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IN EDUCATION**

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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used *The Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of the work of the local education authority (LEA) 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 involved the analysis of data and scrutiny of documentation from the LEA, information from school inspectors and audit reports. Discussions were held with elected members, staff in the education and training service and in other council services as well as representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on the aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 86 schools. The response rate was 67 per cent.
3. The inspection sought to establish the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to four infant schools, four junior schools, five primary schools, five secondary schools and two special schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's school improvement 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 improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Since its inception in 1998, Telford and Wrekin has developed rapidly into a good LEA. It has many strengths, few weaknesses, supports its schools well and, in most activities, gives good value for money. It clearly has the capability to improve even further.

5. When pupils begin primary education their attainment overall is below average. Standards at each stage thereafter rise to the national averages. Rates of improvement have mainly been similar to those nationally, and in some respects, like the three per centage points rise in last year's GCSE results, considerably above the norm. However, there are large differences in attainment, management and quality of education between the LEA's schools.

6. The authority serves both urban and rural areas, and a market town. It has a growing population and low unemployment. Social and economic characteristics are below average. There are concentrated pockets of deprivation and 20 per cent of jobs are unskilled. The council has declared its intention to work to increase prosperity and the quality of life of residents. Promoting the education and interests of local children feature in two of its four corporate priorities. The LEA has ambitious plans to raise pupils' attainment and to promote school improvement and social inclusion. Political consensus on these plans and policies is strong and the council has invested considerably to realise its aims. The vision for improvement is coherent and shared by members, officers, headteachers and other stakeholders. It is grounded on extensive consultation and a clear understanding of local and national needs.

7. The LEA's very capable and committed senior officers have devised strategies to realise these intentions which are sharply focused, well managed and rigorously evaluated. Planning, both to get things done and to secure efficiency, by linking together the activities of various management levels and services, is a strength. The Education Development Plan, for example, has been instrumental in guiding work on school improvement and social inclusion and is well in line with other plans. Another strength lies in the LEA's capacity to forge effective partnerships with its stakeholders. This shows itself in high levels of mutual understanding and agreement, extensive procedures to consult and take into account stakeholders' views and efficient, collaborative action to bring about improvement. The partnership struck between this LEA and that in Shropshire, by which both are served by the same source of advisory and inspection services and of provision for pupils with special educational needs, has been very successful. Schools have access to support which is authoritative, wide ranging, and affordable, benefiting from economies of scale.

8. Officers know the schools well and have well-developed methods of doing so. In particular, the use of performance data to help schools to set targets for improvement is outstandingly effective. This, together with strong programmes of monitoring and supporting schools and for management development, and the skilful work of attached advisers, is helping schools to become increasingly responsible for their own development and evaluation, not least in the crucial area of judging teaching effectiveness. The establishment of an innovative, authority-wide

infrastructure for Information Communication and Technology (ICT) is ambitious and has the potential in the medium term to promote extensive curriculum development in schools. Support for schools with serious weaknesses and those in special measures has been timely and effective. The LEA lacks, however, a clear and agreed protocol to identify other schools which cause it concern and to communicate this formally to governors. Much has been done to ease pupils' access to education by, for example, improving attendance and reducing exclusions. Provision for pupils who nevertheless are excluded is, by contrast, less than adequate.

9. The LEA carries out the following functions very effectively:

- strong and coherent political and professional leadership and decision making;
- corporate and educational development planning;
- forging purposeful partnerships;
- management services, notably finance and personnel;
- administration of school places and admissions;
- analysis and circulation of performance data to schools;
- support for literacy and curricular ICT and, at primary level, for numeracy;
- support for early years;
- support to governors and school managers;
- the management and provision of advisory and inspection services;
- the education of pupils with special educational needs;
- the process of asset management planning; and
- taking measures to combat racism.

10. The LEA has two key weaknesses:

- lack of an agreed protocol for schools causing concern to the LEA; and
- its provision of education otherwise than at school.

11. Elected members and officers have energetically promoted school improvement and the interests of pupils. They have assiduously evaluated progress. Work is now underway to rectify the weaknesses identified in this report. The LEA has been particularly adept at managing change and its achievements so far have been considerable. Given its success and average levels of funding, it gives good value for money. It has the vision, drive and managerial competence to continue to improve.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. Telford and Wrekin council became responsible for education on separating from Shropshire county council to become a unitary authority in 1998. It serves the former Telford new town, the market town of Newport and surrounding rural areas. Its growing population stands at 153,000. After a sharp decline in manufacturing in the 1970s and 1980s, industry, commerce, leisure and tourism are expanding. Inward investment is strong. Unemployment, at 3.4 per cent, is well below national and regional levels. However, there is a legacy of low wage levels, 20 per cent of jobs are unskilled compared with eight per cent nationally and there are concentrated pockets of unemployment, poverty and debt. In the 1998 Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions Index of local deprivation, Telford and Wrekin lay within the 100 most deprived authorities in the country.

13. Two thirds of three-year olds and all four-year olds have access to early years education provided in 115 maintained, independent and voluntary settings. The LEA maintains 65 primary schools (16 infants, 15 junior, 34 primary) serving 15,427 pupils. The secondary sector serves 10,087 pupils. Eight of its 13 schools have community status, seven being 11-16 comprehensive schools and one a girls' 11-18 grammar school. Three are foundation schools, providing comprehensive education for the 11-16 age range. Two are voluntary aided 11-18 schools, one a boys' grammar and one a comprehensive school. Four special schools serve 460 pupils. A city technology college and two independent schools are located in the district. Twenty six schools are in an Education Action Zone (EAZ).

14. Entitlement to free school meals is slightly above average and significantly higher than in similar LEAs in both primary (23.2 compared with 20.5 per cent nationally) and secondary (19.7 compared with 18.1 per cent nationally) schools. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is high, at 3.6 compared with 2.6 per cent nationally in the primary range and 5.9 compared with 3.9 per cent nationally in the secondary range. Sixty-nine per cent of pupils with statements attend mainstream schools. There are fewer pupils of ethnic minority origin than nationally (5.9 compared with 11.7 per cent).

Performance

15. Pupils' attainment on entry to education is below average overall. At Key Stage 1, the proportion achieving level 2 is in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. At Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 in English, mathematics and science is average. The rates of improvement in the core subjects since 1998 have been higher than those nationally at Key Stage 2 and the LEA is on course to reach its 2002 targets for literacy and numeracy. Improvement is in line with national averages at Key Stage 1. At Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 is average in English, mathematics and science. The rate of improvement in English was higher than that nationally in the last three years and in mathematics and science it was in line with the national rate. At Key Stage 4, 48.5 per cent of pupils achieve five or more higher GCSE passes at in 2000; this is average. Over three years the rate of improvement has been average

but last year it was well above this, surpassing the EDP target of 43.7 per cent by five points.

16. In the most recent inspections, 78 per cent of primary schools compared with 71 per cent nationally were judged good or very good. No school required significant improvement compared with four per cent doing so nationally. Three of the 10 recently inspected secondary schools were judged good or very good, compared with 57 per cent nationally, and three needed much improvement, compared with 10 per cent nationally. Overall, the second cycle of school inspections so far shows clear improvements in the way primary schools are managed and in the quality of education they provide. In the secondary sector, there has been an increase in the proportion of schools requiring much improvement.

17. The exclusion rate has fallen to below the national level in primary schools. In secondary schools, the rate is high, particularly for boys, although it has fallen sharply. Rates of attendance have recently improved and are average.

18. Two Beacon schools are maintained by the LEA. Five schools have been judged since 1993 to require special measures, although four of these have improved sufficiently for the measures no longer to be needed. One school has been classified as having serious weaknesses.

Funding

19. Since 1998, the council has funded education at the level of its Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), which is below the unitary average. In 2000/2001 total Council spending against SSA was 103 per cent. In the last two years spending on the social services and other blocks of expenditure has been well above their respective SSA levels. The council delegated some 84 per cent of its local schools budget to schools in 2000/2001, a rise from 81.2 per cent in 1999/2000. In both years its level of delegation was slightly above average. For 2000/2001, the Secretary of State's targets for reduced central expenditure and increased delegation to schools were met. For statutory and regulatory duties Telford and Wrekin's expenditure per pupil was £39, well below the average for statistical neighbours of £45, and 43rd of 46 unitary authorities.

20. The delegated individual budget per primary school pupil (£1540 in 1999/2000) is lower than statistical neighbours (£1666) and unitary authorities (£1667) but higher in secondary schools: £2442 as opposed to £2338 and £2400 respectively. The same pattern continues in 2000/2001.

21. The funding for the education welfare service and pupil referral units is below the norm; that for school improvement and education out of school is above the norm; and the devolved standards fund grant to schools is very high. Total expenditure on special education, at 15.8 per cent of the local schools budget, is just below average.

22. Education has benefited from a high level of external grant funding, enhanced by successful bidding, for example the provision of a lifelong learning centre, funded by the Single Regeneration Budget, and the EAZ. The current

education capital programme also demonstrates an ability to maximise available funding.

Council structure

23. The council has 54 members: 30 Labour, 15 Conservative, four Independent, four Liberal Democrats and one Residents' Association. It operates through a policy and resources committee and four boards, one of which is for education and training, and a number of sub-boards and panels. The council is piloting a cabinet-style executive in its move towards a modernised structure. Two scrutiny committees monitor the Council committees, panels and cabinets. A standards committee monitors conduct.

24. A chief executive leads a team of corporate directors. The corporate director for education and training has two assistant directors who oversee (1) school improvement and childrens' services and (2) planning and resources.

The Education Development Plan

25. The Education Development Plan (EDP) has been very effective in guiding school improvement. Its seven priorities are: information and communications technology (ICT); literacy; numeracy; management; early years; raising achievement through social inclusion; and standards at Key Stage 4. Each priority is clearly outlined and firmly grounded in a comprehensive audit of needs. Action is well targeted to meet these needs. The audit was based on a wide range of performance data, and a deep understanding of local needs. The plan is closely aligned to government policy and to the council's well thought out corporate priorities as expressed, for example, in its community plan. The EDP is also carefully aligned to the other major education and training plans, such that each has a strong school improvement orientation.

26. Consultation with schools has been extensive both individually and through a comprehensive system of representative groups. The school visits and school survey show that headteachers and chairs of governing bodies are very satisfied with the LEA's willingness to consider their views. The inspection also confirmed that other major stakeholders are in close agreement with the priorities of the plan. In addition, headteachers, through various working parties relating to the EDP priorities, have had ample opportunity to help LEA officers shape the content of the plan. Headteachers in each school visited understood well the contents of the EDP and its implications for their own school improvement work. In each school, the school development plan showed strong links with the EDP.

27. For each priority, detailed action plans contain well-coordinated and achievable tasks, finely tuned to meet the overall aim. The timescales and the criteria for success are clearly expressed. Whilst those responsible for specific tasks are identified, it is not always clear who has overall responsibility. Resourcing, including the deployment of LEA staff, has been carefully allocated according to the needs of each activity. Quantified performance targets form the basis of most of the EDP priorities. Those relating to pupil performance in, for example, literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 4 are explicit and appropriately ambitious. Improvements

in literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 2 have been impressive from 1996 and the targets for GCSE improvement were exceeded in 2000. Qualitative success criteria are also clearly expressed and appropriate.

28. The EDP is thoroughly monitored and evaluated. There are rigorous procedures for data collection and analysis, routine monitoring by advisers and other officers, and detailed consultation with representative groups. The report on the first year of implementation gives an accurate and reasonably detailed picture of progress in most areas although that for numeracy is thin. It also gives an honest appraisal of where slippage has occurred, for example, where progress on the ICT priority was held up by a misunderstanding of the requirements of the European Union tendering process. These evaluation procedures have provided a firm basis for the drafting of new versions of the EDP, as well as providing for elected members and senior officers a satisfactorily clear picture of progress. Overall, the progress has been very good.

The allocation of resources to priorities and Best Value

29. The allocation of resources to priorities is transparent and effective. This is recognised by the schools, and all are at least satisfied with the relevance of the LEA's priorities to their schools. The infant admissions policy, now under review, disadvantages the education SSA, in that the summer born children are not reflected in the January statistics used to determine SSA support.

30. The cornerstone of the education funding policy is the protection of school budgets for three years until 2002, including inflation and the rising school population, with the Council meeting any increase in Standards Fund contribution from central funds. Schools appreciate this commitment which the Council hopes to continue beyond 2002. The massive investment in ICT within schools, £11.4m in all, 55 per cent of which is being met by the council, reflecting ICT's position as the first priority within the EDP, provides a further key example of resourcing following priorities. The allocation of resources to priorities is helped by good control of spending, a clear procedure for delegation of budget responsibility and the use of the council's financial information system. Corporate recharges to education are negotiated annually through key business partnership agreements.

31. Following consultation, some changes have been made to the LEA's Fair Funding scheme and, more are rightly planned both to enhance the scheme's efficiency and transparency and to ensure it fully reflects agreed education priorities, including an increased emphasis on the inclusion in mainstream education of pupils with special educational needs.

32. Much progress has been made in establishing performance management and increasing the use of benchmarking statistics. The nine business plans to deliver the services to meet overall priorities show some attention to the detailed financial implications of their objectives though this can be more specific. The council's Best Value Performance Plan, published in 2000, has been strongly praised by the District Auditor. The Best Value process is only at the beginning and no education Best Value review has been completed. However, the education and training service is well placed to use the process to improve performance.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

33. The LEA has responded well to most aspects of the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations and has worked hard to promote school autonomy. It monitors its schools with precision, has the expertise and authority to challenge them, provides or encourages access to good levels of support and training, and intervenes decisively in schools deemed to have serious weaknesses or to be in need of special measures. However, it lacks a clear and agreed protocol by which to distinguish other schools causing concern and to communicate this formally to headteachers and governors, and hence to provide effective support for all.

34. The LEA understands its schools very well from its extensive and effective use of performance data. It is able to detect some problems in schools, for example in reading at Key Stage 2, simply from data analysis. Schools are increasingly autonomous, generally and specifically, in their use of this data. In addition to remote monitoring, attached advisers visit schools, the frequency differentiated according to need. They make a maximum of three visits per year to most schools, and those schools with weaknesses receive proportionally more. They review, with each school, staff performance, planning, targets, teaching and curriculum in an annual cycle and, with the help of data analysis, discharge their monitoring roles very effectively. The advisers' notes of visits to schools are not given to governors. The LEA rightly intends to develop an agreed annual review statement as at present no written statement of the LEA's view of a school goes to its governors. It is not clear that all major judgements on school performance made by advisers are conveyed directly to governors, or that governors are able routinely to question the advisers about their judgements.

35. The LEA has the capacity to challenge schools to improve and a good track record in doing so. Attached advisers and their managers are well regarded by headteachers who rightly argue that the LEA has reached a balance between challenge and support in line with the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations. The notes of advisers' school visits and documented case studies show clear evidence of how LEA personnel have influenced schools to improve. Three schools visited during the inspection, however, remained reluctant to accept aspects of the LEA's persuasion for the need for further improvement.

36. Support in the form of advice, consultancy and training is also authoritative. It reflects the deliberate policy of enabling advisory staff to retain specialist expertise. Provision is bought by schools through consultancy or subscription services: schools are thus free to choose according to their perceived needs. Schools are complimentary about the quality and effectiveness of the various types of this support, including the recommendation of appropriate external providers.

37. The LEA has the expertise to help schools in difficulties and has done so in proportion to their needs and with considerable success in many cases. Intervention has been authoritative and decisive in schools deemed to have serious weaknesses or to need special measures in the primary, secondary and special phases. It has been impeded in other schools, however, by the lack of clarity and agreement

concerning the other levels of concern and of the degree of intervention schools should expect when they fall into these categories. The LEA is currently producing new guidelines.

38. The advisory and inspection service is provided in the LEA under contract by the Shropshire LEA's advisory and childrens' service. On local government reorganisation (LGR), the LEA decided to have a strong advisory service to enable it to discharge its school improvement functions. It retained those features of the pre-existing service which would give authoritative coverage, a wide choice for schools and economies of scale. The original service level agreement has been extended to 2004 on the basis of a favourable external evaluation of effectiveness. Its total costs in 2000/2001 are £3.9m, 38 per cent of which is earned income, the remainder funded 41 per cent by Shropshire and 21 per cent by Telford and Wrekin. Eighty-nine per cent of schools purchased the subscription and the remainder buy back elements of the advisory service. Although the costs of the advisory service are marginally above the median, it uses its funding effectively and provides a valuable resource in effecting school improvement. Value for money is good.

39. The service covers a wide range of school improvement functions in relation to the EDP. The large team of advisory and support staff is able to sell expert advice to schools which adequately covers the full spectrum of curricular and management needs in all phases of compulsory schooling. The advisory service is able to gain further economies of scale beyond those deriving from its joint operation, by selling expertise to other LEAs and organisations. The school survey, supported by the school visits, clearly indicates high levels of satisfaction with the impact of this service.

40. The service is very well managed, having a clearly expressed vision of its duties and a well considered strategy which ensures that its energies are directed appropriately towards EDP priorities and schools causing concern. Service planning is rigorous. Staff at all levels consult and communicate well with schools. In particular, clear documentation depicts the levels of service provided to schools, although in some of the weaker schools visited, headteachers were not precisely clear about their levels of entitlement. There is a very high level of buyback by schools. Performance management has many strengths and senior staff go to some lengths to judge the impact of the service on the schools, for example, by analysing data on school improvement, seeking views from consultative groups, meeting with each headteacher annually and responding vigorously to complaints. Most headteachers visited in the inspection were very complimentary about the skills and credibility of advisers, but there were three complaints about the value of advice given on two subjects at secondary level. Advisers are appraised every two years, and the LEA is rightly concerned that this is too infrequent to be in the best interests of the schools.

Collection and analysis of data

41. The provision for target-setting and the collation and analysis of performance data has a long history and a national reputation. It is outstandingly effective. Schools rate this aspect of support very highly.

42. Schools receive a wide and informative range of data. This includes comparisons with other schools in their local 'family' of schools, value added data, and a full subject analysis of GCSE results for all secondary schools. A suitable scheme of baseline assessment has been adopted. Advisers and schools have undergone excellent training programmes as well as receiving high quality written guidance. Many of the schools visited are effective users of data, and could show, for example, how they were monitoring pupils' progress carefully and setting targets for individual pupils. Primary schools particularly valued the 'families' data and the twice yearly meetings of the families of schools to discuss performance and targets. Discussion at these meetings usefully considers the strategies needed to achieve the targets. The Shropshire school effectiveness centre, which provides the data, also offers highly valued, bespoke support to schools for data analysis. The centre continues to develop and has, for example, recently provided guidance for secondary schools in using the 'chances graphs' provided in OFSTED's autumn package of data. Schools consider the data they receive to be timely and very useful.

43. The target-setting process in schools is very well supported by the LEA. In advance of the target-setting meeting, advisers send an *aide-memoire* to schools containing an analysis of trends, benchmark data, and predictions based on an analysis of prior attainment. The school supplies its own data on individual pupils. The targets are agreed by discussion between the attached adviser and the school. The school visits confirmed that the advisers are well prepared for the discussions, and that the discussions themselves are suitably rigorous and include consideration of the strategies needed to achieve the targets. For example, in one primary school, target setting had had a clear impact on the proportion of pupils moving from level 2c at Key Stage 1 to level 4 at Key Stage 2, as the school focused more sharply on improving attainment. Two of the primary schools visited had set targets which appeared cautious, although in each there had clearly been a challenging discussion with the attached adviser before the target was set. There was one instance in the last year where, despite persistent efforts by the LEA, a school set a target lower than the LEA deemed suitable.

44. Target-setting for ethnic minorities is now being developed and an initial training session has recently been held for schools. Most schools already set targets for individual pupils, including those from ethnic minorities. Special schools have also been involved in a pilot project with the SEN adviser, looking at the QCA guidance on setting targets for individual pupils.

Support for literacy

45. Support for literacy is very good. Since Telford and Wrekin was set up, results at Key Stage 2 have risen at a slightly faster rate than nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining level 4 or above has risen from 60.5 per cent in 1998 to 73.6 per cent in 2000, compared with a national rise from 64.8 per cent to 75 per cent over the same period. The LEA exceeded its 2000 EDP target for Key Stage 2, and is well on course to reach its 2002 target of 77 per cent. Results at Key Stage 3 in 2000 were average, and have improved since 1998, whereas nationally they have fallen.

46. The EDP provides a suitable strategy for supporting literacy. It builds appropriately on earlier work. Literacy support has had a high profile through the RAISE (raising achievement in Shropshire) project, which has been operating in schools to improve standards since 1994. The literacy team, which is shared between the two LEAs, is well led and operates effectively. All the staff are regarded by the schools as experts in their field. The consultants have a good range of expertise between them, and are deployed according to their strengths and the needs of schools. There are good links between the literacy team and other services such as that for ethnic minority achievement, SEN and the primary advisers.

47. The primary schools which have been given intensive support via the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) have been suitably identified and supported. The effectiveness of the support is demonstrated by the LEA's own monitoring of progress, which shows that schools receiving intensive support made, on average, double the percentage point improvement at Key Stage 2 than those schools not targeted for support. 'Non-intensive' schools had also benefited from three of the five original days training received by the intensive schools. Those schools visited had received very good support and training for introducing the NLS, for example in preparing effective schemes of work, managing the literacy hour, evaluating lessons and school-based training.

48. Effective support has been provided for schools with a relatively high proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language. Initially, a research project identified issues. The LEA has given schools training in the nationally provided materials and has initiated a joint project with two schools which is to be extended. Support was provided for schools with mixed-age classes, in advance of the national guidance. A range of valued training has been provided, with a greater focus in 2000/2001 on priorities such as improving writing and boys' performance. Training to help teachers to improve pupils' writing in subjects other than English is being made available to all schools.

49. As in the primary sector, there has been a long tradition of support for literacy in the secondary schools. This continues, and is well regarded in the schools visited. Secondary schools have been well briefed on the introduction of the NLS in primary schools. Literacy work has been supported effectively by the RAISE adviser in targeted secondary schools. Some schools have been helped to develop literacy across the curriculum. Training has also been provided for the summer schools, which have been held for the last three years.

Support for numeracy

50. Support for numeracy is particularly good in the primary schools, but less so in secondary schools. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is average. Improvement since local government re-organisation has been slightly slower than that found nationally, although just prior to that it was faster. Between 1998 and 2000, the proportion of pupils attaining level 4 at Key Stage 2 improved from 56.5 per cent to 70.3 per cent, compared with the increase from 58.5 per cent to 71.7 per cent found nationally. The LEA is well placed to meet its 2002 target of 75 per cent. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is average and, as at Key Stage 2, the rate of improvement since 1998 is just slightly lower than the national rate.

51. The numeracy team, and in particular the work of its consultants, is managed effectively. The consultants work flexibly across the two LEAs. The EDP outlines a suitable strategy for improvement. Activities include: training subject leaders in primary and secondary schools; supporting improvements in teaching; monitoring using standardised data; and providing intensive support for underachieving schools and departments. The LEA's monitoring indicates that the priority got off to a good start. Support for the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) has built successfully on previous developments, especially the 20-day courses to improve teachers' subject knowledge and the RAISE project.

52. Primary schools were selected for intensive support by consideration of a number of appropriate factors including low test scores. The 5-day training for intensive schools was successful; each school also receives 6 days of consultancy support. Non-intensive schools received support with their audit and their first training day, and to see if there were any particular issues. In addition, all primary schools are also offered termly co-ordinators' meetings and meetings for co-ordinators to review the analysis of test scores. The leading mathematics teacher scheme has been implemented effectively; visiting programmes are arranged centrally.

53. Staff in the intensive schools visited had benefited particularly from observing the consultants' demonstration lessons, and from regular evaluations by the consultants of teachers' lessons. All schools had also received considerable advisory support for monitoring and evaluating teaching and standards. In several schools additional effective and well-targeted support had been given. For example, one school had benefited from new curriculum materials and training for the teaching of mathematics investigations, and this had helped teachers to challenge high attaining pupils.

54. Support for secondary schools is less extensive. There are termly meetings for heads of departments. A conference was held in autumn 2000 where the implications of the NNS for secondary schools were considered. Arrangements are being set up for Year 7 teachers to visit leading mathematics teachers in primary classes. In the past, a RAISE project in Key Stage 3 helped schools to give additional support to pupils who had not reached level 4. The joint plans for introducing the NNS into Key Stage 3 have just been approved, and a consultant will be appointed. Responses to the school survey indicate that support for secondary schools is good. However, in the secondary schools visited, support had been mixed. One school, for example, had received good support for highly attaining pupils, and a school with an underperforming department had effective support in analysing its position and moving forward. However, in one needy school, the support provided had not been effective, and in another, support had been difficult to obtain.

Support for Information & Communication Technology (ICT)

55. The LEA is giving excellent support to schools by developing infrastructure and content for its broad band, wide area network. Support for the curriculum and teaching is good. There are examples of outstanding practice in schools. Practice in

some schools is weak, however. Although the potential of the LEA's support to raise standards is great, it has not yet had time for the full impact to affect all schools.

56. Since 1996 Telford and Wrekin Council has developed an ambitious strategy for ICT. It centres on an impressive communications infrastructure to link all schools, the LEA and other organisations such as colleges, libraries and medical practices. Within this network, all members will have filtered access to the internet and to a rich flow of content, developed in-house or by the commercial sector.

57. The education and training service has been prominent in this well planned endeavour. ICT is the first of its EDP priorities and it features in other priorities. It has allocated resources to match its intentions. The Council has also made available substantial funding. Government funding through the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) – within which the LEA has “pathfinder” status – has contributed around one fifth of the cost of the overall project. Three of the Council's corporate directors sit on the NGfL project team reflecting the importance placed on ICT in the LEA. Strengths of the LEA's approach include the high calibre of staff running the project and the partnerships forged to meet its aims. Schools have been very well consulted and headteachers welcome the initiative. They have been willing to allocate funding, join the network, upgrade their own ICT systems and facilitate staff training in order to reap the potential benefits. School ICT coordinators have been immersed in various developments. They are now in favour of the project after previously having some reservations. Commercial partners are providing infrastructure according to the LEA's specification and others are developing sophisticated multi-media content, which they will trial in the LEA's schools. Experts from higher education have been consulted to provide strategic and technical advice, together with specific evaluations. The three major external evaluation reports seen during the inspection concluded that the developments in the infrastructure so far have been effective and far reaching in their implications for other parts of the country.

58. School inspection reports show that pupils' attainment in ICT is weak throughout the age range and that some schools have given too little prominence to the use of ICT. The LEA has good procedures to support schools. It provides clear guidance on development planning and policy formulation. Training needs are identified and met through a comprehensive and graduated system of training courses and school-based consultancy beyond that required by NGfL. There is an agreed setting of a common hardware and software platform, which promotes economy of scale and efficient training. The procurement procedures enable schools to buy hardware and maintenance at an economical cost. There is an LEA-wide procedure for the review by groups of teachers of software before it is purchased for all to use through the network. Although at least three schools are concerned about their inability to use existing software on the new centralised system, the LEA has taken effective steps to minimise the effects of this by enabling the system to obtain LEA-wide licences for software used by individual schools. Because of the LEA's grand vision some schools have been held back. This needs to be balanced against the future potential benefits.

59. Some schools are very advanced in their teaching of ICT capability and in the impact ICT has on learning in other subjects. They have clearly been aided by

the LEA's strategy. However, some schools, including some of those visited, require very intensive support to reach the levels of competence which the LEA has in mind. The LEA has demonstrated, in schools which have already received such support, that it can rise to this challenge. Nevertheless, although the LEA is working hard to help schools to raise standards, too little attention has been paid to analysing levels of pupils' ICT capability in the schools and the LEA overall, or to setting targets to raise standards.

60. Support for ICT administration is good. The LEA draws a distinction between the management information systems team, which is responsible for assisting schools to use information systems to their best effect, and IT support for schools which provides all aspects of hardware and software technical support. Adequate consultation mechanisms exist with an administrators' group as well as an issues forum. The school survey shows schools' general approval of the LEA's efforts in both ICT administration and electronic information exchange. All schools have been on line for ICT administration since 1998. The LEA will have no difficulty meeting the DfEE 2002 targets for communications and information management.

Support for schools causing concern

61. Once schools are in special measures or serious weaknesses, they receive very effective support from the LEA. However, the LEA does not have clear and agreed protocols for identifying and supporting schools not identified by OFSTED but which are causing concern to the LEA. This key weakness reduces the LEA's ability effectively to support the 15 schools in this category.

62. The LEA currently has one school in special measures, one with serious weaknesses and two which have been identified as underachieving. Four schools, two of which were placed in special measures just after LGR and two before that, have now been removed from special measures having made the necessary progress. The LEA has energetically and effectively supported the schools placed in special measures and with serious weaknesses. In two of the schools, senior officers used their knowledge of the expertise available within the LEA to help governors to secure an effective new headteacher and chair of governors. This action was crucial to the subsequent progress the schools were able to make. Other support included seconding an adviser to the secondary school in special measures, providing extra attached adviser time to the other schools, appointing additional governors, providing additional subject, behaviour and educational psychology support, and extra money for classroom assistants. Schools have received good support and advice on dealing with competency cases.

63. The LEA establishes review teams for schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses. These teams enable very effective co-ordination of the support and monitoring of progress. The LEA learnt quickly from its early experiences, and now ensures that schools are not overwhelmed, but receive well-targeted support. The training in monitoring and evaluation of teaching has been particularly beneficial. There has been a negotiated exit strategy for those schools recently removed from special measures, although this was not used earlier, a situation which left one school in a very fragile state.

64. Four schools have been placed in one of OFSTED's categories of causing concern in the last two years, indicating that the LEA did not have sufficiently robust procedures for preventing this. The LEA has responded by amending and clarifying its monitoring procedures. It is also currently reviewing and clarifying its protocol for schools causing concern, which is not at present sufficiently clear. Criteria and procedures for schools causing concern to the LEA are being developed to establish, by September 2001, a transparent and robust system which is accepted by schools. Headteachers and officers are involved.

65. At present, there are 15 schools on a list of those causing concern to the LEA. However this information has not been passed on to their governing bodies in writing. Four schools in this category were visited in this inspection. Only two were clear about the LEA's concerns and another was partially aware. In these schools the support provided was being effective, but in the fourth school, which was seemingly unaware of the LEA's concerns, support had been ineffective. The present lack of clarity limits the LEA's ability to provide them with support, as until a school is aware of its weaknesses and accepts that they are real, support is unlikely to be effective.

Support for governors

66. Support for governors is good.

67. The LEA provides free clerking for three governors' meetings per year to all schools and a buy-back service which provides the administrative support for meetings; ninety-six per cent of schools purchase the service. The LEA provides draft agendas for governing bodies and operates briefing sessions for the clerks, and, separately, for the chairs of the governing bodies. In all the schools visited, these arrangements were praised. These briefing arrangements promote regular consultation with governors and do not inhibit governing bodies from choosing their own agenda items.

68. Governors are provided with good quality and relevant general information by the LEA and support in equipping them to evaluate the work of their schools. The LEA is, for example, currently piloting a self-evaluation tool kit in six schools. A wide range of training opportunities meeting the needs of both new and experienced governors is offered. Most schools visited were satisfied with the training that they had received although some courses, for example that designed to help governors with performance management, had been less interesting and useful.

69. The LEA works hard to recruit new governors. It keeps a register of people interested in this role and has done, for example, some excellent governor recruiting work with schools causing concern and within the ethnic minority communities. Members of these communities are well represented on governing bodies given the overall balance of the population. Despite the officers' work, there is a 10.4 per cent vacancy rate for LEA governors although this is below the LEA's statistical neighbours (14.5 per cent) and the national average (16.7 per cent). Two of the schools visited had vacancies on their governing bodies and reported considerable difficulty in recruitment. One of these indicated that the recruitment problem was

reducing the effectiveness of that governing body.

70. In all but one school visited, the LEA is rightly seen by governors as being helpful, open, accessible and responsive.

Support for school management

71. The LEA's support for school senior and middle management, newly qualified teachers and school self review is good. Evidence from recent school inspections shows that, with a few exceptions, the quality of leadership and management is good. From inspection reports and other sources, the LEA understands well the strengths, weaknesses and development needs of management in its schools. Well-conceived strategies have ensured good progress in all six activities outlined in the EDP for management development.

72. Attached and specialist advisers provide regular support to senior and middle managers. The level of support varies appropriately according to need and to the amount purchased by schools. It is well regarded and well matched in almost all the schools. Headteachers value their advisers' ability to discuss management issues with them. Support for school improvement and post-inspection action planning is effective. All subject areas are supported by the joint advisory service, and some subject advisers have set up effective networks to share good practice.

73. Courses led by external consultants, together with 'on-the-job' training and close monitoring by attached advisers, promote self review. Support for school self-evaluation, including data analysis, lesson observation and subject performance reviews, is good and has improved headteachers' and subject leaders' management capabilities. Many more senior and middle managers monitor the quality of education and standards achieved. Most schools submit summaries of their self-reviews but the LEA has no moderated procedure for their validation.

74. The LEA provides a comprehensive management training programme on priorities identified within the EDP. Newly appointed headteachers are well supported by mentors and experienced headteachers through the Leadership and Management Programme for New Headteachers (HEADLAMP) training scheme. The national training programmes for serving headteachers (LPSH) and for those aspiring to headship (NPQH) are well supported by the LEA, and have been well taken up. The LEA has worked collaboratively with external providers and higher education to develop accreditation for some of the training programmes. The structured support for the newly qualified teachers is good, including effective provision of mentoring, guidelines, networking arrangements, general courses and access to a comprehensive induction package.

Support for life long learning

75. The LEA has a strong commitment to lifelong learning. The lifelong learning plan is comprehensive and well in tune with local needs. A partnership with schools, further and higher education, Shropshire careers service, employment services and private and voluntary sectors, enables the authority to manage multi-agency work, which contributes to school improvement and standards. Many pupils

of all ages benefit from a wide range of initiatives including after school and Saturday clubs and summer schools. Each year, the children's University of Telford and Wrekin, for example, organises a diverse programme of workshops for all Year 6 pupils on science, art, ICT, environmental and technological themes. In 2000, participation rates were high and schools visited were pleased with the positive impact on pupils' motivation and self esteem.

Support for early years

76. The LEA's support for early years is very good. The early years and childcare development plan (EYCDP) provides an excellent framework with a clear range of work and targets to ensure that the LEA meets its statutory responsibilities. The partnership arrangements are effective and efficient. Primary and infant schools visited rate the support for early years as very good or excellent.

77. The early years team has very good links and works well with independent, private and voluntary sectors through the EYDCP. The early years partnership benefits from strong leadership and a team of competent officers with a clear drive for further improvement. Very good progress has been made on all six activities in the EDP. Good guidelines for the implementation of the Foundation Stage Curriculum and the deployment of qualified teachers have reportedly improved practice in all pre-school settings and reception classes. The partnership has invested a great deal in supporting vulnerable children, those with special educational needs and those for whom English is not the first language. The linkages between the EAZ and the 'Trailblazer' Sure Start project have enabled the LEA to implement an early intervention strategy to tackle pupils' learning difficulties in involved schools within deprived wards.

78. The partnership has developed a clear strategy to ensure the dissemination of good practice and provided effective training for management, self-review, curriculum planning and pupil assessment.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for schools causing concern:

- protocol and revised procedures for identifying and supporting schools causing concern to the LEA need to be agreed with the schools and published, and to include provision for written notification of the LEA's concern to the school's governing body.

In order to improve the support for management and governance:

- notes of advisers' visits should be forwarded to governing bodies as appropriate;
- the consistency of the LEA's procedures to validate the schools' self review should be strengthened;
- a review statement agreed between the headteacher and attached adviser on school performance should be prepared annually for governors; and

- schools where the effectiveness of the governing body is in question should be identified and specific support should be targeted to assist those governing bodies in carrying out their role.

In order to raise standards of attainment:

- continued assistance should be given to those schools where teachers currently lack confidence and competence in ICT teaching; and
- the analysis of pupils' levels of ICT attainment should be strengthened and appropriate targets for improvement should be set by the schools.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

79. The strategic management of education is very good. Whilst schools were initially sceptical about LGR, they are now complimentary about the new authority. They cite particularly the strength of support, the quality of partnership and the fact that they know the officers well, and the officers know the schools well.

80. The corporate plan of the council was developed following an audit of local needs which highlighted low skill and wage levels and high degrees of deprivation concentrated in some areas. The council consulted widely on its draft community plan issuing eight service 'green papers' including one on education and training, and 'white papers' developed from those, conferences and surveys. The consultations included meetings of the 'race reference group' and a 'children's and young persons' conference.

81. The four corporate priorities that emerged from this process include 'promoting the interests of children and young people', and 'improving prosperity and combating poverty and social exclusion'. These give an appropriately high priority to education and social inclusion, which commands a broad political consensus. Senior members believe strongly that such consensus is essential for progress to be made. The council and the education and training directorate plans have a three-year life and are due for review in the spring of 2001. The planning process operates at four levels from the strategic to the operational where senior officers have personal plans derived directly from the directorate plan. These plans are well thought through, clear, affordable and achievable.

82. Directorate level planning processes support and complement the corporate plans and have appropriate objectives. Plans and their implementation are monitored and appropriate action is taken in the light of that monitoring. For example, as a consequence of monitoring in 1999, some £180k was re-focused on reducing Key Stage 2 class sizes to match the government strategy on Key Stage 1 class sizes. There are effective systems at directorate level for communicating and implementing corporate plans. The links between the corporate and directorate plans are clear and direct. They lead to a coherent and well understood approach to management and change. Lines of communication, responsibility and accountability are clear and appropriate. Different directorates and agencies work closely in partnership.

83. Members have a coherent vision for education, which is clearly reflected in the strategic planning of education. They also have an unclouded view of their strategic role in relation to education and in the context of autonomous schools. Their leadership of the LEA is purposeful, visionary and strongly committed to working in partnership with other agencies. Members take a strong interest in schools.

84. Decisions related to education are well informed and take account of the views of schools. Processes for accountability are well established and delegation to officers is appropriate. All key education policies are subject to an effective scrutiny

mostly through the education and training board. Members are satisfactorily involved in monitoring the work of education and training. Officers provide elected members with clear, succinct and well informed advice. Members are kept up-to-date by officers with their responsibilities.

85. Schools rightly appreciate the effectiveness of the officers and their firm emphasis on promoting the interests of children. All schools visited expressed their trust in and support for the leaders of the service who are perceived to know schools well and to understand their challenges. There are many levels of communication with schools. Headteachers and others are represented on all main consultation and discussion groups. There is an overall headteacher forum and groups reporting to it that are specific to secondary and primary phases and special schools. In all schools visited, headteachers expressed the view that they were fully involved in decision making, and consulted extensively. Former grant-maintained schools were full of praise for the way in which the LEA had handled the return to partnership with the LEA.

Partnership

86. The LEA has developed particularly strong links with a wide range of partners who are, without exception, very supportive of the open and receptive attitude of the LEA and its willingness to work in real collaboration. There is a well co-ordinated structure in which partnerships thrive, deriving from the overall body, the Telford and Wrekin partnership and continuing through the education and training advisory group, incorporating a range of headteacher forums. Services are clear about their own responsibilities in relation to "cross-cutting" issues. Relationships between the key partners are very good and widely praised by partner organisations including the police service, the health authority, the local race equality commission and the statutory social services function. The agencies have established a partnership development unit (PDU) staffed by three secondees from the council, the police service and the health authority. It is hosted by the university; its IT support is provided from Telford College and the local Training and Enterprise Council/Chamber make a cash contribution to running costs.

87. This approach to partnership has yielded a number of direct benefits to education. One example is the establishment of a translation/interpreting service jointly funded by Telford and Wrekin, the police, the health authority, the fire service, the college and the careers service. Providing support between English, Urdu and Punjabi, this facility is available to all agencies and has proved useful, for example, in translating the LEA's admission information. A second example is the creation of a multi-agency child and family centre (Glebe Centre) in partnership with social services and the health authority. Although a fully effective multi-agency approach to individual casework has yet to emerge, this co-location of staff from a range of services and agencies provides excellent opportunities for joint working. Thirdly, the LEA has been effective in setting up and assisting the operation of an EAZ. This is already bringing clear benefits, for example in reducing exclusions from secondary schools.

88. Notable features of Telford and Wrekin's provision are joint arrangements for SEN and advisory and inspection services with the new Shropshire County Council.

Members were determined that LGR would not lead to a loss of the 'economies of scale' in major services that they had seen elsewhere in the country. The arrangement is underpinned by service level agreements, which recognise different levels of service in the two authorities. The benefits are clearly visible, for example, in the authoritative, comprehensive and cost effective support to schools provided by the SEN and advisory services, which would have been difficult to secure from smaller services.

Management services

89. The school survey, visits to schools during the inspection, documentation provided and officer interviews all confirm that, in general terms, no service is less than satisfactory and some, for example financial and personnel, are good.

90. Schools' confidence in the LEA's range of services is demonstrated by the high level of buy-back of those which are delegated. The LEA has produced a directory of services for schools and evaluates through a representative group both the usefulness of the directory to schools and the delivery of services. All schools visited found the directory helpful and it has much to commend it: all services are described, whether delegated or not; each sets out what levels of service will be provided and a release clause can be activated if a particular service underperforms. However, the directory still falls short of what is required in the context of Best Value. It gives no indication of the breakdown between central and delegated costs and little information about alternative providers. Therefore, schools cannot judge if a service offers value for money or compare the council against other potential providers.

91. The LEA's financial and personnel services are very effective and generally highly rated by schools, as is the provision for internal audit. The effectiveness of these services is enhanced by their integrated support to schools, offering a joint approach to aspects of governor training, headteacher recruitment and the action necessary to control school budgets. Although based within the education and training service, each has line management responsibilities to the corporate centre, thereby assisting co-ordination with the council. Both services make light-touch contact with schools, unless otherwise necessary.

92. Following consultation, the financial service introduced an on-line accounting system to schools on LGR, thus increasing the efficiency of school financial management. From 2001 it will appropriately reduce the level of balance at which a school has to report formally to the LEA from 7.5 per cent to 5 per cent. No school has a serious budget problem. The service has yet to provide appropriate guidance to schools on their requirement to have regard to Best Value.

93. The personnel service made a slow start in the new authority but has made up ground and offers a good service. In the school survey, personnel advice and guidance were rated equally well with casework. Good statistical evidence is maintained on personnel issues, allowing for properly-targeted activity on themes such as the reduction of fixed-term contracts, absence management and recruitment. A revised personnel handbook has recently been produced and there

are productive arrangements with trade unions. Good working relationships exist with payroll.

94. The overall rating in the school survey for other services is satisfactory. Schools vary considerably in their views, suggesting that the consistency of performance can be improved. There are good arrangements to provide a corporate approach to maintaining and improving standards, with regular meetings of managers from the premises-related services, transport and catering services with senior education colleagues. The resultant arrangements for consulting schools, individually and collectively, and in monitoring and improving services, are impressive. A reorganisation of client functions to give direct responsibility to the education and training service aims to improve management arrangements. The cost per pupil of the integrated transport and catering services is reasonable, compared with statistical neighbours.

Recommendations

In order to improve services to schools:

- multi-disciplinary working should be further developed, where appropriate, in the new child and family centre;
- the directory of services should be restructured, in consultation, to give more information to schools to determine if value for money is being provided; and
- guidance should be provided to schools on their responsibilities in respect of Best Value.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

95. The council's firm intention to promote social inclusion is clear from its incorporation into two of its four corporate priorities. Members and officers are determined to play a strong advocacy role and provide appropriate education for children with SEN. Their good planning to this effect, and the effective integration of corporate and educational priorities, are evident in the council's children and young persons' strategy, the comprehensive SEN and social inclusion development plan and in the clear policy described in an annex of the EDP. The policy is well in line with national guidelines for the Code of Practice for special educational needs.

96. The LEA's strategy and provision for SEN, inherited from the former county LEA, are good. There has been an extensive review of all aspects of SEN within Telford and Wrekin LEA through 10 working parties and the commissioning by both LEAs of an outside consultant's report on aspects of support for EBD pupils. Their work has focused appropriately on enhancing inclusion, including: improving the provision and support to meet the needs of early years; developing early intervention strategies; promoting closer liaison between all stakeholders and extending professional development and training opportunities. The education and training board is considering all of these reports, outcomes and future actions. The structure of special schools, for example, will be subject to further detailed and formal consultations. Other actions, such as setting up of the EBD nurture group and dual school and pupil referral unit Key Stage 3 placements are imminent. Officers intend to prioritise those developments followed by further consideration of the funding and practicalities of their implementation. The consultative process has been open and has enhanced an already strong sense of partnership.

97. The joint arrangements for the management of both the advisory service and the SEN support services work well for special schools and SEN provision in mainstream schools. The arrangements give all schools access to a more comprehensive and authoritative service than they would have if provision were the sole responsibility of one LEA. This is further enhanced by the high calibre of officers dealing with SEN in the LEA.

Statutory obligations

98. The LEA takes effective steps to fulfil its statutory duties and is assisted by an SEN pupil database that is being expanded to take account of additional aspects such as attendance figures. The process of assessment and issue of statements is well managed. Ninety-five per cent of statutory assessments, above the national average, are prepared within the time limits set by national guidelines, when the LEA receives advice on time. When medical advice arrives late, however, only 49.1 per cent are processed on time, a figure well below the LEA's target. The practice of allocating educational psychologists (EPs) to schools based on need, and with statutory work taking precedence, works well, and the principle is understood, and approved of, by schools. In nearly every case, schools received good support and advice in dealing with the statutory assessment of children with SEN.

99. The quality of statements and the individual education plans on which they are based is good and improving. The LEA maintains an accessible record of the dates on which annual reviews and transitional plans have taken place and they are represented where the school has requested attendance because of a potential change to a statement or recommendation of a pupil placement. Much has been done to reduce the percentage of pupils with statements of SEN and there have been very few appeals to tribunals to challenge the LEA's decisions. At present, 4.7 per cent of pupils have statements. This is significantly higher than national and regional averages. The support services are giving excessive time to statutory assessment, because of the existing assessment criteria, when that help could be given to pupils, especially through earlier intervention. Although deployment of support services in this way continues to be inappropriate, the LEA is tackling the issue with vigour.

100. The parents' partnership scheme is beginning to have a positive impact. It provides a useful and efficient network and parents are now well informed of their rights and responsibilities.

School improvement

101. Support for pupils with SEN is good, with a clear focus on raising standards. In all schools visited, support for SEN was at least satisfactory and in over half it was good or very good. The support and training opportunities are well regarded by schools. The hearing and visual impairment teams provide very good support and advice, and pupils with sensory impairment make good progress.

102. The two LEAs cooperate effectively to support SEN pupils. The LEA has four special schools which provide places for pupils from both Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin. Similarly, Shropshire's special school for EBD pupils provides places for children from both LEAs. The number of pupils who are educated in the independent and non-maintained sector is small and the LEA intends that increasing liaison between the LEA and the social services department should lead to a further reduction. There are agreed procedures for placing pupils in special schools which headteachers report work well.

103. The monitoring of SEN in mainstream schools and in out-of-county school placements has been given a high priority, and is highly effective. A specific senior appointment has been made and the protocol for SEN monitoring is part of a rolling programme. It is thorough and appreciated by schools. SEN provision, school data and central support arrangements are all considered together. The LEA has a good knowledge of how schools are spending those funds provided by the LEA specifically for SEN and the information contributes to the future planning of SEN provision. The extension of this to include additional information on pupils' progress provides an effective means of assessing value for money. An extensive range of support provided by the specialist staff for pupils with, and without statements, is provided through the joint arrangement. Schools rightly value the quality of these services.

104. Schools receive very good advisory support for SEN and appreciate the enthusiasm, commitment and accessibility of senior LEA staff working for pupils with SEN. School SEN coordinators in particular valued the fact that they are informed

of national developments and know to whom they can turn for support and advice. The extensive professional development programme available for both teachers and learning support assistants is very good. Special schools are pleased with the quality of subject specialist advice. Good use has been made of specific additional Standards Fund grants.

Value for money

105. At 15.8 per cent of the local schools budget, the overall costs for special education in 1999/2000 are satisfactory and below those for statistical neighbours and unitary authorities (15.9 per cent) and the national average (16.1 per cent). Of the centrally funded elements of this expenditure, the use of special education placements outside the authority is well below the norm.

106. At the time of the inspection, working parties established to develop the authority's future SEN strategy were shortly to produce their final recommendations. Officers are acutely aware of the need to plan within budgetary limits. SEN expenditure has been controlled effectively so far in the new authority. However, if current trends continued statementing costs would rise by 21 per cent up to 2007/2008.

107. The majority of statementing costs are delegated in addition to which school funding to meet the needs of non-statemented pupils with SEN is clearly set out in the scheme of delegation. The LEA monitors school SEN spending particularly effectively. It plans to delegate the majority of funds to schools as it implements the revised SEN Code of Practice. However, success will depend on reducing the high number of statements and better planning to work within budgetary limits. The LEA is strongly committed to achieving both aims.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision for special educational needs, steps should be taken to:

- ensure that the future SEN strategy deals with the need to plan within budgetary limits, in particular to reduce the number, and control the cost, of statements;
- ensure that the LEA's forthcoming SEN strategy builds upon the good practice in the special schools and continue to involve them fully in future developments so that recent changes can be consolidated; and
- develop effective strategies to monitor the progress of pupils with EBD and to ensure effective coordination of the work of the mainstream schools, the special school and the support service.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

108. Telford and Wrekin manages the supply of school places effectively. The school organisation committee is well established, and the practice of planning and provision of places is good. However, the school organisation plan lacks coherence and specificity, particularly in the section on issues. The District Audit report on the planning of school places, published in 1999, was broadly complimentary. The major issue facing the council now, as then, is that of providing for a rising school population. Over 6000 houses are to be built in the area over the next seven years and a further 7500 in the following ten years. So far the additional school accommodation required has been provided at the right time and, following full consultation, at an appropriate site.

109. Three of the thirteen secondary schools have surplus places of over 20 per cent and three are more than 20 per cent over capacity. The overall secondary surplus is 8.4 per cent. It is anticipated that 600 extra secondary places will be required by 2006. The LEA is planning for a new secondary school to be provided from 2004. The resultant required review of secondary provision should address the need to maximise the use of all suitable available accommodation. The total surplus of primary places amounts to 8.3 per cent, a reduction from 9.3 per cent in 1999. The LEA has specific plans for the three schools with over 25 per cent surplus places. The declared LEA policy is for all through primary schools, to be pursued when circumstances permit. Proposals for the closures of an infant and a junior school to establish a primary school have been implemented.

110. The forecasting of school population is accurate and efficient, via a comprehensive, computerised planning model.

Admissions

111. The administration of the admissions system is very well organised and is recognised as such by schools. All schools rated the information provided as satisfactory or better. A 1999 District Audit study concluded that the council met best published practice on all stages of the admission and appeals process. The admission booklets for primary and secondary schools are thorough and make clear the procedures to parents. The task for secondary education is made more difficult by the diverse pattern of organisation within the LEA. Consultation took place in 2000 on possible changes to the present secondary admissions system, the proposed major policy change being to give higher priority to those wanting to go to their nearest school. Following consultation no change was made, although the issues will need to be re-examined whilst planning for the proposed new secondary school. The process of consultation was conducted well throughout. The LEA has also recently consulted on a possible change to primary reception admissions; whatever the decision, the consultation process has again been thorough and even handed.

112. Effective co-ordination takes place with other admissions authorities, and the LEA has helped foundation and voluntary-aided secondary schools to improve their

admissions and appeals procedures. The admissions forum is an effective advisory body which is consulted on all admissions policy matters.

113. For 2000/2001 admissions, 89 per cent of parents secured their first choice of secondary school and 98 per cent their first choice at the primary reception stage. This is a satisfactory level overall. The number of appeals heard as a percentage of admissions is not excessive: 4.8 per cent in secondary and 9.1 per cent in primary schools. The primary figure is inflated by the high number of appeals for year groups outside the reception age group.

Asset management

114. The LEA has been highly successful in implementing the DfEE's procedures to promote effective asset management planning. At the outset, the council allocated an extra £100k to facilitate the process. Condition and suitability surveys have been completed to the satisfaction of almost all schools and of the DfEE. Most schools visited clearly understood how the needs of their own school fitted into the framework of the LEA's policy. Benefiting from DfEE advice, the local policy statement is clear on how the premises data now available will be used to determine building priorities within the LEA. Schools should now have no doubt as to why LEA funds are committed to particular schemes.

115. The annual resources likely to be available should allow for proper maintenance and improvement of education premises. No school visited has expressed serious concern about the present and future state of its premises and the LEA is assisted in its property management by the relative newness of the building stock. Schools have adequate technical advice to support their delegated responsibilities. The good start to asset management planning has been much assisted by the early formulation of an asset management plan working party, recently extended into an enlarged consultative group. The LEA is ensuring that the planning process continues to meet the needs of schools, the DfEE and the council so that the asset management plan can contribute positively to school improvement.

116. The current capital programme of the LEA is enhanced by basic need provision, capital expenditure to implement the NGfL, and good use of various partnership schemes. It totals about £31m, representing a major investment for the size of the LEA.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

117. Provision of education otherwise than at school is unsatisfactory, but improving. There are strengths, for example there is a comprehensive database of pupils without a school place and good provision for pupils of primary age. However, there are significant weaknesses in the provision for excluded secondary pupils and others who are without a school place. The strategy in the EDP recognises the need to improve provision. There are plans, which are being further developed, to meet the government's requirements for 2002.

118. A pupil referral unit (PRU) provides well for primary pupils who are excluded or at risk of exclusion. Pupils spend 50 per cent of their time in the unit and 50 per

cent in their primary school. They receive 25 hours education per week in total. There is a good emphasis on, and support for, re-integrating all the pupils into school. The PRU's recent inspection report judged the progress made by pupils and the quality of teaching to be good.

119. Provision for excluded secondary pupils is more problematic, although there are some strengths. Most excluded pupils, as well others such as school phobics, attend tuition centres. These are not registered as schools or as PRUs and do not have a proper legal basis. This is a key weakness. Although centre-based staff are clearly committed, the LEA does not adequately monitor the quality of provision. The average time taken to place permanently excluded secondary pupils has fallen from 40 days in 1998/1999 to 27 days in 1999/2000, but is still too long. Only 59 per cent of secondary pupils receive 10 hours or more of tuition. Re-integration rates are low for Key Stage 3 pupils (less than one third of pupils were re-integrated in 1999/2000) and only 16 per cent of Key Stage 4 pupils went on to college in 1999/2000. There is additional provision for some pupils at Key Stage 4 in a pilot project run in conjunction with the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders. Some secondary pupils have also benefited from referral to a project run by the youth service, which has helped to increase the success of re-integration.

120. The LEA has suitable monitoring arrangements in cases where parents choose to educate at home. In a positive move to help school-age mothers continue their education and to access other services, a teenage pregnancy support officer has recently been appointed, funded jointly with the health authority. At present, pregnant schoolgirls and school-age mothers are rightly encouraged to attend their own school for as long as possible. Poor attenders receive tuition, which the LEA is seeking to enhance.

121. Spending on education out of school generally is high, reflecting the relatively high proportion of excluded pupils. It is low, however, on PRUs and the overall costs of providing education otherwise than at school are average. The LEA is appropriately reviewing its procedures and two external audits have been completed recently. Plans to provide full-time education for excluded pupils within 15 days by September 2002 have been approved by the DfEE and are being developed further. As part of the plans, provision for Key Stage 4 pupils will be relocated to a local further education college; a small scale pilot project has already started.

Attendance

122. The LEA's support for attendance is sound with good features and is improving. Attendance in the schools has been broadly similar to the national average since 1998, and is gradually rising. The LEA came very near to meeting its 1999/2000 targets for reducing unauthorised absence.

123. The education welfare service (EWS) is soundly led and managed. It has a published attendance policy and guidance document. This is mainly suitable although the formal guidance to schools on contacting parents when a pupil is absent indicates too slow a response. There are clear service level agreements with

schools, which set down the responsibilities of schools and the service. An appropriately stepped system leads to prosecutions.

124. Improvements are being made in response to the recommendations of a recent district audit report. The EWS now provides a good analysis of school data, used to target support to schools most in need. Schools causing concern to the EWS are highlighted and an action plan agreed. This has proved useful to schools. Education welfare officers (EWOs) are carrying out more work with schools to improve strategies for attendance. The LEA is also adopting a scheme from a neighbouring LEA to help to encourage pupils to attend.

125. Most schools visited were receiving good support. They valued the contribution made by their EWO, to whom they had access between visits if necessary. Schools in the EAZ received extra support. One secondary school, for example, had used EAZ resources plus money from the pupil retention grant and the LEA to fund a school-based EWO, and had an attendance officer who made contact with parents on a pupil's first day of absence. However, two secondary schools felt that although the quality of support was good, it was not enough. The overall costs of the service are well below the national average, and the value for money is good.

Behaviour support

126. Support for behaviour is sound with good features and is improving. After a vigorous LEA campaign between 1998/99 and 1999/2000, permanent exclusions were sharply reduced, by 40 per cent in secondary schools. However, the rate remains high in comparison with national rates in secondary and special schools. The EDP target for 2000 for permanent exclusions has been met. Fixed-term exclusions are high overall in secondary and special schools; the incidence varies considerably between schools.

127. The 1999 behaviour support plan (BSP), which is allied closely to the EDP, recognises appropriately the need to reduce permanent exclusions and improve education otherwise as well as to use multi-agency approaches. The LEA's considerable success in reducing the number of permanent exclusions has been achieved through a variety of means. These include the production and circulation to schools of exceptionally good quality data on exclusions, and persuading headteachers to take more responsibility for difficult pupils. The LEA has, in several cases, been able to act effectively as an advocate for the children concerned at the pupil planning meetings held prior to exclusion. A secondary behaviour support team has helped the schools to provide for pupils at risk of exclusion. The LEA is now starting to tackle the high incidence of fixed-term exclusions. The first step in this has been to ensure that all schools have comparative data. So far the impact in secondary schools has been limited.

128. The behaviour support service (BSS) is managed well and provides good support. There are clear service level agreements with secondary schools that buy in support. Primary schools are able to access the service for individual pupils through a clear process of referral from an educational psychologist. The average time from referral to receiving support is reasonable. Most schools visited felt they receive good quality support. The BSS provides support for pupils, advice and

training for teachers, support with developing policies and for the establishment of inclusion centres. Some of the primary schools visited also receive effective help via an inclusion project with one of the special schools or through a shared placement at the primary PRU.

129. Three of the secondary schools visited also had in-school inclusion centres, in two cases partially funded by the EAZ. These were starting to have a positive impact. In the most successful case, the centre had helped the school to reduce its incidence of permanent exclusions to zero and its fixed-term exclusions from 50 per term to two last term.

130. The LEA intends to continue improving support for schools and has the capacity to do so. Review of the BSP, within the context of the proposed inclusion policy, started in January and will be followed by consultation. The BSS has received two external audits, and carries out benchmarking. Secondary behaviour support has had a full analysis of its costs in order to provide prices to schools. Costs overall are below average and value for money is satisfactory.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

131. The child protection and health and safety arrangements made by the LEA are highly satisfactory. Statutory duties are being met. Guidance on referral procedures and on identifying possible child abuse has been developed in partnership with schools and other agencies. All schools have identified a 'designated person'. The LEA record of these is kept up-to-date and shows the training that the individuals have attended. However, this reveals that, in 18 schools, the designated person has not yet received training, despite this being offered by the LEA. The training provided is good quality. There are clearly written procedures and policies for health and safety and established procedures for dealing with areas of significant risk.

Children in public care

132. Highly satisfactory provision is made for the education of children in public care, and the authority has accepted its corporate responsibility. The LEA and schools are aware of which children are in public care. Their attendance is monitored appropriately by the EWS. Personal education plans exist for the majority of children and the Council is working to secure this for them all. Social services support the LEA's work for children in public care.

133. GCSE targets have been set individually for children in public care and these were significantly exceeded last summer. The LEA has, since September 2000, designated an educational psychologist to look particularly at children in public care and work with schools to ensure that appropriate and suitably challenging targets are set for their attainment. This is sound practice.

Ethnic minority children

134. Provision for children from ethnic minority backgrounds, including that for travelling children, is highly satisfactory. Overall, ethnic minority pupils in the authority achieve above the LEA and national averages at, for example, GCSE. However, some Pakistan heritage pupils achieve low levels at KS2 and in GCSE (and in one school visited, at KS1). Until recently, the LEA had not targeted specific areas of ethnic minority underachievement. However, data has now started to be collected and analysed. This will be used to develop intervention focused on greatest need.

135. Since its inception, the LEA has monitored permanent exclusion data and analysed it by ethnicity. In September 1999, this was extended to include fixed-term exclusion data. The analysis is shared with all schools to inform their practices. Pupils from ethnic minorities are not over represented among excluded pupils.

136. The administration of the ethnic minority and Travellers' achievement grant (EMTAG) meets government requirements. One school visited had used this grant, with some success, to employ more bi-lingual support assistants to work with its 30 per cent of children whose first language is not English. These assistants also provide translation services in two Asian languages at termly parents' meetings.

137. The LEA is a member of the West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Travelling Children. This service is well respected within the region and the support given locally to travelling children is appropriate.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

138. The LEA provides good support for able pupils. A working group maintains an overview of local and national initiatives. The LEA has produced detailed and helpful guidelines on developing policy and practice for more able and talented pupils. It provides good advice to teachers through the advisory and education psychology services on extension and enrichment activities. Some enterprising recent initiatives have enabled schools to improve provision for more able pupils. In 2000, DfEE funding enabled the authority to run three summer schools to provide challenging problem-solving opportunities to stimulate and extend high attaining pupils. Some of the schools visited have named coordinators and organise clubs, extra-curricular activities and 'master classes' and promote thinking skills to support these pupils.

Social Inclusion

139. The LEA has a strong commitment to social inclusion for all pupils. This is understood and supported by schools. The social inclusion development plan for 1999-2002 outlines how this is to be achieved. The LEA's support for pupils with SEN, attendance, behaviour, child protection, children in public care and ethnic minority pupils makes an effective contribution. Multi-agency working is being supported, for example, through the strategy for pregnant teenagers. Provision for excluded pupils and those without a school place of secondary age does not make a strong enough contribution at present, but this is being tackled by the LEA.

140. Telford and Wrekin has taken firm measures to combat racism in schools. It has clear policies on, and has made clear its determination not to tolerate, racism. The council is using the Council for Racial Equality standards. It has an appropriate training plan to achieve its objectives. The policies are monitored and appropriate action is taken as a consequence. For example, the council has identified that ethnic minorities are under-represented in its work force when compared with the local population as a whole (1.5 per cent compared to 3.5 per cent) and is addressing this, with the support of the local race equality council, through realistic target setting and positive action. The local race equality council is highly supportive of the attitudes of, and actions taken by, the council over equal opportunities and, specifically, racism. The LEA has produced clear guidance on combating racism, and circulated a helpful leaflet, via schools, to all parents.

141. The council has responded appropriately in the aftermath of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence (the Macpherson report). It has established a race equality leadership group, which has initiated work on translation and interpreting, a revised complaints procedure, training programmes for central staff and schools and a targeted training pack on 'tackling racism in schools'. Training is provided for teachers on meeting the needs of ethnic minority pupils. After two recent deaths in Telford, the LEA was pro-active in identifying pupils who may have been affected and in offering support and counselling. The positive impact of this was apparent in two of the schools visited.

142. Data on racial incidents is being collected. Returns have been received from all but one school - this is being pursued vigorously for the information. This data is being analysed, but this process is at an early stage. The main issue to emerge to date is the need for greater clarity in defining a racial incident. This issue has been included in recent briefing sessions for governors and clerks to governors.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision for education otherwise than at school steps should be taken to:

- ensure all provision for pupils not in school at Key Stages 3 and 4 has a proper legal basis; and
- improve the quantity and quality of this provision at Key Stages 3 and 4, so that pupils are better prepared for the next stage of education, and there is more emphasis on re-integration for pupils at Key Stage 3.

In order to promote social inclusion, further steps should be taken to:

- reduce the incidence of fixed-term exclusions; and
- ensure that all 'designated persons' in schools for child protection are appropriately trained.

In order to raise standards of attainment:

- steps should be taken to ensure that all children in public care should have personal education plans; and
- steps should be taken to develop an LEA-wide system for setting realistic and yet challenging targets by ethnic group, and using progress against these targets to judge the effectiveness of targeted support and inform the future deployment of resources.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve support for schools causing concern:

- protocol and revised procedures for identifying and supporting schools causing concern to the LEA need to be agreed with the schools and published, and to include provision for written notification of the LEA's concern to the school's governing body.

In order to improve the support for management and governance:

- notes of advisers' visits should be forwarded to governing bodies as appropriate;
- the consistency of the LEA's procedures to validate the schools' self review should be strengthened;
- a review statement agreed between the headteacher and attached adviser on school performance should be prepared annually for governors; and
- schools where the effectiveness of the governing body is in question should be identified and specific support should be targeted to assist those governing bodies in carrying out their role.

In order to raise standards of attainment:

- continued assistance should be given to those schools where teachers currently lack confidence and competence in ICT teaching; and
- the analysis of pupils' levels of ICT attainment should be strengthened and appropriate targets for improvement should be set by the schools;
- steps should be taken to ensure that all children in public care should have personal education plans; and
- steps should be taken to develop an LEA-wide system for setting realistic and yet challenging targets by ethnic group, and using progress against these targets to judge the effectiveness of targeted support and inform the future deployment of resources.

In order to improve services to schools:

- multi-disciplinary working should be further developed, where appropriate, in the new child and family centre;
- the directory of services should be restructured, in consultation, to give more information to schools to determine if value for money is being provided; and
- guidance should be provided to schools on their responsibilities in respect of Best Value.

In order to improve provision for special educational needs, steps should be taken to:

- ensure that the future SEN strategy addresses the need to plan within budgetary limits, in particular to reduce the number, and control the cost, of statements;
- ensure that the LEA's forthcoming SEN strategy builds upon the good practice in the special schools and continues to involve them fully in future developments so that recent changes can be consolidated; and
- develop effective strategies to monitor the progress of pupils with EBD and to ensure effective coordination of the work of the mainstream schools, the special school and the support service.

In order to improve provision for education otherwise than at school steps should be taken to:

- ensure all provision for pupils not in school at Key Stages 3 and 4 has a proper legal basis; and
- improve the quantity and quality of this provision at Key Stages 3 and 4, so that pupils are better prepared for the next stage of education, and there is more emphasis on re-integration for pupils at Key Stage 3.

In order to promote social inclusion, further steps should be taken to:

- reduce the incidence of fixed-term exclusions; and
- ensure that all 'designated persons' in schools for child protection are appropriately trained.

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