bodies.

Support for school management

57. The support is satisfactory overall, but there is variation. Among the schools visited, it was at least satisfactory in all of the primary schools and good in half of them. By contrast it was poor in half of the secondary and all of the special schools visited. This variation is in part due to the distribution of management expertise within the advisory service (paragraph 31).

58. The LEA has made various initiatives over recent years to support school management. It makes use of the national training schemes for aspiring and serving headteachers. Forty-three schools have been accredited under the Investors In People scheme and a further 10 have committed themselves to seek the award. More recently, officers have been encouraging schools to consider using the business excellence model to improve management quality. Additionally, there are residential conferences for headteachers and, started more recently, for deputy headteachers. The LEA has supported management in other ways. It has recently reviewed and revised its provision for training newly qualified teachers (NQTs). The new system has not yet run for a year and it is too early to assess it. Nevertheless, the NQTs met during the school visits were appreciative of the support. The appraisal of teachers and headteachers has, pending new national guidance, largely fallen into disuse and an important tool for improving the quality of teaching more broadly is therefore missing. However, a third of the schools visited had instituted their own, varied systems to monitor and evaluate teaching.

59. The initiatives have not been adequately coordinated and have yet to produce a consistent approach to improvement in the schools. A process which has the

potential to do this has now begun as part of the EDP activities on school management and the introduction of the new self-evaluation system. It is intended that the work should strengthen schools' management as well as providing a means for the early identification of problems. The planning for this new scheme is sound but some schools will have a long way to go to implement it effectively.

Other areas

60. Trafford's support for early years is effective and inspection reports show that provision for under fives in schools is often good. Provision for the early years features prominently in the education department's strategic plan, with targets for: an increase in childcare places; a better geographical match between provision of places and need; a free nursery place for all three-year-olds; and improvement in the quality of early years education and childcare in all settings. The Council has demonstrated its commitment by nominating a member of the cabinet with specific responsibility for early years and childcare development.

61. The early years development plan is well-conceived: it comprises a thorough, comprehensive review of provision and analysis of needs. The EDP priority for early years is not so useful as it lacks a clear link between the activities and the success criteria. For example, the plan to: "establish a unified system for the transfer of information" is to be evaluated in terms of a "reduction in the number of formal assessments."

62. Currently every four-year-old is entitled to three terms in a reception class and approximately 85 per cent of three-year-olds have a nursery place. There are surplus nursery places (around six per cent are unfilled), although these are not always located in the areas of greatest need. The LEA is keen to redress this and is looking at ways of developing local approaches in different parts of the borough to respond to needs. So far, no clear plan has emerged.

63. The Early Years and Childcare Partnership has been effective in forging good working relationships between services and with other public and private sector organisations. It has commissioned a comprehensive and potentially useful audit of childcare provision. In addition, it is participating in a pilot children's information services scheme that involves the transfer of information with neighbouring LEAs. This is in its early stages, but has already proved beneficial in forging close links with these authorities as well as in setting up an electronic exchange of information.

64. Schools are generally content with the advice and support that they receive about early years. A wide range of in-service training is available as well as cluster meetings for staff. The early years team also supports and advises providers in the private sector, including childminders.

Recommendations

In order to make school improvement more effective, the LEA should:

- Allocate monitoring, challenge, intervention and support to schools in proportion to need;

- identify high-performing schools and disseminate good practice;
- accord operational plans for the school improvement service more closely with the EDP and the strategic plan;
- broaden the range of data made available to schools and improve the quality of guidance on its use;
- improve the quality and consistency of advice and challenge given to schools by link advisers in the analysis of data;
- assess and provide the quantity and quality of advice and support that is needed to promote the use of curriculum and administrative Information and Communication Technology in all schools; and
- improve support for school management and for schools causing concern through the implementation of the self-evaluation framework, and monitoring work of the advisers.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

65. Trafford MBC lacks a comprehensive and publicised statement or plan of its overall aims and purposes. As part of its political and administrative reorganisation (paragraph 18) it has specified four key objectives:

- life long learning;
- social and economic regeneration;
- safe and sustainable environment; and
- well-being of the community.

66. The objective of lifelong learning is, obviously, that which includes schooling and the other functions of the LEA. At an administrative level it is reflected in the reorganisation of the Council's education department as the department of education, arts and leisure (DEAL) and the appointment of its chief officer as one of the Council's four executive directors and responsible for lifelong learning. The MBC has a structure which implies a high status for education but has not made this status explicit. The school visits showed that few headteachers or governors were aware of the priority attached to education by the MBC.

67. Although the MBC does not have a strategic plan to emphasise the place of education, the DEAL itself has just completed its own strategic plan which, after a period of the consultation, was approved by the Council in December 1999. The plan has some clear strengths: it defines a role for the LEA which is consistent with government policy; it appraises the LEA's current performance; it sets clear targets for improvement which incorporate the targets of the EDP within DEAL's wider educational framework; it also brings together all of the LEA's development plans, both statutory and non-statutory, within a single framework.

68. The plan also sets out the activities and timescales for implementing its proposals, but the weakness of the process is that it has yet to be developed into consistent and effective service plans. Formal evaluation too is relatively weak. It is hampered by the lack of management information (paragraph 27), and there are inconsistencies between services in the way evaluation is carried out. Nevertheless, there is a recently introduced review system which involves the executive director meeting six times a year on a formal basis with the assistant directors to assess the work of the services they manage. At a political level, the newly established scrutiny committees (paragraph 18) are intended to provide another level of evaluation. The system has not been running long enough for a judgement of its effectiveness to be made.

69. Although a robust, formal system for evaluation has yet to be established, an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the LEA was produced by officers as part of the process of drawing up the DEAL strategic plan. The findings of the analysis are consistent with the findings of this inspection. They show that the LEA is aware of its weaknesses and that it has established the culture of evaluation which is an essential starting point for the move toward dealing with those weaknesses.

70. Planning and evaluation are improving, but they have a considerable way to go. Until now, their progress has been inhibited by the lack of clear strategic direction, both for the LEA as a whole and for some specific services, for example SEN (Section 4), school management development (paragraphs 57-59) and assessing the needs of minority ethnic pupils (paragraph 117). The processes of planning and evaluation, together with financial decision making, are also hampered by poor-quality management information.

71. The new political and departmental structures are being used well by officers and members. Working relationships are good and members receive clear advice from officers. The leadership of the LEA is one of its strengths.

72. The LEA works well with its external partners and with other departments of the authority. The LEA is working effectively with the social services department on the production of the children's services and behaviour support plans (BSP). Day-to-day liaison between schools and social workers is good. There is also good liaison with the EAZ and, in the matter of post-16 provision, with the local further education colleges.

Management services

73. Financial advice and support received by schools from the LEA are generally satisfactory. The current financial systems have been in place for many years and have provided reliable financial information. The systems are still largely sound but in some respects do not meet the current needs of schools or contribute to their financial autonomy. In particular:

- the lack of electronic communication of financial information make schools' access to financial data cumbersome; and
- systems for the authorisation of property and ancillary services invoices by schools do not give schools sufficient control of their resources.

74. The personnel casework support for schools is very good. It has helped headteachers to deal with difficult employment issues and to handle staff restructuring, when necessary. A few schools face budget pressures, primarily relating to declining pupil numbers and the consequential need for restructuring. The combination of personnel and financial services is effective in helping these schools deal with their budget problems.

75. Some schools currently have substantial surpluses. Overall balances were around six per cent in the primary sector and 7.3 per cent in the secondary sector in April 1999. Two secondary schools had surpluses of 27 per cent and 40 per cent of their budgets. Surpluses carried forward were ten times higher in the former grant maintained schools than in the county sector. The LEA faces a considerable task to ensure that these resources are used effectively.

76. Trafford spends the fourth highest amount per pupil among metropolitan authorities on school transport and this reduces the resources available for other purposes. The main reasons for this are the £345,000 spent on transport for out-of-borough placements and the provision of free transport for pupils over 16. Transport

arrangements for some pupils with moderate learning difficulties are being reviewed. Almost all of the additional expenditure relates to policy decisions and District Audit reviews have concluded that the scope for efficiency savings is comparatively small.

Summary and evaluation

77. The status of education in Trafford is unclear in the authority's documentation. Recent changes in the LEA, most notably the publication of the strategic plan, show a move toward better planning and evaluation of services. Hitherto, there has been no clear, systematic approach to these parts of the LEA's management. Management support services are contributing to school improvement, except that they are not wholly effective in promoting schools' financial autonomy or preventing them from amassing substantial budget surpluses.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management, the LEA should:

- clarify the priority attached to education by Trafford and the place of education in the Council's overall strategy;
- improve the planning and evaluation of services; and
- improve electronic communication of financial information to schools, and work with them to make more effective use of current budget surpluses.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

78. The LEA does not have an effective strategy for SEN. Planning is weak. There is no clear view of the effectiveness of the current provision in meeting pupils' and schools' needs, nor of the LEA's plans for provision. Special schools are particularly aware of the lack of clarity regarding their future roles.

79. Development is, however, taking place: the LEA has recently appointed an assistant director of education for learner support, whose remit is to manage SEN provision; a comprehensive review of the current provision is planned; the two former all-age schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties have been supported successfully in the change to separate provision for primary and secondary pupils; the LEA is undertaking the refurbishment of all of its special school buildings; the upgrading or replacement of buildings is being carried out with due consultation, and schools receive additional resources when the refurbishment is complete, for example to equip newly established specialist subject areas and libraries; a training programme for learning support assistants has been established and the support services for SEN are refining their working methods and extending their remits and functions. However, in the absence of an overall plan and coordination, gaps in provision are apparent and developments are taking place in an *ad hoc* manner.

80. The quality of teaching and progress made by pupils are at least satisfactory in five of the LEA's six special schools. However, the LEA's own inspection of the school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), in November 1998, found serious shortcomings in the management of pupils' behaviour and attendance. The difficulties persisted on the re-establishment of the school and its move into new premises in September 1999. The support provided by the LEA, although extensive, has not proved to be effective and the school continues to give rise to concern.

81. The LEA has prepared a statement on inclusion. It has not, though, stated the balance of separate and mainstream provision it wishes to attain, the manner in which schools should ensure the social and educational inclusion of all their pupils, or how any development is to be achieved. As a result, schools do not have well informed or shared views on this issue.

82. The financial strategy for SEN is weak. There is a lack of clarity in the allocation of resources to priorities and the effectiveness of their use is not monitored. Nearly half of the central SEN resources are for independent placements. The LEA intends to reduce this expenditure but has not yet produced a formal plan of action to do so. Around £530,000 was delegated to schools in 1999/2000 for expenditure on pupils with learning difficulties. The formula for the delegation of these resources is not based on current need and their use by schools is not monitored. Schools were consulted as part of the 1999/2000 budget round on the formula used for this delegation, but no change was made because of a lack of information about pupils on the SEN register in different schools. Information has not been collected in time for the current budget round. The funding formula for

special school placements was last reviewed three years ago. Since that time a series of *ad hoc* adjustments has been made to accommodate the needs of individual special schools.

Statutory obligations

83. The LEA takes steps to meet its statutory responsibilities with respect to SEN. Statements of SEN are of good quality, providing a clear picture of pupils' difficulties and requirements. They form an effective basis for planning. However, too few statements are prepared within the recommended time limit, and the LEA's performance in this respect has worsened over time. Targets set to speed up the process are not demanding enough.

84. The LEA has kept demand for statements under reasonable control. It intends to reduce the proportion of pupils with statements by, for example, enhancing the support given to pupils at earlier stages of the SEN code of practice and by improving the capabilities of schools and services to meet a broader range of needs. While these are good strategies, the means of their implementation remain largely unresolved and uncoordinated.

85. LEA staff rightly give priority to attending more contentious annual reviews as well as those that take place at periods of transition. However, the LEA's input is not sufficiently effective, as very few statements are discontinued or have levels of support reduced as a result of pupils' successes.

Improvement and value for money

86. The LEA's advice and support for pupils with SEN have not contributed effectively to school improvement. There are some strengths, such as the training provided for primary school special needs coordinators, but support services vary greatly in the degree to which they improve the capability of schools. The service for pupils with impairment of sight and hearing provides a good model in this respect. Not only does this service provide effective support for pupils, it also offers good training and advice to school staff. At the other extreme, some individual staff from support services simply confine themselves to working with their target pupils without communicating the nature or outcomes of their work with the school. Educational psychologists provide highly valued support within the limitations of their workload, but low staffing levels prevent fully effective work. Psychologists have found it impracticable within staffing constraints to allocate time to each school in a planned manner, but respond to schools' requests for assessment and advice, prioritised according to their perceptions of pupils' needs. The learning support service and early years education service are well regarded by schools and they provide effective support to individual pupils. Overall, advice and support to schools are not well coordinated, and that provided by the advisory service is not rated highly by many schools.

87. The LEA's SEN provision does not offer good value for money because of the high cost of out-of-borough placements. The LEA's monitoring of annual reviews of statements is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that allocated resources are always still required. The degree to which SEN support services ensure value for money

through promoting schools' and their own evaluation of the quality of their service varies greatly. The process of quality assurance is most highly developed within the sensory-impaired support service.

Analysis

88. The LEA's support for SEN is provided in such a way as to meet statutory obligations, at least to a minimal level. To that extent it is just satisfactory. However, there are weaknesses at the strategic level, in support for school improvement and in some, though by no means all, of the support services.

Recommendations

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

- review SEN provision and support without delay;
- plan and implement a programme of support to enhance the effectiveness of the special school for pupils with EBD in managing behaviour and ensuring good attendance;
- prepare a clear policy statement with respect to inclusion;
- increase the target for completing statutory assessments within the recommended timescale and improve performance in this area; and
- as part of the overall review of SEN strategy, produce a clear resource plan and revise the formulae for delegating SEN resources to mainstream schools and for funding special schools so as to take more account of current and projected needs.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

89. The LEA has managed the overall supply of school places in the primary and secondary sector effectively, but there are a number of difficult issues to be resolved by the school organisation committee (SOC). In January 1999, there were just over seven per cent surplus places in both the primary and secondary sectors, but there are surplus places in some parts of the borough and not in others. The LEA and schools are playing a positive role in the innovative partnerships being developed between schools and colleges to improve 14-19 provision.

90. The SOC has been established and is in the process of agreeing the school organisation plan (SOP). The committee was established late and has yet to address the difficult issues involved with the supply of places in some parts of the borough.

91. In the primary sector, there are considerable variations in demand for places in different areas, with 4.6 per cent surplus places in Altrincham and 16.1 per cent in Partington. Primary school populations will drop substantially in Trafford over the next few years. A District Audit report showed that the LEA needed to improve the quality of information available for forecasting future school populations. Changes have been made in line with these recommendations. There are variations in the expected rates of decline of the school population, ranging from one per cent in Altrincham to 19 per cent in Partington. The fall in numbers is now threatening the financial viability of some primary schools and the need for action is becoming urgent.

92. Secondary school populations will continue to rise over the next few years. As a result, most secondary schools have a buoyant school population. Two secondary schools, however, only had 406 and 468 pupils in January 1999. As a result their budgets are low and their financial viability is maintained by substantial injection of resources through the small school protection factor. One of these schools serves an isolated community, and it has developed strong links with regeneration initiatives in the area. A range of innovative provision is being developed in partnership with South Trafford College to link alternative provision at age 14, courses to encourage higher staying on rates and adult education initiatives in the area. Although the extra support means that the cost per place at this school is high, the key role of the school in the local community currently justifies this investment.

93. There are considerable variations in post-16 participation rates in different parts of the borough. In some of the grammar schools, virtually all of the pupils stay on in full-time education or training. In schools without a sixth form, staying on rates are lower, with only just over half staying on in one school and with further problems with the number of these students who complete their courses. The SOP says that "post-16 provision will be developed for those schools without sixth forms" and the Council produced a post-16 education and lifelong learning strategy in April 1999.

Admissions

94. Within a diverse system, the LEA manages the admissions process effectively. Admissions information has been amended in line with government guidance.

95. The diverse secondary system obviously presents problems for admission arrangements. Half of the 18 secondary schools were formerly grant maintained. There is a mixture of grammar and high (secondary modern) schools. The selective schools have a variety of different entrance criteria. The non-selective schools have intake populations with substantially different ability ranges. There are six single-sex schools and they create imbalances in the ratio of boys to girls in some of the mixed schools. Nine of the schools (seven grammar, one high and one special) have sixth-form provision; the rest do not. Nearly nine per cent of all pupils in Trafford schools live outside the borough, with large variations in the percentage of pupils in different schools coming from outside. The combination of the processes involved with moderation of 11+ results, appeals against the test results followed by admissions appeals means that pupils and parents face periods of considerable uncertainty on transfer from primary to secondary schools. Appeals for a small number of pupils are not resolved until August. This makes transitional arrangements for pupils difficult, but the problems are inherent in the selective system.

96. The advantages and disadvantages of this diversity are subject to fierce debate in the borough.

Asset management planning

97. The LEA has, overall, exercised reasonable stewardship over the condition of school buildings in the borough. Investment has taken place to improve the condition of many school buildings.

98. Technical staff have a good knowledge of the condition of schools. Information systems, however, are currently not good enough to allow effective prioritisation of resources, to present information to the LEA about the total extent of backlog problems, or to inform decisions about the level of resources required. Steps are being taken to remedy this as part of the asset management process. Surveys have been completed for the majority of schools. A computerised information system is being purchased which will be able to store all relevant property information. The LEA started these processes later than was desirable and as a result the final stages are having to be accelerated to meet DfEE deadlines.

99. A small number of schools have serious building problems that create difficulties for school governors and management. Although capital bids are being made to address these, remaining problems include:

- a primary school in an old building where disrepair causes the governors concern about their ability to maintain the building within their delegated resources;
- a secondary school in the north of the borough which has received inadequate investment for many years; and

- a special school housed in two adapted buildings which are not suitable for the needs of the pupils of the school.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

100. There are currently 93 pupils who are being educated other than in a school. These include 17 pupils receiving home tuition, six attending college and 51 receiving a part-time education at the LEA's intermediate education centre (InterEd) for secondary pupils. Most of the pupils who attend InterEd have been permanently excluded.

101. The amount of education received by most of these pupils is inadequate. The home tuition amounts to a maximum of seven-and-a-half hours, but is typically only three or four hours. Two excluded pupils of primary age are receiving only four or five hours' tuition per week; this is clearly not enough to provide them with a firm foundation for reintegration. The amount of time that pupils are taught at InterEd is currently around nine hours, which, although insufficient, is similar to what many other LEAs offer. Pupils receive a limited curriculum at InterEd, but they are helped to study for GCSE examinations and, where appropriate, to improve their behaviour. The LEA has agreed proposals with the DfEE to increase the amount of taught time at InterEd.

102. The LEA keeps a comprehensive record of permanent and fixed-term exclusions, including an analysis by ethnicity. It has established a good mechanism for determining where to place excluded pupils and for reviewing their progress through an allocations panel that meets every month. The process of reintegrating pupils into full-time education is, however, often too slow. Many pupils spend too long (up to a year, in the case of nine pupils) being educated outside of school. Generally it is the older pupils, who are more difficult to place, who spend the most time being educated otherwise. However, even the primary pupils are sometimes not reintegrated for two terms or more. The LEA aims to reduce the time pupils are out of full-time education to one month by July 2000. This is ambitious, given the present situation.

Attendance

103. Attendance in primary and secondary schools has over the past four years been close to, or slightly higher than, the national average; unauthorised absences are close to the national average. The LEA has made attendance a priority in its EDP, mainly because of the poor attendance in a small number of schools in areas of social deprivation. It has targeted resources effectively to respond to the needs in these schools with the result that attendance figures for autumn 1999 show an improvement; only three secondary schools and one special school now have attendance figures below 90 per cent.

104. Spending on the education welfare service (EWS) is low (£7 per pupil compared with the metropolitan borough average of £12 per pupil). Yet, the service is run efficiently and gives good value for money. The EWS has good links with the

police and works closely and effectively with the Traveller support service to raise the attendance of Traveller children.

105. Schools rated support for attendance as good in the school survey. This is an above average response. It was borne out in the school visits where teachers often praised the efforts of the EWOs in promoting and ensuring good attendance.

Behaviour support

106. OFSTED reports show that Trafford's pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good. The number of permanent exclusions is in line with the national average for primary schools, but below the average for secondary schools. The exclusion rate is high in a few schools. The LEA has estimated that around five per cent of Trafford pupils have significant behaviour problems and a further five per cent have significant learning plus behaviour problems. Schools are concerned about the poor behaviour of a small number of pupils. The LEA has responded by making support for behaviour a priority in its EDP.

107. The LEA's support is weak in a number of respects. Firstly, there is no overall coordinated approach to managing support for behaviour. Secondly, the support, although generally effective, is insufficient to meet the needs of schools and pupils.

108. There are weaknesses in the behaviour support plan (BSP) and in the EDP's priority on behaviour. Targets are not well defined and responsibilities not clearly specified. The timescale set in the EDP is too long and the activities too vague. The LEA is, though, in the process of revising its plans and seconded one full-time equivalent of a headteacher and two deputy headteachers' time to carry out a review of needs in schools.

109. Support for primary-age pupils comes mainly through Prime Target. This is a well organised and efficient service that was initially set up for pupils in danger of being excluded. Its work has now expanded to involve pupils, mainly at Stage 3 of the SEN register. Key Stage 2 pupils who are referred to Prime Target and meet the specified criteria receive two days' education at the centre. They receive a curriculum that is well coordinated with work they do back in school on the remaining three days. Younger pupils are supported in their own schools. The work of Prime Target is well regarded by schools and often effective. However, it serves the needs of a relatively small group of pupils (ten in the centre and 15 in school at present; although a further 30 are being monitored in school). In addition, schools are not given enough help in managing pupils' behaviour for themselves; training is offered, but not enough schools take advantage of it. The recruitment of two additional behaviour support assistants should help, but is unlikely to enable the service to meet the growing demand from schools.

110. There is no equivalent service for secondary pupils. InterEd deals mainly with excluded pupils and although the intention is to develop more outreach work in schools, in practice the service is over-stretched. Not enough is done to support those Year 7 pupils who have formerly been supported by Prime Target. Schools are rightly dissatisfied with the overall support for behaviour, although they

appreciate the help from individual educational psychologists and welfare officers. More support is needed to help schools manage pupils' behaviour.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

111. The LEA takes reasonable steps to promote the health, welfare and safety of pupils and staff. Schools have access to a good range of guidance materials as well as training and other initiatives, such as a healthy schools scheme. The EWS has good systems and visiting arrangements to discharge its responsibilities on child employment. Training on child protection is well-regarded by schools.

Looked-after children

112. Trafford has relatively few looked-after children. It has the lowest rate per 10,000 in the country. Only ten per cent of relevant pupils achieved at least one GCSE grade A* - C or equivalent in 1998. The LEA has set a target of 50 per cent achieving this standard by 2001.

113. The coordination of support for looked-after children is satisfactory and has improved over the past year. The lead officer has been in post for less than a year and has already begun to establish an effective multi-disciplinary approach. Records are kept of all looked-after children but not yet of their attainment. The database systems are poorly developed.

114. The emphasis now given to looked-after children is reflected in the references in several of the activities within the EDP. Also, elected members take their responsibilities seriously and make regular visits to the five residential homes where the majority of the children live.

115. The LEA's intention to raise standards for looked-after children is not matched by the quality of its written plans. For example, the Quality Protects action plan is very thin on detail for its educational targets; outcomes are not directly related to action. Insufficient attention is given to the need to improve attendance and behaviour as mechanisms for raising attainment, and a disproportionate number of looked-after children are excluded.

116. The LEA has taken a number of positive steps to improve the education and achievement of these pupils, and a psychologist has been allocated responsibility for them. The LEA has recently been successful in an application to the New Opportunities Fund for a grant of £744,000 for study support. Some of this will be used to develop study centres in residential homes.

Minority ethnic children

117. The LEA has not made support for minority ethnic pupils a priority in the past. It has not systematically collected data about the attainment of pupils from different ethnic groups. There are clear signs of a firm commitment to changing this through, for example, priorities in the EDP. However, this good intention may be undermined by the lack of a co-ordinated approach to the activities.

118. The two main services that support minority ethnic pupils are the language service and the Ethnic Minority and Travellers Achievement Grant (EMTAG) service. The latter was formerly under the auspices of Section 11. The LEA has always managed to find additional funds to top up those from the grant and has funded the language support service centrally. The liaison between these services has not always been effective and at one time they used different schemes for assessing pupils' language competence. EMTAG funds are allocated to schools on the basis of appropriate criteria related to the percentage of minority ethnic pupils, the number for whom English is an additional language and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals. The LEA has allowed schools to develop their own approaches though most have chosen to support pupils with English as an additional language. Schools are reasonably satisfied with the support they get for minority ethnic pupils. Support from the language service for recent refugees is particularly well regarded and effective. The service is over-stretched and cannot meet the needs of all the pupils who need support.

119. The LEA's analysis of ethnic composition in schools is good and shows that although around nine per cent of all pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds (compared with 9.7 per cent nationally), they are mainly concentrated in a few schools. An analysis of pupils' attainment has just started but is not yet complete as many schools have failed to send in their information. However, some schools are way ahead of the LEA in terms of information collected about minority ethnic pupils.

120. The EDP includes a number of activities related to pupils from ethnic minorities. However, these do not appear to be well coordinated and there is a lack of coherence in the approaches, which have different lead officers. The EMTAG action plan is also weak in a number of respects; it lacks detail and is not based on a secure evidence base of, for example, the attainment and attendance of different ethnic groups.

121. Support for meeting the needs of Traveller children is well organised and generally effective. The service comprises two teachers who work mainly with two schools in the borough. They have established good links with the Traveller community in the area and are working to improve the attendance of pupils in the secondary school.

School improvement

122. Some of the LEA's initiatives to improve access are having an impact, albeit indirect, on raising pupils' attainment. For example, in areas targeted by the LEA for support, attendance shows signs of improving and exclusions are falling. Support for behaviour, although limited in scope, is proving effective in the primary sector. Not enough has yet been done to improve the educational opportunities and achievement of looked-after children and pupils from ethnic minorities. The need for a comprehensive database is critical in this, as without it neither the LEA nor schools can target limited resources effectively.

Social exclusion

123. There are very large variations in the levels of affluence or deprivation in different parts of the borough. Individual primary schools vary very considerably in the prior attainment of their pupils on entry. At secondary level, the geographical factors are compounded by the selective system. As a result of these factors, some schools in the borough have more difficult issues to face in raising attainment than others.

124. The LEA has started to give a higher priority to tackling social exclusion. Developments include:

- a number of partnerships between schools and colleges to make 14-19 provision more attractive for some pupils;
- extra resources in some schools in the EAZ;
- a regeneration partnership between one school and the local community, partly funded through single regeneration budget (SRB) resources;
- activities aimed at raising the attainment of pupils from ethnic minorities;
- ICT investment in schools through the EAZ and SRB;
- EDP priorities aimed at improving pupils' behaviour and attendance and reducing exclusions; and
- £421,000 in the funding formula for schools allocated on the basis of free school meals.

125. Individually and collectively, some of these initiatives are beginning to have an impact on social exclusion.

126. The effective liaison with the EAZ is further promoting social inclusion.

Recommendations

In order to improve access to education, the LEA should:

- present proposals to the SOC to reduce surplus places in the primary sector in some areas of the borough;
- provide a plan for the level of investment needed for school buildings, particularly those in serious disrepair;
- increase the amount of tuition received by pupils who are educated outside of school;
- reduce the time taken to reintegrate excluded pupils into full-time education;
- implement a co-ordinated approach to support for behaviour so that it meets the needs of a wider range of pupils; and
- gather comprehensive data on the attainment of different groups of pupils, including those from ethnic minorities.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 1: LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

- improve the EDP by establishing consistently clear connections between proposed activities, intended outcomes and criteria for success; and
- improve the provision of management information so as to allocate resources to educational priorities more clearly.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to make school improvement more effective, the LEA should:

- allocate monitoring, challenge, intervention and support to schools in proportion to need;
- identify high-performing schools and disseminate good practice;
- accord operational plans for the school improvement service more closely with the Educational Development Plan and the strategic plan;
- broaden the range of data made available to schools and improve the quality of guidance on its use;
- improve the quality and consistency of advice and challenge given to schools by link advisers in the analysis of data;
- assess and provide the quantity and quality of advice and support that is needed to promote the use of curriculum and administrative ICT in all schools; and
- improve support for school management and for schools causing concern through the implementation of the self-evaluation framework, and monitoring work of the advisers.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In order to improve strategic management, the LEA should:

- clarify the priority attached to education by Trafford and the place of education in the Council's overall strategy;
- improve the planning and evaluation of services; and
- improve electronic communication of financial information to schools, and work with them to make more effective use of current budget surpluses.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

In order to improve special education provision, the LEA should:

- implement the planned review of SEN provision and support without delay;
- plan and implement a programme of support to enhance the effectiveness of the special school for pupils with EBD in managing behaviour and ensuring good attendance;
- prepare a clear policy statement with respect to inclusion;
- increase the target for completing statutory assessments within the recommended timescale and improve performance in this area; and
- as part of the overall review of SEN strategy, produce a clear resource plan, and revise the formulae for delegating SEN resources to mainstream schools and for funding special schools so as to take more account of current and projected needs.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

In order to improve access to education, the LEA should:

- present proposals to the SOC to reduce surplus places in the primary sector in some areas of the borough;
- plan for the level of investment needed for school buildings, particularly those in serious disrepair;
- increase the amount of tuition received by pupils who are educated outside of school;
- reduce the time taken to reintegrate excluded pupils into full-time education;
- implement a coordinated approach to support for behaviour that it meets the needs of a wider range of pupils; and
- gather comprehensive data on the attainment of different groups of pupils, including those from ethnic minorities.

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