



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
TAMESIDE
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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**OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection of Tameside local education authority (LEA) 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 (December 2001)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on best value.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports and audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and members; focus groups of headteachers and teachers; staff in other departments at that local authority; and diocesan representatives. Telephone conferences were also held with headteachers in three schools and the pupil referral unit (PRU). Other agencies and partners also participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier OFSTED/Audit Commission report on this LEA published in June 2000. A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to 105 schools, and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 85 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one early years centre, five primary schools and two secondary schools. Those visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support that is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, and is effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council continues to serve a relatively disadvantaged area with few pockets of comparative affluence. Unemployment levels, while lower than the national average and less than in the neighbouring Greater Manchester boroughs, mask low average earnings. The council has been successful in obtaining additional funds, including substantial regeneration and neighbourhood renewal monies.

5. Standards of attainment in primary schools have continued to improve and are broadly in line with national averages; at Key Stage 1, rates of improvement exceed those found nationally. Standards of attainment in secondary schools have changed little, with results at both key stages similar to the national average, although a smaller proportion of pupils achieve higher grades at GCSE than is found nationally.

6. At the last inspection, the number and nature of the weaknesses identified led to the conclusion that the LEA was not succeeding in promoting high standards in schools. Moreover, the inspection questioned the ability of the LEA to provide the strong and sustained educational leadership that its schools needed.

7. The LEA has made substantial progress in a very short time. The LEA performs the great majority of its functions satisfactorily; strengths now heavily outweigh weaknesses which, although few, are significant. The LEA has been successful in securing the trust and co-operation of its headteachers in an effective partnership. This has been achieved by significant improvements in communication and consultation, the appointment of very effective managers and leaders to key positions within the education service, and sheer hard work on the part of officers and the cabinet deputy for lifelong learning. The LEA tackled the recommendations of the last inspection head-on and has been successful in making a measurable impact on the quality of educational provision within Tameside. For example, there have been substantial improvements in the quality of teaching found in the borough's schools.

8. One of the fundamental changes that has taken place in the last two years has been the significant improvement in the quality of data available to schools and officers. Not only has this resulted in more robust target-setting by schools, but the effective use of data by officers underpins much of their work. The LEA is now data-rich and has effective foundations for challenging schools to improve their performance.

9. The council as a whole has contributed to recent improvements. Elected members have a clear commitment to education. Not only do they now allocate a budget that is slightly above the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for education, but they have also supported a number of regeneration projects which have benefited schools and pupils. A culture of continuous improvement permeates the work of the council. In addition, the council is one of only twenty operating a pilot local public service agreement (PSA) which requires it to achieve a range of challenging targets, three of which relate to education.

10. At the time of the previous inspection, the following functions were judged to be good. As evidence indicates that these functions are still delivered to the same standard, they have not been inspected in depth on this occasion:

- financial support to schools;
- human resource management;
- support for governors; and
- support for school attendance.

11. The following functions are now strengths of the LEA:

- the clarity of its definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention and its shared understanding with schools;
- intervention in under-performing schools;
- support for numeracy;
- services for information and communications technology (ICT) in school administration;
- the leadership, expertise and value for money of services contributing to school improvement;
- the quality of performance data and the use made of it by the LEA and schools;
- the provision of school places; and
- the clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans.

12. The following functions are not performed adequately:

- support from property services;
- provision for pupils who have no school place; and
- arrangements for child protection.

13. The LEA is now effectively supporting the management of schools and has done much to create the conditions for sustainable improvement both in its schools and within its own work. The LEA has good capacity to take effective action on the recommendations made in this report.

SECTION 1: LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

14. Little has changed in the short time since the last inspection. The population of approximately 219,400 continues to decline slowly, as does the unemployment rate for the borough, which at 3.1 per cent, compares favourably with Greater Manchester at 3.5 per cent and a national mean of 3.3 per cent. Approximately four per cent of the population is from ethnic minority groups, although this varies considerably throughout Tameside; for example, one of the nine towns in the borough has an ethnic minority population of around 20 per cent.

15. In the last two years, the school age population has remained stable and is currently 35,902¹. These pupils are educated in the LEA's 75 maintained primary schools, two infant and two junior schools, 18 high schools (two of which are 11-18), and five special schools. Seven primary schools have special educational needs (SEN) resource bases. There is one PRU for Year 11 pupils. In addition to the LEA's three nursery schools, there are 49 nursery classes attached to primary schools, three of which are in partnership with adjacent social services family centres. There continues to be extensive provision for early years education across the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors. All three and four-year-olds are offered at least part-time provision. Participation rates for three-year-olds vary across the academic year, with an average of 84 per cent accepting places in 2000/01; the participation rates of four-year-olds averaged 98 per cent over the same period. The proportion of 16 year-olds continuing into further or higher education, at 67.3 per cent in 2001, has improved in the last two years, but continues to be well below that found nationally. A further education college and two sixth form colleges provide 93 per cent of post-16 education.

16. The proportion of pupils eligible for free schools meals, at 22.3 per cent in primary schools and 20.8 per cent in secondary schools, is similar to that found nationally. The proportion of statemented pupils taught in mainstream primary and secondary schools remains similar to national figures. Nearly seven per cent of the school population is of ethnic minority heritage - almost half the national average.

Performance

17. A detailed analysis of the performance of schools is supplied to the LEA annually in the form of a statistical profile compiled by OFSTED. Key features of schools' performance, and changes since the last inspection, are as follows:

- pupils continue to enter primary school with levels of attainment broadly similar to those found nationally, although few pupils are high achievers;
- the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2 or above at Key Stage 1 remains broadly in line with national averages for reading and writing; however, in mathematics the proportion of pupils achieving at least Level 2 is now above the

¹ At 1 September, 2001 and includes 280 pupils in two school sixth forms.

national average. In 2001, the proportion of boys achieving Level 3 or above rose considerably, by 6.2 percentage points, and is now marginally above the national average. In the last three years, the rate of improvement in writing is almost double the national average and, in mathematics, significantly greater than achieved nationally;

- at Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 or above has improved and is now very close to national averages in all three core subjects;
- there has been little change in the attainment of pupils at Key Stage 3. The proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above in English has declined slightly since the last inspection, but is still in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in mathematics remains below that found nationally, but is improving at a faster rate. The proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above in science has increased at a rate greater than the national mean and is now similar to the average found in similar LEAs²;
- at GCSE, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades remains below the national average, but is improving slowly. Since the previous inspection, the proportion of pupils achieving at least one A*-G grade has declined slightly and is now in line with the national mean; the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*-G grades remains in line with the national figure;
- the attendance of pupils in both primary and secondary schools is in line with national averages. However, authorised absence for primary school pupils was above the national average in 2000, although unauthorised absence was less than that found nationally;
- permanent exclusions from primary schools, although a small number (eight), have doubled in the last two years, whereas those from secondary schools have more than halved;
- OFSTED inspections have found that three schools currently require special measures; a further three have serious weaknesses and one is underachieving;
- the most recent OFSTED inspection of schools shows that the proportion of good or very good primary schools, at 48 per cent, is much less than found nationally; but only a small proportion of schools require significant improvement. However, the proportion of secondary schools³ that require much improvement is almost double the proportion found nationally, although the proportion of good and very good schools is similar to the national picture;
- the total proportion of primary schools judged either as good or very good in terms of climate, quality of education and management and efficiency has increased in all areas between schools' first and second inspections;
- in the secondary sector, the proportion of good or very good schools has increased significantly in terms of management and efficiency. However, the proportion of schools judged to have a very good climate for learning has decreased and those requiring much improvement, increased. There has also been a decline in the proportion of schools providing a good quality of education and an increase in those requiring some improvement; and

² The Tameside's OFSTED statistical neighbours comprise: Bolton, Dudley, North Tyneside, Oldham, Rotherham, Stockton-on-Tees, Stoke-on-Trent, Sunderland, Walsall and Wigan.

³ There are only 18 secondary schools in the LEA.

- the LEA has four Beacon schools (two primary, one special school and one foundation secondary school) and two specialist schools: one for art and the other for technology.

Council structure

18. Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council consists of 47 Labour, six Conservative, two Liberal Democrat and two Mossley Town Council elected members. In response to the modernising agenda, the council adopted a 'cabinet with executive leader' model from January 1999, which became fully operative from May 2001. The cabinet comprises nine members, designated as 'deputies'. The cabinet deputy for Lifelong Learning is responsible for the education service. 'Key decisions' are made, in accordance with the council's criteria, by the cabinet deputy and published monthly in the council's Forward Plan.

19. Education decisions and policies can be subject to review by the Education and Health Scrutiny Panel, one of four panels set up by the council to scrutinise its work.

20. Recently, the council has set up eight district assemblies, which include school representatives. The assemblies have a total budget of £7m to target at local needs which, this year, included a small amount that could be allocated for educational purposes. No funds will, in future, be allocated for education in this way.

Funding

21. The overall funding per pupil from the education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for the LEA is close to the lowest quartile for all LEAs. The SSA per primary pupil is £2464, compared with a metropolitan average of £2532 and a national average of £2653. For secondary pupils, the SSA per pupil is £3156 per pupil compared with a metropolitan average of £3264, and a national average of £3413.

22. The council has demonstrated its renewed commitment to education through increased spending. At the time of the last inspection in 2000, the council spent at 98.88 per cent of education SSA, with its budgeted expenditure falling short of SSA by just over £1m. In 2001/02, budgeted expenditure was increased to 100.67 per cent of education SSA, £0.7m more than the indicative amount.

23. The council has been successful in attracting additional funding for education into the borough. Since the previous inspection, further investment in school buildings has taken place through the New Deal for Schools, targeted capital and an £18m Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme, with a further £35m PFI scheme planned. An additional £34.8m of external revenue and capital resources has been targeted for spending this year, half of which comes from the Standards Fund. The council has also been in receipt of European Funding and regeneration money through its successful Single Regeneration Bid (SRB).

The LEA strategy for school improvement

24. The LEA has a sound strategy for school improvement which has a number of significant strengths. It has clearly articulated its school improvement strategy and whole-heartedly embraced the concept of support in inverse proportion to success. Schools now have a good understanding of the strategy and generally accept it. The Education Development Plan (EDP) is the main vehicle by which the LEA's strategy is delivered.

25. At the time of the previous inspection, a number of serious concerns were expressed about the EDP in relation to consultation, SEN, resource allocation and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation. The LEA responded appropriately to all of these concerns but, as discussed below, did not succeed in evolving effective methods for evaluating, on a consistent basis, the impact of the various EDP activities on schools' performance. The EDP was revised to address the shortcomings highlighted; appropriately, six priorities were changed and an additional one, related to raising the achievement of pupils with additional educational needs, was added.

26. The priorities in the current EDP are as follows:

- raising standards of attainment in literacy;
- raising standards of attainment in numeracy;
- improving the provision and use of ICT to support teaching and learning;
- improving the quality of teaching;
- promoting social inclusion and reducing under-achievement;
- improving the quality of school leadership, management and governance in raising standards;
- promoting citizenship and creativity;
- improving the performance of schools causing concern; and
- raising the achievement of pupils with additional educational needs.

27. The activities detailed in the EDP are comprehensive and appropriate. There are clear links to other plans such as the LEA's ICT Plan and Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Grant Action Plan.

28. Progress towards 2002 targets is variable. However, the target-setting process has become more sophisticated, leading to more accurate and realistic predictions of attainment. In summary:

- at Key Stage 2, good progress is being made in mathematics. In 2001, 70.2 per cent of pupils achieved Level four or above, which was only just short of the target for the year of 71 per cent. Evidence suggests that the LEA is capable of meeting its 2002 target of 76 per cent. However, only just over half of primary schools actually met their individual school target in 2001;
- in the 2001 Key Stage 2 English tests, 73.6 per cent of pupils reached Level 4 or above, which fell short of the target of 77 per cent. Fifty-five per cent of primary schools equalled or bettered their targets for 2001. The Key Stage 2 English

target for 2002 of 81 per cent presents a significant challenge for the LEA and its schools;

- in 2001, the LEA has failed to meet all three of its Key Stage 4 targets. Only 96.2 per cent of pupils achieved at least one GCSE grade or equivalent compared with the target for the year of 98 per cent. Just over 42 per cent of pupils achieved five or more GCSE grades A*-C compared with the LEA's target of 45 per cent with only one-third of secondary schools achieving their target. The average point score achieved by pupils was 35.5, which just fell short of the target of 36;
- the 2001 unauthorised absence target of 0.2 per cent for primary schools has been achieved and the challenging target for secondary schools of one per cent was only just missed;
- the LEA has been very successful in reducing the number of permanent exclusions from its schools; only 41 exclusions occurred last year, below the target number of 45.

29. Strategies for monitoring the progress and evaluating the impact of the EDP lack coherence and remain largely unsatisfactory. Monitoring procedures established for the revised EDP in 2000 proved too cumbersome to maintain. Responsibility for monitoring was then placed with the LEA's strategic planning group, comprising headteachers, governors, teachers, officers and elected members, but has not undertaken this work. The council's own arrangements for overseeing the implementation of plans has ensured progress against key targets has been regularly monitored, but this has not required the impact of various EDP activities to be effectively measured. Nevertheless, good examples of detailed monitoring and evaluation reports, for example on the literacy and numeracy summer schools, and Eco-schools project, have been produced. Moreover, a review of the priority 'Promoting citizenship and creativity' gave a clear account of progress made - but this standard has not been consistently applied to all priorities.

30. Nevertheless, the LEA has made sound progress in the last two years in implementing its school improvement strategy. This has resulted in a reduction of the number of schools causing concern and ensured others have not been so categorised. Good progress has been made in implementing activities within the EDP priorities related to literacy, numeracy, school leadership, improving the performance of schools causing concern, and the promotion of citizenship; satisfactory progress has now been made on the remainder. The LEA has effectively targeted its resources to tackle those areas of greatest weakness by appointing additional staff and refocusing advisers' work to those schools causing concern.

31. The LEA has made a very good start in the production of EDP2. Consultation has been more thorough than previously, and the identification of priorities is underpinned by rigorous analysis of performance data. Feedback indicates that schools are more committed to its implementation than for the first EDP. Targets at all key stages are challenging.

The allocation of resources to priorities

32. Processes for allocating resources to priorities were identified as a weakness in the previous inspection, with the council urged to make fundamental

improvements in this area. Arrangements for allocating resources are much improved, with the result that the strengths now significantly outweigh the remaining few weaknesses. Since the previous inspection, the council has increased the proportion of its expenditure available to education. Education resources are clearly linked to school improvement priorities and schools are better informed on funding issues. Weaknesses remain in the targeting of resources to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.

33. The LEA has worked effectively with schools to improve their understanding of issues involved in the allocation of education resources. Improved consultative mechanisms have resulted in greater transparency in resource allocation. In addition, regular reviews have led to a sharper targeting of budgets, as well as an increase in the resources available for school improvement. Schools receive high quality budget information and are helped in their budget planning by the early distribution of indicative data. There has been a substantial increase in the number of funding streams reaching schools. Occasionally, the reasons for individual schools receiving extra resources have not been made sufficiently clear to all schools.

34. All government targets for the delegation of funds to schools have been met. Although the LEA delegated 85.2 per cent of the Local Schools Budget in 2001/02, this was less than the metropolitan average of 86.7 per cent, primarily as a result of the non-delegation to primary schools, at their request, of school meals and insurance. The LEA has consulted with schools on the delegation required to meet the government's targets for 2002/03 and, as a result, these items will be delegated to primary schools from April 2002.

35. The education budget is controlled effectively and out-turn matches expenditure in most areas. However, although overall expenditure on SEN transport is in line with that in other metropolitan authorities, its budget was overspent by around £60,000 in 2000/01; as a result, the SEN base budget has been increased and expenditure is now under control. SEN transport is currently being scrutinised as part of an overall review of the council's transport services.

36. Most areas of central expenditure are similar to other metropolitan authorities. Since the last inspection, and following discussions with schools, central expenditure on school improvement has been increased to £28 per pupil, slightly higher than the metropolitan average of £24 per pupil. Total expenditure (central and delegated) on SEN is lower than average and represents 11 per cent of the Local Schools Budget in 2001/02 compared with an average of 15 per cent for metropolitan authorities. An increasing proportion of SEN resources are being delegated to schools and an additional £300,000 from the 2000/01 education budget has been provided as part of this to support non-statemented pupils with additional needs.

37. There has been no fundamental review of the funding formula for schools in recent years. Incremental changes have been made on an annual basis and, as a result, funding largely meets the needs of individual schools, other than for SEN. Recently, the LEA has identified a notional four per cent of the delegated schools budget for SEN. However, these resources are not allocated to schools on the basis of their pupils' needs.

38. Only one school has a significant budget deficit and this is related to its falling roll; the LEA has appropriate contingency plans to tackle this. Cumulative surpluses in school budgets are too high, having risen from £0.5m four years ago to nearly £5m in April 2001. Although the LEA has a programme to investigate individual schools in which surpluses are too high, and has successfully worked with 22 schools to reduce their budget surplus, cumulative surpluses still continue to rise.

Recommendation

In order to improve the use of education resources:

- the LEA should work with schools to reduce significantly the level of school balances.

Continuous improvement including Best Value

39. The LEA's arrangements for securing continuous improvement in the effectiveness of its services are satisfactory. The council has successfully created a culture of continuous improvement: services are expected to meet challenging targets and progress towards them is rigorously monitored. A particular strength is the way in which continuous improvement processes are consistently built into the business planning arrangements of each service. This provides an effective mechanism for education officers and the cabinet deputy for lifelong learning to monitor progress on improvement targets regularly. However, not all the elements that contribute to effective planning are in place: some service units do not have individual service plans and performance management arrangements are inconsistent within the education service. Where plans do exist, there is no consistent format or mechanism for their evaluation.

Recommendation

In order to strengthen service planning and performance management:

- all service units should produce annual service plans which identify priorities for development, actions to deliver these priorities, targets and success criteria, personnel and timescales. These plans should link directly with the department's business plan and the council's priorities and provide a basis for the delivery of effective performance management arrangements.

40. Satisfactory progress has been made on the implementation of Best Value arrangements. The Best Value Performance Plan for 2001/02 was given an unqualified opinion by the external auditor, who acknowledged that the performance management framework is developing positively, with improved links between plans and a better use of performance information. It identified, however, some concerns about the use of performance information. Within education, not all service units use performance targets effectively to plan and monitor their activities; this is, however, a particular strength of the advisory and inspection service.

41. Three completed Best Value (BV) reviews of cleaning and catering, early years and SEN were inspected (see Appendices 2-4 of this report). Generally, BV principles were applied sufficiently rigorously to promote continuous improvement, although the challenge and comparison elements were not consistently robust. There were some weaknesses in the process of review selection. The SEN BV review closely followed the previous LEA inspection and the review added little to the action plan already produced. After this inspection, the LEA has said that it will review its remaining Best Value programme to focus on reviews with a wider scope; it will also seek to integrate the Best Value process more closely with its other planning arrangements.

42. A major strength of consultation has been its use, after completion of reviews, to focus on further improvement. For example, the cleaning and catering services have developed mechanisms to seek regular feedback from schools on the quality of their services.

43. The LEA is making good progress in encouraging schools to take into account Best Value principles. Schools are required to submit statements as to how they have applied these when they submit their budget plans. Although these statements are not yet rigorously monitored, examples were given of effective intervention and support when Best Value principles have not been effectively applied. Useful information has been provided to assist schools in applying these principles through a range of consultation and training events.

44. The council has demonstrated a willingness to use alternative providers; for example, creating new trusts to manage housing stock, care homes and leisure services. Following the SEN review, it decided that specialist services for some pupils would be better provided from the independent sector. The cleaning and catering review concluded that the investment required would best be secured through a partnership with the private sector.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

45. A clear and attainable vision for school improvement, which is shared by schools, has been established by the borough education officer, with the major responsibility for school improvement resting with the monitoring and advisory team. Its work is well managed, increasingly according to best value principles, and effectively targeted at those schools most in need. The deployment of staff is largely effective, but there are still a few areas, such as the support for ICT in the curriculum, where support is not sufficiently targeted. There is a good spread of expertise and experience, and advisory staff have appropriate opportunities to update their knowledge. Gaps in expertise identified in the previous inspection, notably in relation to school management, have been suitably filled by the sensible use of secondments and consultancies and by a small number of key appointments. There are appropriate induction arrangements, including mentoring, for new members of staff. All advisers have performance targets that are reviewed termly. Performance management is beginning to be enhanced by paired working. The LEA now spends rather more than the average for metropolitan boroughs on school improvement but the costs are not high, staff work very hard and schools are beginning to improve. The provision offers good value for money.

46. Schools receive good, effective support on personnel and financial issues. Officers from these services contribute to discussions on the categorisation of schools, enabling resources to be targeted to those most in need. There has been a significant improvement in the support for the use of ICT in school administration since the previous inspection. The quality of support from property services is variable which detracts school managers from concentrating on their main priorities.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

47. At the time of the previous inspection, schools did not fully understand or support the LEA's approach to monitoring, challenge and intervention. This has improved markedly, from unsatisfactory to good.

48. Monitoring, challenge and intervention are clearly defined. Schools have been consulted thoroughly on the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations and, meeting a recommendation from the previous report, on the categorisation of schools according to need. Schools understand and support the emphasis on co-operative working towards school improvement. Procedures for monitoring and the criteria for intervention are clear and accepted by schools, as is the LEA's responsibility for challenge.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools

49. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA was beginning to monitor its schools effectively and those in greatest need were supported strongly. However, challenge was variable and often inadequate. The LEA has very largely been successful in meeting the recommendations of the previous report and its provision

for monitoring and challenge is now highly satisfactory, with some significant strengths and few areas of major weakness.

50. The proportion of schools identified by OFSTED inspection as requiring improvement, though still above average, is reducing and those causing concern to the LEA are becoming fewer in number. However, the LEA's approaches to school self-evaluation are, like its dissemination of good practice, not yet sufficiently consistent to develop fully self-managing schools. While the special and primary Beacon schools have been used to share expertise and support schools causing concern, the role of the secondary Beacon school is less well developed.

Recommendation

In order to support the development of autonomous schools:

- devise consistent approaches to school self-evaluation and the dissemination of good practice.

51. Underpinning the LEA's provision of monitoring, challenge and intervention are the performance data available to schools and advisers. Since the previous inspection, very good progress has been made in the provision, quality and range of data, in guidance on their use and in target setting. The recommendations of the previous report have been fully addressed and the service is now consistently good. Information is transmitted electronically to schools in an appropriate form. A particular strength is the very detailed information provided to secondary schools in July before pupils transfer to them from primary schools. The clear policy and procedures for target setting at all key stages are based on pupils' prior attainment and schools accept them as equitable and challenging. Accurate data are also provided to schools and support services on the performance of specific groups, such as minority ethnic pupils and children in public care.

52. Schools receive effective help in interpreting and using the data and the LEA is responsive to requests from individual schools. Regular training is provided for schools and link advisers. The use of data management systems is not yet fully developed in all schools but a recently established working party of assessment co-ordinators provides advice and shares good practice.

53. Effective consultation between schools and the LEA has led to a broad measure of agreement that support should be focused on those with greatest need - which it is. Performance data are used very well to place schools in appropriate categories and to target support. In addition to the OFSTED designations of schools requiring special measures, those with serious weaknesses and those that are underachieving, the LEA has its own categories of schools causing concern. This identifies schools, in the process of transition from a lower category, and the great majority that require only a light touch. The attention that the LEA gives to each school is appropriately differentiated according to its category. However, although it is compiling a register of good practice, its current categorisation system does not separately identify high-performing schools, other than those with Beacon status.

54. The LEA's monitoring and challenge to help schools to improve are increasingly effective. The previous inspection found that secondary schools were insufficiently challenged; however, the level of challenge for schools in all phases is now satisfactory and particularly strong where there is under-performance. Effective sources of challenge include: improved performance data and target-setting procedures, the secondments of headteachers to the monitoring and advisory team, and the perceptive questioning by link advisers.

55. Light touch schools receive a maximum of three termly monitoring visits from their link adviser each year. The first visit is to set targets, the second for review and improvement planning, and the third for monitoring of local priorities. The great majority of schools value these visits, which they find well-planned and challenging. Appropriately, the LEA is beginning to implement a policy that the best-performing schools may not need a visit every term.

56. The monitoring and advisory team makes good use of national data and local knowledge of schools' performance to inform their school visits. However, written reports produced by advisers, although sometimes excellent in their evaluation, are variable in quality, with too many being sparse and inadequate. These reports are sent to headteachers, but only to chairs of governors if their schools are causing concern.

Recommendation

In order to make monitoring more effective:

- ensure that written records of school visits are more consistently evaluative and of high quality, and are distributed to chairs of governors as well as to headteachers.

57. Monitoring is well linked to advice that helps schools to identify the support they need. This may be purchased through a service level agreement that enables provision to be tailored specifically to a school's needs, through the LEA's extensive programme of continuing professional development, or from other providers. The LEA's brokering of external sources of expertise for the benefit of schools is improving but not yet fully developed.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools

58. This was identified in the previous inspection as one of the stronger areas of the LEA's provision. Rightly, improving the performance of schools causing concern has remained a priority in the EDP. Since the previous inspection, provision has been reviewed and has continued to improve. It is now good overall, although the LEA has identified appropriate aspects for further attention.

59. Currently, there are three schools that have been found by OFSTED inspection to require special measures, three that have been judged to have serious weaknesses and one that has been designated as underachieving. The LEA has not succeeded in enabling any of the three schools in special measures to come out of

the category within 18 months and it is rightly taking steps to improve its performance in this respect through more strongly focused support. Nevertheless, HMI reports indicate that these schools are now improving as a result of LEA intervention. The LEA has been instrumental in replacing the headteachers of two of these schools along with a significant proportion of the teaching staff, in order to improve the quality of teaching. The headteacher of the third school is receiving appropriate support. There is increasing evidence of the effectiveness of these measures.

60. The LEA has enjoyed more success in preventing schools from failing and none has been placed in the special measures, serious weaknesses or underachieving categories in the past 12 months. The effectiveness of LEA intervention is also illustrated by the reduction, in the same period, of the number on the LEA's own list of schools causing concern from 14 to 10.

61. The LEA's thorough procedures for identifying, monitoring and supporting under-performing schools are well known to schools. In the pre-inspection survey, the quality of provision was rated in the top quartile of all LEAs surveyed. The LEA's ability to identify weaknesses early will be further improved by the purchase of new software that will enable the use of a wider range of alerts. When a school is identified as causing concern, intervention is prompt, sensitive, well targeted and very largely effective. The link adviser works with the school to devise a suitable action plan. Appropriate emphasis is given to the improvement of teaching and learning and of leadership and management. The LEA has not shirked from placing schools on the list of those causing concern when, for example, pupils' performance is below that expected. It is a measure of the success of the monitoring and support provided that a number of schools have identified themselves as suitable for inclusion on the LEA's list. However, in one instance, the headteacher lodged a successful appeal against the school's categorisation.

62. The LEA's approach to under-performance is rigorous. Schools' progress is reviewed regularly, not only by senior managers and elected members but also by link advisers, headteachers and chairs of governing bodies. The LEA has made clear, in letters to a small number of schools, that it is prepared to use the full range of its powers, if necessary, including formal warnings and the withdrawal of delegated budgets. Where required, it has appointed additional governors and managed staffing changes. However, in spite of positive strategies, difficulties have been encountered in the appointment of staff to schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses. As schools improve, gradual reductions in support help them to take increasing responsibility for their own improvement.

Support for literacy

63. The LEA's support for literacy was judged in the previous inspection to be satisfactory but with some weaknesses. The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) was being implemented satisfactorily at Key Stages 1 and 2 but there was a gap in specialist support for secondary schools, though a consultant had just been appointed. Standards were improving.

64. Standards have continued to rise at Key Stages 1 and 2 and are broadly in line with national averages and those in similar authorities. The LEA is aware that it has much to do to ensure its 2002 target for Key Stage 2 is achieved. At the time of the previous inspection, the proportion of pupils achieving levels 5 and 6 at the end of Key Stage 3 was close to the national average; since then, there has been a slight decline. The proportion of boys who gain level 6 and above is close to the national average, though the proportion of girls has declined to below the average. Current training has tackled possible causes for this and the LEA is well placed to make maximum progress towards its 2004 target.

65. Support for literacy in primary schools has improved and is satisfactory with no significant weaknesses; support is good at Key Stage 3. The service has been strengthened considerably since the last inspection through an expansion of the team with well-qualified staff and an appropriate range of expertise. Responsibilities have been appropriately assigned to ensure specialist advice across the full age range, including early years. Some well-planned improvements for Key Stages 1 and 2 have yet to impact fully on standards.

66. Support and challenge for primary schools have improved, grounded in a growing knowledge of weaknesses in individual schools and in the performance of the cohort as a whole. Good use is made of this intelligence, and of the detailed performance data available to identify priorities for action. Many schools value the training and advice provided by the consultants and leading teachers. However, recent staffing changes have yet to impact on a significant number of primary schools, who still echo previous concerns about the quality and reliability of advice.

67. Support for the Key Stage 3 literacy strategy is well underway, both at school and departmental level, and is highly rated by schools. The advisory team has undertaken an audit of planning and teaching which has identified gaps in curriculum coverage and the need for more sharply-focused departmental planning. For example, a unit of work on Shakespeare, developed and trialled with one school, has been used to model planning and teaching, based on the strategy's teaching objectives; this has now been disseminated to other schools. The network of heads of English departments is now more active.

68. There are satisfactory links with most other services and sound plans to strengthen them. Good links with the English as an additional language (EAL) service and with the schools' library service have been developed further. Links with SEN are satisfactory and improving; teachers from special schools have contributed to the training of mainstream colleagues. Although still in its initial stages, support for gifted and talented pupils is rightly seen as an important strategy for raising the achievement of more able pupils generally, and training is taking place on implications for the teaching of literacy.

Support for numeracy

69. Support for numeracy was judged to be good at the time of the previous inspection. The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) had been implemented promptly, and primary schools had received good training and support. Standards

had risen significantly at Key Stages 1 and 2. Support for secondary schools was less consistent, although some individual schools had received effective support.

70. Support in primary schools has been sustained and developed and support for secondary schools has been significantly improved. The NNS is very well led; and the quality of advice and training given by the adviser and consultants is highly valued by schools. Although there has been a change in personnel for the primary strategy with a gap in staffing between September and January, sufficient support has been provided to keep the strategy on track. Good use is made of leading primary mathematics teachers to model good practice. Performance data, in addition to monitoring visits, are well used to identify poor performance, for example in schools with larger cohorts of ethnic minority heritage pupils. Support is evaluated thoroughly, using both qualitative and quantitative data.

71. Standards at Key Stage 1 have risen steadily and are now at the national average. Standards at Key Stage 2 rose at a rate above the national average between 1996 and 2000 though, as nationally, there was little progress in 2001. The target for 2002 requires an improvement of almost six percentage points which schools' aggregate data indicates is attainable. Standards are beginning to rise at Key Stage 3, although they remain below the national average.

72. The Key Stage 3 strategy was launched a year early and is progressing well. Mathematics departments have reviewed planning and teaching; as a result, medium term planning is now much more detailed and schools have adopted changes in teaching style and lesson structure.

73. Links with other functions are at least satisfactory. Established links with SEN have been further developed. There is good support for interpreting the NNS for pupils in special schools, and SEN specialist teachers provide support and advice for mainstream colleagues. Links with other services are currently being strengthened, for example with the ethnic minority support service, to identify and tackle causes of underachievement, and with the excellence cluster, to incorporate strategies for teaching gifted and talented pupils.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

74. At the time of the last inspection, support for ICT in the curriculum and for the use of ICT in school administration were both considered to be unsatisfactory. In particular, there was no adviser with sole responsibility for ICT; little had been done to support schools in using resources funded through the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) and the use of electronic mail was under-developed. Software and hardware support did not operate coherently.

75. Significant improvements have been made in both areas and support for the use of ICT in the curriculum is now satisfactory with some significant strengths. Actions to tackle the three recommendations arising from the last inspection have been appropriately completed, or in several cases, superseded. The very close working relationships between corporate and education IT have contributed significantly to the progress made.

76. The LEA now has a comprehensive ICT strategy for education which has evolved as a result of full consultation with schools and has been much welcomed by them, albeit, rather late in the day. Although the strategy has clear success criteria and an appropriate focus on the use of ICT to enhance learning, there are no targets for raising standards in or through ICT. This is an important omission in the LEA's strategy, as it undermines its work with schools on ICT development planning and effective practice. The LEA's ICT development plan has subsequently been updated, but is not costed and does not have clear targets; it is unclear how the identified actions will lead to a rise in standards.

77. The recently appointed ICT strategy manager has provided very effective leadership in the development of ICT both in schools and within the council. Primary schools are particularly well served. Three primary advisory teachers: provide good quality New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training; deliver a range of relevant training to improve the use of ICT across the curriculum; and undertake three-day visits, purchased by 51 primary schools, during which model lessons are delivered. The council has developed and funded an ICT passport for primary school pupils which provides a record of the skills they have mastered; this will help secondary schools identify the level of pupils' ICT skills at transfer. Primary schools are not yet consistently measuring pupils' ICT capability at the end of each key stage nor setting targets for improvement, although some good practice was reported in this area.

78. Curriculum support for the use of ICT in the secondary curriculum is satisfactory. The cornerstone of LEA support to secondary schools is its funding, through the PSA, of its home-grown GNVQ ICT course. Effective training has been delivered to a number of secondary schools on-site and a helpful audit of the use of ICT across the curriculum has been carried out in four secondary schools; nevertheless, this support is provided on the basis of request rather than need. Good use is being made of the LEA's specialist secondary technology school to disseminate good practice.

79. The management of the NGfL initiative is much improved with schools well-supported in their choice of resources. The LEA routinely evaluates, and provides feedback on, schools' ICT development plans, which are generally of a satisfactory standard; some are good, but too many still focus on the acquisition of resources rather than on raising standards. All schools will have broad-band connections by March 2002.

80. Collectively, corporate and education IT have worked together to provide a seamless service, not just to schools, but also to the community. Common standards for hardware and software have been established in schools, libraries and throughout other council areas. This enables pupils, for example, to continue work at their local library if it cannot be completed at school; this was cited by one headteacher as particularly helpful for Bangladeshi girls who were not able to stay for after-school clubs.

81. The education management information systems team (EMIST) is much improved since the last inspection; the staffing has doubled and the service now provides high quality support and training which is well regarded by schools. The

service has not yet been delegated to schools as a result of their resistance for this, but is likely to be from 2003.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

82. This function was not inspected at the time of the last inspection.

83. Standards at Key Stage 3 have remained in line with statistical neighbours, though below national averages. Standards in English, which were in line with national averages, have gently declined since 1998, both in terms of the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above as well as in relation to the national average. In the same four-year period, standards in both mathematics and science rose at a faster rate than the national average. OFSTED reports indicate significant variation between schools in the progress made by pupils at Key Stage 3; English, music and art are the only subjects where progress was judged to be consistently good.

84. The LEA's strategy for Key Stage 3 is satisfactory with no significant weaknesses. Foundations were laid a year ahead of the national launch. Secondary schools with lower attainment took part in numeracy and literacy pilot projects. In addition, small-scale research projects identified issues affecting pupils' progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 in the core subjects and identified strategies to improve continuity of teaching across this phase. Summer literacy and numeracy schools have contributed to smoother progression from primary to secondary schools.

85. The national strategies for literacy and numeracy have been successfully launched in all schools, with additional support for a significant number. These schools rate highly the quality of leadership and support provided by advisers and consultants. Support is based on a thorough identification of need and good practice is effectively disseminated. Data on pupils' prior attainment have been used to set challenging targets for Key Stage 3. However, it is too soon to be able to evaluate the impact of the strategy on pupils' performance.

86. Consultation with schools has been thorough and the LEA has sound plans to extend support across the curriculum as a rolling programme, though the strategy for teaching and learning in the foundation subjects has yet to be fully developed. Good links are developing with work in the excellence cluster.

Support for ethnic minority groups including Travellers

87. A light touch inspection was undertaken of this function. In the previous inspection, this support was judged to be satisfactory, but with some areas of weakness. The Traveller education service was effective in identifying and supporting Traveller children and support for pupils with EAL was good. The LEA had targeted underachievement by Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils as a priority, but lacked sufficiently reliable data to set meaningful targets.

88. The LEA has successfully tackled its weaknesses and now has a more robust approach to raising achievement, though strategies have yet to impact significantly on teaching and performance. The service is now satisfactory with no significant

weaknesses. The LEA has set ambitious targets for Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys as part of its PSA. The identification of pupils' achievements and capabilities is now much more effectively supported by good quality performance data. Advisers have analysed causes of under-achievement in individual schools, and have begun to identify partner schools outside the borough to help schools improve practice, for example, in the teaching of numeracy. Good links with leaders at a local mosque have led to additional support for pupils out of school hours to help improve standards of numeracy. Raising pupils' achievement is now a higher priority for the Traveller support service which is working in partnership with another LEA to develop strategies to improve performance.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

89. There was no requirement to inspect this function previously. The proportion of pupils gaining higher levels in national tests is below the national average at Key Stages 2 and 3. Moreover, at Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C continues to be below the national average and improve at a slower rate than achieved nationally.

90. The quality of support for gifted and talented pupils is sound with some strengths. The LEA has provided a clear lead with guidance for schools in identifying gifted and talented pupils. A scrutiny of OFSTED school reports identified weaknesses in teaching and challenge for more able pupils. Training has been provided, for example in developing thinking skills and meeting the needs of more able pupils. Training for the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) now includes advice on working with able pupils. Two summer schools have been run each year for the last two years and their impact monitored. Good support for those schools in the excellence cluster, launched in September, has accelerated progress both in the development of teaching and learning skills and in additional provision for the cohort of pupils identified as gifted or talented. The LEA has sound plans to disseminate good practice from the cluster to the rest of its schools who are mostly at an early stage of developing their strategies for more able pupils.

Support for school management

91. Support for school management was judged to be unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. At the time, the LEA had rightly identified the need to improve management but did not have a coherent strategy for doing so. Many of its planned activities were at an early stage of implementation; moreover, the advisory service had limited expertise in school management.

92. The proportion of schools judged through external inspection as well or very well managed has risen; the number where management is judged to require much improvement has reduced, but only slightly. The rate of improvement has been faster than that found nationally and reflects the effectiveness of the LEA's actions in many schools. In addition, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching in Tameside schools.

93. Support for school leadership and management has improved and is now satisfactory with no significant weaknesses. The advisory team has been strengthened by headteacher secondments, by new appointments with experience of headship, and by the expertise of retired headteachers who act as consultants. Rightly, schools now rate the support for management more highly. Headteachers are consulted about training needs and value the role of the seconded headteachers in co-ordinating their training and advice.

94. Induction and support for new headteachers have improved and are highly rated by most recently appointed heads. The LEA has sustained its support for nationally accredited courses for headship and offers advice to potential recruits. Support for newly qualified teachers, provided by a local university, is generally valued by teachers and headteachers, though they are more critical of some aspects of the training than at the time of the previous inspection.

95. Networks of senior and middle managers are used effectively to develop and disseminate good practice, for example in managing assessment data. The network for deputy headteachers is particularly effective. Support for middle management is improving; this includes an opportunity for middle managers to attend an accredited course offered at a local university, which links to training programmes for headship. Leading subject teachers are being appointed to co-ordinate developments in curriculum areas where the LEA has no specialist adviser.

96. Most schools consider the LEA's support for school self-evaluation is useful, although secondary heads felt it added little to systems they themselves had developed. The general training was well planned, but the LEA is aware that more needs to be done if schools are to tackle areas of weakness and ensure their school management is of a consistently high standard. School-based training courses in several schools have been very effective and the LEA plans to extend this approach. Advice to headteachers on performance management is valued.

Support to governors

97. Support for governors was judged to be very good in the report of June 2000. The main strengths were the quality of advice and range of services provided for governors. Governing bodies were particularly well supported by the clerking service and received useful, regular briefings. There were some delays in filling governing body vacancies.

98. No detailed fieldwork was done in this area for this inspection. Schools still rate the service highly, with good reason. The support for governors continues to provide high quality information and briefings for governors. Governors now receive better information on pupils' performance, though they do not automatically receive reports from advisers' visits to their schools. The service actively recruits to fill vacancies and action has been taken to avoid the delays noted at the last inspection. The service has retained its former strengths and is committed to improvement.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

99. With the exception of support for ICT in school administration, services to support school management were judged at the time of the previous inspection to be effective overall and, in the case of finance and human resources, good. However, the council was recommended to find means of identifying customers' needs, seek feedback from users, and shorten contract lengths.

100. Currently, arrangements for securing management support services for schools are satisfactory, and improving. There is now more systematic, regular feedback from schools. The contracts with schools for support services provide schools with a clear breakdown of the services they receive, with their costs. Six month notice periods provide adequate freedom for schools to change supplier. Best Value processes have been used to stimulate improvements in management support services, for example as a result of the BV review of corporate human resources. These are positive developments.

101. Because of recently proposed changes relating to, for example, a PFI contract for Hattersley schools which includes a facilities management contract for property, catering, cleaning and caretaking services, some schools have concerns about the future provision of management support services. A BV review of facilities management services across the council is currently underway and will inform future provision.

102. **Financial services** to schools were previously judged to be good and this standard has been maintained. The finance service is highly regarded by schools and helps them to manage their finances with an appropriate degree of autonomy. School budget systems have been appropriately updated and support to help them manage their budget is good.

103. It was recommended at the previous inspection that the LEA should assist schools to obtain benchmarking information about resource and staffing deployment. Some specific benchmarking work has been undertaken for individual schools and the LEA has encouraged others to use web-based benchmarking information. However, the use of benchmarking information is not yet sufficiently systematic to enable schools to effectively plan their resources. A benchmarking officer is being appointed.

104. **Personnel support services** to schools are good and were identified as a strength in the previous inspection. Since then, a BV review has been carried out of the council's human resources service. The inspection of this review identified that the service was good and likely to continue to improve. As a result of the review, personnel services have been centralised in order to improve the use of available personnel expertise more effectively in the development of human resources policy. Schools identified that, for a short period of time after this, staffing changes reduced the education expertise that was available to them. This problem has now been rectified and schools again receive good quality advice and assistance on difficult

personnel issues. Very effective support has been given to a number of schools who needed to carry out major staff restructuring.

105. Good policies and procedures on issues such as capability, sickness absence and stress management have been developed and training programmes have been provided for schools. Stronger links have been developed with the advisory service which has enabled the service to make a positive contribution to school improvement.

106. Support to schools from **property services** in terms of technical advice, the management of major capital projects and the vetting of contractors on the approved list is unsatisfactory. Schools do not have access to sufficient technical support to help them to use asset management planning information effectively. Although schools can obtain advice about their building responsibilities on request, the level of resources available to meet schools' needs for support is inadequate. Schools are not provided with adequate information on alternative sources of technical support.

107. Project management for major capital projects is too variable. Some projects have gone very well, with schools satisfied with the design consultation process and the standards of project management during the construction phase. In other cases, the supervision on site has been inadequate, resulting in schools having to deal with too many problems both during, and after, the completion of the building contract.

108. For day-to-day repairs, schools are encouraged to use private contractors on the council's list. The quality of these contractors' work is too variable and schools report that the council's arrangements to tackle this are insufficiently rigorous.

Recommendations

In order to improve the management of school buildings:

- schools should be assisted to find the technical help that they need to carry out their building responsibilities and to obtain the appropriate level of support;
- the LEA should ensure that all capital projects are managed effectively; and
- the work of private contractors should be rigorously monitored and those that fail to reach the required standard of workmanship should be removed from the LEA's list.

109. The **cleaning** and **caretaking, grounds maintenance** and **catering services** have not been inspected in detail in this inspection. However, a BV review of the cleaning and catering services is reported in Appendix 4.

The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

110. The LEA is still at a very early stage in developing a strategy for the recruitment and retention of teachers although this featured as an activity in its first EDP. The supply of teachers has not yet become a major issue for the authority, or its schools. Only three teaching vacancies were recorded in the LEA at the

beginning of September 2001. Nevertheless, five schools have experienced significant recruitment problems and many others report few applications for posts, particularly at a senior management level. Those schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses face the greatest challenge in securing effective teaching appointments and retaining staff. Appropriate support has been given to those schools including the secondment of staff to key posts and advertisements in overseas national papers. Twenty-eight teachers, equally distributed between primary and secondary schools, are in receipt of retention allowances. The LEA has a good record of retaining Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) into their second year of teaching, with 83 per cent remaining with their schools in September 2001.

111. Of the eight activities identified in the EDP, progress on half of them has been satisfactory but two have only just begun, one year late. Nevertheless, a recruitment strategy manager, funded by the council, has recently been appointed for a twelve-month period. Although schools were surveyed in February 2000 to establish the size of the recruitment problem locally, there has been no consistent recording and analysis of teacher vacancies; this is an area of weakness.

Recommendation

In order to inform a coherent and clearly focused strategy for the recruitment and retention of teachers:

- teacher vacancy data should be collected and analysed on a termly basis.

112. Strategies to tackle teacher recruitment are unimaginative and do not include sufficient emphasis on the benefits offered by Tameside's good programme of professional development, although inspection evidence suggests this has contributed to the stability of the workforce in its schools. Weaknesses in the professional development of middle managers, identified during the last inspection, have been tackled.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Introduction

113. At the time of the previous inspection, SEN provision was considered to be unsatisfactory and provide poor value for money. Much has improved since then, largely owing to the effective appointments of an SEN manager and SEN adviser. SEN provision overall is now satisfactory. A BV review of SEN was carried out following the previous LEA inspection, and is reported on in Appendix 3.

114. The previous OFSTED report made seven recommendations concerning action needed to improve provision. Progress has been made in all these areas. There is now a clear SEN strategy and good arrangements for monitoring individual education plans (IEPs); criteria for assessment are clear; and there has been a dramatic improvement in the rate of statement completion.

Strategy

115. The previous inspection found the SEN strategy to be unclear, under-developed and not well understood by schools. Improvements have taken place. There are now a number of key documents which, together, articulate the vision and strategy for the development of SEN within Tameside. While these documents present a coherent vision and strategy, there is no one document which clearly articulates the LEA's ideas for SEN developments over the next few years.

116. The current SEN strategic plan has some significant strengths but also some weaknesses. A particular strength is the clarity of its links with key council plans and the identification of five appropriate priorities that embrace an overall vision of inclusive education. The plan is detailed and comprises a series of service plans which identify the contribution that the five different SEN services will make to each priority. However, this does not enable an overview of the activities that contribute to each priority to be easily identified. Moreover, although success criteria are generally clear, some targets for 2002/03 have still to be agreed. SEN services have contributed to the plan with varying degrees of thoroughness with the result that resources and timescales for action are not comprehensively reported throughout. There is no summary of the total costs required to deliver the LEA's strategy overall.

117. The SEN policy identifies eight key principles that underpin SEN provision in Tameside. However, the policy is generic and does not reflect local imperatives. For each principle, a number of criteria have been identified against which SEN provision will be evaluated. Progress on the implementation of SEN developments, against each criterion is very usefully presented to elected members annually in the LEA's *Implementation Monitoring Report*. Consequently, elected members are well informed about SEN and progress towards the fulfillment of their principles and priorities.

118. In addition, the council has produced a document *Inclusion: A Statement of Intent* which articulates its vision to make the borough a more inclusive community and reflects the government's programme for action. Schools, parental groups and other services were extensively consulted on this document and give it strong

support. A key element of this vision is that specialist provision, when required, should be co-located with a mainstream school. This statement only provides a general outline of intended action, hence schools will not be clear about detailed plans and implementation timescales for changes to SEN provision until the programmed reviews are undertaken.

Recommendations

In order to provide a clear vision and strategy for the short and medium term development of SEN in the LEA, the format of the SEN strategy document should be reviewed to include:

- the vision and principles that underpin the council's SEN strategy;
- clear targets and success criteria for improvements in the attainment of SEN pupils; and
- the resource implications associated with the implementation of all elements of the SEN strategy.

Statutory obligations

119. The previous inspection report highlighted the very poor rate of completion of SEN statements and unsatisfactory aspects of the review process. The LEA's performance in this area is much improved but some weaknesses remain.

120. There has been a recent and dramatic improvement in statement completion which means nearly all statements, with permissible exceptions, are now completed within the given time parameters. However, only 51 per cent without exceptions are completed within 18 weeks. Delays in the receipt of medical advice are the most significant factor and the LEA is actively working with the local health authority to tackle these issues. A protocol has been agreed, and since its implementation in September 2001, monthly monitoring indicates a recent reduction in medical exceptions. An action plan, involving education, social services and the health authority is also being drawn up to facilitate speedier assessment completion. Nevertheless, improvements in statement completion are too recent to have yet had an impact on schools' perceptions and completion rates still cause them concern. Although pupils' needs are expressed clearly, statements still lack precision. Clear criteria for assessment are set out in the LEA's recently produced comprehensive document *Matching Provision to Needs*, drawn up with the involvement of parents as well as schools. This specifies pupil characteristics within the categories 'Action', 'Action Plus' and 'Statutory Assessment'.

Recommendation

In order to effectively meet statutory obligations:

- ensure that the provision specified in statements is clear and quantified.

121. Arrangements to support parents of pupils with SEN are satisfactory. There is a robust partnership scheme that is sufficiently at 'arms length' from the LEA to make credible challenges, while remaining close enough to enable parents to engage in consultation and strategic development. Parents are informed of their rights in respect of appeal to the SEN tribunal and appropriately supported in exercising these rights. The LEA is actively involved in developing the North-West SEN regional partnership conciliation service.

122. Good progress has been made, albeit a little late, on previous concerns about IEPs. A working party has been established, and initial guidance on the format of IEPs was produced in the document *Matching Provision to Needs*. Since then, more comprehensive guidance has been distributed to schools. In addition, the LEA has provided IEP writing software to all its schools and training on this is to be completed by the end of the summer term. The educational psychological service now effectively monitors IEPs and structures are in place to monitor a representative sample which includes all those supporting Action Plus bids for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and statutory assessments. This has resulted in customised support for individual schools. There is an improvement in the rate of completion of annual reviews and LEA officers now attend a significant proportion of them. Schools contacted during the inspection reported favourably on the improved communication with SEN services.

School improvement

123. SEN support for school improvement is satisfactory. There are strengths in the direct help given to schools by the support services and in the quality of training provided. Nevertheless, weaknesses exist in the targeting and transparency of resource allocation and the evaluation of the impact of resources on attainment.

124. The LEA has made good use of the experience and expertise within its special schools in the collection of data, analysis of pupils' performance and in providing successful outreach support to mainstream schools. However, not all schools are aware of this expertise or how it can be accessed.

125. Advice, training and guidance provided by the SEN adviser, and the work of the educational psychologists and other support services are effective and valued by schools. Nevertheless, with the exception of the special educational needs co-ordinators' (SENCO) conferences and the training provided on the new SEN code of practice, in-service provision is reactive, rather than integral to, the strategic plan. The work of the support services is generally sound. The increasing development of service level agreements and internal performance management processes are important improvements. Educational Psychological Service time is allocated through service level agreements according to a formula, but is insufficiently differentiated by need. All schools are not clear about the implications for them in respect of the planned delegation of learning support services.

Value for money

126. At the time of the last inspection, special education needs provision was judged to provide poor value for money. Some improvements have been made and the LEA now provides satisfactory value for money in its exercise of SEN functions.

127. Spending on SEN in Tameside is comparatively low. Central expenditure, at £105 per pupil, is below that of other metropolitan authorities, which average £114 per pupil. Total expenditure, including that delegated to schools, amounts to 11 per cent of the Local Schools Budget compared with a metropolitan average of 15 per cent. Standards Funds have been used effectively, and creatively, to enable some elements of the strategy to be implemented. For example, this funding has been used to introduce nurture groups into eight primary schools, supported by the LEA's outreach team, for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties; these groups will be self-sustaining by April 2003.

128. In 2000/01, the LEA allocated £300,000 of additional resources, indexed annually, to support pupils with additional needs who do not have statements of SEN. Although there was a partial alignment of need to resources, there was insufficient differentiation. The LEA recognises this and is developing a new formula for the allocation of resources that will better target need. The identification of a notional four per cent of schools' budgets for SEN does not enable resources to be effectively targeted at those most in need. The mechanisms to evaluate the impact of these resources on pupils' progress are under-developed.

Recommendation

In order to improve the effectiveness in the allocation of resources to pupils with SEN:

- financial and support service resources should be allocated to schools in a transparent way; and
- robust mechanisms for evaluating the impact of the allocation of resources on pupils' progress and attainment should be devised and implemented.

129. The LEA has appropriate systems in place for monitoring the SEN budget and the only area of overspend was in respect of an unavoidable increase in the costs of SEN transport. Assessment criteria for the range of SEN are now clear and the rate of completion of statutory assessments has significantly improved. Although school budget statements now show a notional four per cent allocation for SEN this financial year, the budget cycle is not yet complete so monitoring and evaluation, including the impact of these resources on pupils' progress, has, understandably, not been done; this is planned.

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

The strategy to promote social inclusion

130. Much has been done to promote social inclusion; the LEA's strategy is satisfactory with few significant weaknesses. Council plans give appropriate prominence to combating social exclusion. These plans are clear, complement each other well and give appropriate weight to the work of the education service in contributing to the council's vision and targets. Appropriately, the EDP includes a priority to promote social inclusion which rightly focuses on raising the attainment of disadvantaged and under-achieving groups. The council has been successful in securing funding to support a number of initiatives that contribute to regeneration. These include neighbourhood renewal money, excellence cluster funding and the recently initiated Schools in the Community project.

131. The council has been proactive in its work to combat social exclusion. A Social Exclusion Plan for Tameside 2000/03, published in June 2000 and updated in July 2001, identified five priorities, two of which directly related to the education service: school absences and exclusions; and teenage pregnancies. The activities in the revised plan complement other initiatives within the education service including the PSA work to reduce unauthorised absence and support for children in public care. Progress is good and measured against clear targets. In addition, the council has produced a document, *Monitoring Social Exclusion in Tameside* (January 2002), which provides comprehensive local data and national statistics on a range of indices against which the effectiveness of social exclusion policies will be evaluated.

132. The education service has been successful in securing Local Government Authorities Pathfinder Status for a major project, Schools in the Community. Working with major partners, including the police, health and social services, the council will provide a wide range of support services for families of pupils in three new schools to be built, as a result of a PFI scheme, in one of the most deprived areas of the borough. This project supports the key priorities of Tameside's Community Plan and its social inclusion work.

133. Good progress in tackling social exclusion has been made by reducing the number of permanent exclusions from schools, improving attendance levels, and supporting pupils in public care. Good performance data has enabled resources to be targeted precisely at under-achieving groups, including ethnic minority pupils, in order to raise their levels of attainment. It is a credit to the council that it has included a target related to the performance of ethnic minority pupils in its PSA. The LEA has been less successful in securing full-time provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school. Although data from schools on racist incidents has not been collected with sufficient rigor, much has been done within the council to create a climate in which racial harmony and respect flourish.

The supply of school places

134. In the previous inspection, the provision of school places in Tameside was satisfactory. Since that time, the LEA has taken further action to tackle the effects of population decline in some areas of the borough; its management of school places is

now good. The school organisation committee works effectively and has tackled some difficult issues. The school organisation plan for 2001/05 clearly identifies and summarises key issues for action. District audit reports confirm that methods of forecasting pupil numbers are effective.

135. Primary surplus places, at 6.5 per cent, are considerably lower than the metropolitan authority average of 10.5 per cent. A decline in the population in some areas of the borough has sensibly led to a rolling programme of area reviews. Difficulties encountered in the schemes that combine PFI and school reorganisation have caused delays to the process. In initial area reviews, nursery and primary reviews were carried out separately, but the council has now learnt that it would be more effective to combine them. Further area reviews are programmed, but the timetables have sensibly been delayed, pending calculations of school capacities under the new government methodology. Effective action has been taken to reduce all infant class sizes, such that none exceed 30 pupils. Overall, the conflicts inevitably involved with school reorganisation have been well handled.

136. Secondary schools carry seven per cent surplus places. Two secondary schools currently have significant surplus places. Some of the small schools are in the aided sector and are over-subscribed. In one case, an appropriate reorganisation scheme involving a substantial PFI building programme for both primary and secondary schools in the Hattersley area is underway, and has already had a significant impact on increasing the pupil numbers in the secondary school. Formal proposals have not yet been made in relation to places in other secondary schools, but the council has started to consider appropriate alternatives.

Admissions

137. The previous inspection report judged the management of the admissions process as good, but recommended that the LEA should provide firmer leadership to reduce the complexities of secondary transfer arrangements. Arrangements for admissions to schools are still sound, although only limited progress has been made on resolving transfer issues.

138. The previous report identified the clarity of information in admissions booklets, the use of a database to track pupil movement between schools and the timeliness of the appeals process, as strengths; these remain, and further improvements have been made. The booklet is now available in four languages and an audio-tape is available for those with visual impairment. The number of first preferences met has increased and is now 97 per cent in the primary sector and 94 per cent in the secondary sector. All appeals are now completed in time, which allows pupils to be inducted to their new school in the term prior to entry.

139. The separate admission processes for the 12 community, three aided and three foundation schools in the borough complicate the secondary admissions process. Since the previous inspection, extensive work has been carried out in consultation with the admissions forum and schools to simplify this. The council consulted with governing bodies on the introduction of catchment areas, but this was not thought to be an appropriate solution because of the existence of single sex and foundation schools.

140. Nonetheless, some progress has been made. Common dates have been agreed between all schools for parental open days and for the closure of applications. Foundation schools have agreed that they will notify the LEA of their allocations 14 days before the process is finalised for community schools. However, foundation schools continue to maintain additional admissions criteria and it has not been possible, to date, to agree standardised criteria and common application forms. The council is, understandably, delaying further changes until the outcomes of the recent government consultation on admission processes are known.

Asset management planning

141. Although asset management planning was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, it was recommended that funding needs arising from the asset management plan (AMP) should be incorporated into capital and revenue budget priorities. It was also recognised that schools needed support to ensure that they understood, recognised, and were able to implement, their responsibilities.

142. Since then, the LEA has carried out its asset management planning responsibilities well and has been successful in securing capital resources to improve building condition and the suitability of facilities. The LEA has surveyed the condition of school buildings prior to the DfES requirement so to do and has met all milestones for the implementation of asset management planning. Moreover, the DfES has judged that the LEA has demonstrated above average performance in a number of these categories. Condition data submitted to the DfES shows that the top priority backlog in Tameside, at £77 per pupil, is below the national average of £91 per pupil and considerably below the metropolitan average of £158 per pupil.

143. There are clear signs that capital investment is making an impact on the condition of the worst school buildings in the borough. Government resources, such as the new deal for schools and targeted capital, are being used to improve them. Condition and suitability information is being well used by schools to identify appropriate priorities. Investment priorities take due account of other factors; for example, the supply of school places and, in one area of the borough, a PFI project linked to school reorganisation. Recently, schools have been given the information to enable them to plan long-term capital and revenue investment in their buildings. However, the LEA has not yet worked with schools to use this information to re-examine the long-term revenue resources that will be needed for future preventative maintenance.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

144. The previous inspection found that the LEA made appropriate provision for pupils who were educated otherwise than at school. However, despite strengths in the education of pupils in hospital and at home, the overall provision for this disparate group of pupils is now unsatisfactory, owing to a number of serious weaknesses. Excluded pupils below Year 11 are in provision that has not been registered and which does not provide them with a broad and balanced curriculum; pupils in the Year 11 pupil referral unit (PRU) do not have access to GCSE qualifications; and the plan for full-time provision from September 2002 is not costed.

145. There is no coherent overall strategy for the education of pupils who are not in school. The head of the home and hospital tuition service has responsibility for the education of pupils who are in hospital, pupils receiving home tuition, pupils excluded from school who attend the unregistered provision at the hospital, as well as pregnant school girls and young mothers. Another service manages the PRU. These two services, although linked, do not provide well-integrated support.

146. However, the LEA has clearly stated its commitment to the re-integration of pupils into mainstream education as soon as possible and has provided evidence of effective work in this area. A headteachers' panel to advise the LEA on the placement of permanently excluded pupils into secondary schools was established in September 2000 and has contributed, alongside the home and hospital teaching service, to the effective re-integration of 15 of the 41 pupils permanently excluded last year.

147. The well-established PRU, theoretically, provides full-time education for Year 11 pupils, most of who have been permanently excluded from school. However, during the period from the start of the autumn term to the end of November 2001, of the 24 pupils placed at the PRU, half were refusing to attend. Moreover, pupils at the PRU do not have access to GCSE courses, although they are entered for a range of basic skills examinations.

148. Overall, arrangements for younger pupils who are permanently excluded are unacceptable. Where possible, the LEA arranges alternative mainstream placements. However, others are allocated places in a class which falls outside the statutory and regulatory framework; this is a serious cause for concern. Moreover, in the classes that are provided, there is often a mix of primary and secondary pupils and those who are sick or permanently excluded. Of the 21 pupils who should have been attending this class in the autumn term, all but one had less than 10 hours of education provision - this is unacceptably poor. Moreover, these pupils do not have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. There is a clear, but uncosted, plan to secure full time education for excluded pupils by September 2002 and additional accommodation is planned to enable this to happen.

149. The LEA makes satisfactory provision for sick pupils through its home and hospital tuition service and schools are provided with clear guidelines as to their responsibilities towards these pupils. Although the majority of pupils in hospital receive 12 hours of tuition, of the 14 sick children educated at home, all only receive a maximum of five hours provision; this is insufficient.

150. There are effective procedures for monitoring both the academic and social provision made by parents who elect to educate their children at home. Sound arrangements are made to cater for the relatively low number of pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers.

Recommendations

In order to improve the quality and quantity of education provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school:

- immediate action must be taken to ensure pupils not educated in school are in registered provision; and
- provision for all pupils educated otherwise than at school should be reviewed to ensure that:
 - pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum;
 - pupils have access to public examinations; and
 - plans are implemented to ensure full-time provision for all those who are capable of receiving it, from September 2002.

Attendance

151. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's support to schools for pupil attendance was judged to be good. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) was well managed and highly valued by schools. The service had a clear set of performance targets and appropriate arrangements for monitoring its work.

152. No detailed fieldwork was done in this area for this inspection. Rates of attendance in both primary and secondary schools continue to improve and are similar to those found nationally. In primary schools, unauthorised absence is lower than the national average although authorised absence is slightly higher. All three attendance measures in secondary schools are in line with national averages. Over half of both primary and secondary schools responding to the school survey considered the support they received to be good or very good.

153. Although a reduction in the overall level of unauthorised absence in secondary schools is one of the council's PSA targets, not all schools yet have attendance targets. This is not the case for schools in the excellence cluster and for the 15 schools who have been identified by the DfES as having too high a level of unauthorised absence over two consecutive years. Attendance levels in "problem" schools are carefully monitored. The work of the EWS is well targeted at specific groups of pupils and on the causes of non-attendance, such as bullying.

Behaviour support

154. The previous inspection found that support for behaviour was satisfactory. There was a well-structured behaviour support plan and a small but well co-ordinated behaviour support service. However, concerns were raised about the length of time taken to provide support and about the co-ordination of information from the various services involved. Current support for behaviour is satisfactory, with more strengths than weaknesses. Primary schools now rate support for improving pupils' behaviour as satisfactory, although secondary schools still rate the support as less than satisfactory.

155. The LEA has successfully supported schools in significantly reducing permanent exclusions. In 1998/99 there were 80 permanent exclusions of which four were from primary schools. Last year, there were only 41 permanent exclusions, of which eight were from primary schools. This is a very creditable achievement, particularly as the LEA's target for the year was 45 permanent exclusions. Fixed term exclusions have risen significantly, from 585 pupils in 1998/99 to 861 pupils in 2000/01, with the largest increase in the secondary sector. The increase in the number of permanent exclusions from primary schools is slightly worrying, as is the apparent rise in fixed term exclusions, although this apparent rise is partly owing to improvements in the LEA's data collection arrangements. The profile of secondary exclusions indicates that the proportion of boys permanently excluded is greater than that found nationally, but resources are not adequately differentiated to tackle this. Similarly, although the most frequent category for secondary exclusion is 'cumulative misbehaviour', this has not yet led to the provision of resources at an earlier stage.

156. The LEA has increased the size of the behaviour support team and improved the speed and flexibility of response to schools' requests for support which is allocated through a bid system. The bids are made to a panel that includes teacher representatives and, if successful, schools are allocated a six-week support package followed by a six-week monitoring period. Rightly, the LEA is beginning to interpret this provision more flexibly. Schools acknowledge the improvements made, but continue to have concerns about waiting lists and delays. The requirement that bids must have the support of an educational psychologist can add a significant delay. Nevertheless, when schools receive the support, they rate it highly.

157. The LEA's guidance to schools on the use of pupil retention grants is useful and is followed up by monitoring visits. However there is insufficient evaluation of effectiveness, and good practice is not systematically disseminated. Most secondary schools have now established learning support units but this has not arisen from an audit of need and resources have not been appropriately differentiated to target schools with the greatest difficulty.

158. The behaviour support plan has a clear rationale and is underpinned by appropriate principles. Its action plan delineates responsibilities clearly but success criteria are insufficiently precise to allow effective monitoring. There is often no clear baseline against which progress can be measured.

159. Schools are able to commission effective in-service training and support specific to their needs. However, the LEA does not provide schools with suitable guidelines for developing their own effective systems of behaviour management.

Recommendation

In order to improve the management of behaviour in schools:

- produce guidelines to support schools in developing effective systems for behaviour management.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

160. At the time of the last inspection, links with social services and the police on child protection matters was good, and training was reported to be of good quality. Child protection arrangements are now unsatisfactory. Although the LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations at a strategic level this is not reflected in good practice at school level. Schools are very concerned about child protection arrangements, particularly the limited response from concerns raised with social services. No management information is produced by social services as to the source of child protection referrals. Education and social services senior managers are aware of the concerns of schools and have been working together for some time to develop a shared strategy to tackle them - progress has been much too slow. Proposals to have a named social worker for every school are, at last, being introduced; secondary schools will be informed of their named contact this term, and a similar arrangement for primary schools will be in place by September. Strategies are also being formulated to better inform schools on social services' working practices and expectations.

161. There are weaknesses in the monitoring of child protection training. Although every school has a designated teacher for child protection, training records show that since April 2000 only 20 per cent of designated teachers have attended training. The records do not indicate the level of training attended. No records are kept of the training given to other education service staff who work with children in school.

162. The LEA produces a satisfactory range of support materials for schools on child protection and schools are familiar with the procedures. There are also clear guidelines on procedures to be followed in relation to teachers and other staff facing an allegation of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Although a model bullying policy has been produced, there is no strategy to monitor which schools have adopted this, or its effectiveness.

Recommendations

In order to improve child protection arrangements:

- secure the attendance of teachers and others on appropriate training courses and, in particular, ensure that newly designated teachers receive training at an early opportunity;
- keep full records of staff involvement in training; and
- urgently tackle schools' concerns about the effectiveness of communication with social services in order to rebuild trust in child protection arrangements in the borough.

163. The LEA is represented at an appropriate senior level on the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) and its sub-groups. The ACPC has a business plan which provides an evaluation of its work.

164. At the time of the last inspection, schools rated health and safety arrangements to be poor, although health and safety policies were in place and implemented. Schools' concerns arose primarily from the LEA's poor building maintenance record. An improvement has occurred. The LEA effectively assists schools to carry out their health and safety responsibilities and the strengths identified at the last inspection, related to the production of model policies and training, remain. In addition, a programme of visits has been carried out to around two-thirds of schools to advise headteachers of health and safety processes including those related to buildings and playgrounds. The remaining schools will be visited over the next few months. The schedule for building maintenance, which carries health and safety implications, has been well communicated to schools.

Children in public care

165. At the time of the last inspection, the council had recently established a policy to improve support for, and the performance of, looked after children. The optimism expressed then about its positive potential has been justified by the action subsequently taken and the provision made.

166. There is a strong political commitment to support children in public care and the arrangements are highly satisfactory. Support for these pupils at strategic and operational levels is well co-ordinated between education and social services. The overall strategy is appropriately based on sustaining stability in school placements. No children in public care were excluded last year and 55 per cent of the target age group achieved at least one GCSE A*-G. Attainment is measured at all key stages and individual attendance is effectively monitored.

167. Schools are informed when a looked after child is admitted to school and when their care status changes but the provision of information is not always timely. Schools have designated teachers and governors for pupils in public care and evidence from the school visits suggest that they are familiar with their responsibilities and know the children well. The proportion of pupils with personal education plans (PEP) is much higher than the national average but not all schools yet understand the plans' significance for those pupils who appear to have no academic or social difficulties. The LEA has supported schools in raising the attainment of children in public care through a number of initiatives including a shared reading project. However, the success of these projects has not been evaluated nor has good practice been disseminated.

Measures to combat racism

168. At the time of the previous inspection, the effectiveness of measures taken to combat racism were satisfactory; they remain so overall. Nonetheless, there has been some effective interventionist work by the LEA.

169. The council has provided a clear lead in its work to combat racism. Progress on the Commission for Racial Equality standards is tightly monitored across all services by the chief executive. As a consequence of racial tension in a neighbouring authority in the summer of 2001, a Race Summit has been held which has resulted in a new council strategy being developed. The council's easily

accessible web-site provides a very helpful support pack and guidance for victims of racial harassment. In addition, the LEA has set up an anti-racist scrutiny panel with appropriate representation to monitor its work in this area.

170. Although the LEA's work in combating racism is generally satisfactory and in some instances very good, there is one significant weakness. Rightly, the LEA annually collects details of racist incidents occurring in schools and reports the findings to the cabinet deputy for lifelong learning, and subsequently to schools. However, only 39 of the LEA's schools provided information last year and there was no systematic follow-up of those who failed to. However, several very good examples were found of excellent support being provided to individual schools, pupils and parents who have experienced racist incidents. Notes of visits to schools by advisers made it clear issues were being tackled.

Recommendation

In order to ensure the LEA obtains an accurate record of racist incidents in schools:

- more rigorous procedures must be put in place to ensure records of racist incidents and nil returns are sent to the LEA from all schools.

171. The range of training available to support measures to combat racism is insufficient. Training has been provided for teachers and governors on the development and implementation of an anti-racist policy following the distribution of the council's clear anti-racist statement to schools. However, there is limited training available for mainstream teachers on dealing and responding to racist behaviour. Some training has been targeted at particular groups or for those dealing with particular issues; for example, those working with asylum seekers; an annual conference for bilingual teaching assistants and a training exhibition on the life-style of Travellers.

Recommendation

To improve efforts to combat racism:

- expand the range of training provided for mainstream teachers on effective approaches on dealing with, and responding to, racist behaviour.

172. Although there is no comprehensive strategy to support schools in their work to promote racial harmony through the curriculum, there are some imaginative projects which have effectively raised the profile of ethnic minority issues; these are generally "one-off " events. Nevertheless, link advisers are scheduled to raise the profile of measures to combat racism in their discussions with schools this term, primarily to ensure that all schools have appropriate policies in place.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction

173. At the time of the last inspection, a number of significant weaknesses were identified in relation to planning and decision-making. Schools had little confidence in the LEA, were poorly consulted and did not feel involved in the LEA's work. Recent changes in the structure of the council, including the strategic management of the education service, had not had the opportunity to bed down and headteachers were disconcerted at further planned changes. The core education management team was considered too small and was over-stretched. Liaison with other partners was judged as satisfactory.

174. Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant improvement. Schools now trust the LEA; they enjoy an effective partnership in which their views and opinions are actively sought and acted upon; they are generally well-informed and appropriately consulted. This change is due to a number of factors. Firstly, the LEA has made a number of very good appointments to key positions, thus creating a climate in which it is able to provide effective leadership. Secondly, senior officers have made themselves well-known to schools and are respected for their openness and frankness. Thirdly, effective intervention and support that meets the needs of schools has resulted in improvements in attainment. The climate within the LEA is clearly focused on continuous improvement; and as one headteacher said "it used to be happy to be average, but not now".

Corporate planning

175. At the time of the last inspection, the education department had a patchy history of contributing to corporate working. As a result, the synergy between corporate initiatives and education work was not fully exploited. Although a new strategic director had been appointed to have responsibility for education and cultural services, insufficient time had elapsed for this appointment to impact on the council's work when the inspection took place.

176. Significant improvements have occurred. Building on its vision statement published in 1996, the council produced a community strategy in 2000 supported by a more detailed Community Plan 2000-3. This Plan identified eight priorities including one related to education that made a commitment to improve school performance and create more opportunities for lifelong learning. Following further extensive public consultation, four key priorities were identified as the focus for council development; these included 'education in schools'. The council's plans are consistent. Progress against an impressive and comprehensive range of targets is monitored regularly by the chief executive on a service basis; for example, progress on PSA targets are monitored every two months. The effectiveness of the council's plans is judged according to progress towards meeting clear and measurable success criteria.

177. Education now plays a leading role in corporate work which is welcomed by the corporate centre and appreciated by schools, who now see benefits accruing to them as a result of the closer involvement of education in renewal and regeneration

activities. The successful bid to the LGA for Pathfinder Status for Schools in the Community is an example of education taking the lead in a major corporate initiative to continue the regeneration of one of the most deprived areas of the borough. Schools have also benefited from the LEA's involvement of the neighbourhood renewal funded projects focused on, for example, tackling youth disaffection.

178. Across the council, each of the four directorates and eighteen services has responsibility for drawing up an annual business plan, which in the case of education services, identifies for each of its twelve service units, key objectives and performance measures against which it will be evaluated. The business plan provides a useful and effective framework for monitoring progress against sharp targets of key aspects of the services' work. However, the emphasis is on key activities, with the result that the monitoring of the progress and impact of other activities is less good and lacks coherence. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of plans in some service areas.

Decision making

179. Since last inspection, the modernised cabinet structure has gained full powers. Corporate decision-making arrangements are clear and are well informed as a result of good consultation with stakeholders. The cabinet deputy has extensive decision-making powers, which are wisely used, and as a result, key decisions are made more quickly. Members are provided with clear documentation and well-explained alternatives to support their decision-making. Nevertheless, they have shown themselves to be independent thinkers, and have not shirked from hard decisions, such as the amalgamation of schools.

180. Financial decision-making is timely and effective. Schools appreciate the new strategic planning advisory group, set up after the last inspection, which includes representatives of headteachers, officers, teacher association representatives and elected members, and which advises officers on a wide range of strategic issues. Headteachers consider this group to be effective in influencing decision-making; it provides a forum for schools' key concerns to be raised, including issues relating to the work of social services.

Leadership of officers and elected members

181. At the time of the last inspection, concerns were expressed as to whether the then new leadership of the education services had the capacity to successfully tackle the shortcomings found, and fundamentally, to secure an improvement in schools' standards.

182. Since the inspection, the then recently appointed strategic director for education and cultural services and the borough education officer have formed a very effective working partnership, respected by schools, which has led the transformation of the LEA. While the strategic director, who holds the position of chief education officer, has focused his work on the development of the corporate side, the borough education officer has tackled shortcomings in the service head-on. The strategic director has ensured that he has close contact with schools by visiting every school annually; now in his third round of visits, this is no mean achievement.

Although this annual visit has played a significant role in improving the relationship between schools and the LEA, it is questionable as to whether this demanding and extensive schedule of visiting is now necessary.

183. The education service has been restructured to bring all service unit managers under the direct supervision of the borough education officer in order to provide a clear focus for all on school improvement; this has been very effective. He has provided imaginative and stimulating leadership through forthright and intelligent work with both officers and schools which has transformed the work of the service into one which is very responsive to schools' needs. He has not shirked from giving schools and officers hard messages. Nevertheless, the current management structure of the education service places a significant workload on the borough education officer to whom the twelve service unit managers report directly.

Recommendation

In order to maximise the effective deployment of senior managers:

- the structure and organisation of the education service should be reviewed.

184. In the past two years, the work of the LEA has also been enhanced by a number of key appointments of considerable quality, particularly in the areas of SEN, ICT and literacy. These appointments have complemented other effective postholders, already in post, who now have an appropriate climate in which to drive forward school improvement.

185. The cabinet deputy has worked hard to ensure he has a good understanding of education issues and is very well supported by officers. Not only does he meet with the senior management team fortnightly, but he also meets with service unit managers half-termly.

186. The work of the scrutiny panel for education and health is unsatisfactory. It has not taken on the role of challenging key decisions such as on the allocation of the education budget. In the last six months it has been unduly focused on the attainment of schools, in order to identify best practice - one of the functions of the LEA's advisory service. Although having previously reviewed SEN and hence influenced the improvement in the rate of completion of statutory assessments, its work with regard to education is unclear. Although, in this council, scrutiny panels have a role in providing challenge to BV reviews and monitoring the progress of BV review action plans, this has not happened within the education service.

Recommendation

In order to strengthen the role and effectiveness of the scrutiny panel for education:

- the panel should have clear objectives for its work and plan its activities accordingly.

Partnership

187. This function was not inspected in detail in the current inspection. Liaison with other partners was judged to be satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Links with most agencies were effective and to the benefit of schools, though diocesan boards were insufficiently informed or consulted about the LEA's plans.

188. Strategic links have been sustained and developed, though liaison with health and social services breaks down too often at an operational level. Overall collaboration with other agencies is satisfactory with few weaknesses. Strong links with the police have been sustained. Liaison with the Tameside race equality forum is well developed. Liaison with diocesan boards and with local post-sixteen providers has improved significantly. Strategic links with the West Pennine health authority and social services are strong with clear benefits to pupils' welfare and access to education. Cross-service planning for early years provision is effective. Good links between health and education have facilitated the implementation of a range of policies, for example, vaccination programmes. Liaison with social services has been particularly effective in supporting children in public care. Schools are however, seriously concerned by two significant breakdowns in co-operation. Statements of special educational need cannot be completed promptly because health advice is delayed. Relationships between many schools and social services have deteriorated over issues of child protection, characterised by concerns about poor communication and a lack of confidence that schools' views are taken seriously.

APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes a number of recommendations and the following are significant for the further improvement in the LEA:

In order to provide a clear vision and strategy for the short and medium term development of SEN in the LEA, the format of the SEN strategy document should be reviewed to include:

- the vision and principles that underpin the council's SEN strategy;
- clear targets and success criteria for improvements in the attainment of SEN pupils; and
- the resource implications associated with the implementation of all elements of the SEN strategy.

In order to effectively meet statutory obligations with regard to SEN:

- ensure that the provision specified in statements is clear and quantified.

In order to improve the effectiveness in the allocation of resources to pupils with SEN:

- financial and support service resources should be allocated to schools in a transparent way; and
- robust mechanisms for evaluating the impact of the allocation of resources on pupils' progress and attainment should be devised and implemented.

In order to improve the quality and quantity of education provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school:

- immediate action must be taken to ensure pupils not educated in school are in registered provision; and
- provision for all pupils educated otherwise than at school should be reviewed to ensure that:
 - pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum;
 - pupils have access to public examinations; and
 - plans are implemented to ensure full-time provision for all those who are capable of receiving it, from September 2002.

In order to improve the management of school buildings:

- schools should be assisted to find the technical help that they need to carry out their building responsibilities and to obtain the appropriate level of support;
- the LEA should ensure that all capital projects are managed effectively; and
- the work of private contractors should be rigorously monitored and those that fail to reach the required standard of workmanship should be removed from the LEA's list.

In order to improve child protection arrangements:

- secure the attendance of teachers and others on appropriate training courses and, in particular, ensure that newly designated teachers receive training at an early opportunity;
- keep full records of staff involvement in training; and
- urgently tackle schools' concerns about the effectiveness of communication with social services in order to rebuild trust in child protection arrangements in the borough.

To improve efforts to combat racism:

- expand the range of training provided for mainstream teachers on effective approaches on dealing with, and responding to, racist behaviour.

In order to ensure the LEA obtains an accurate record of racist incidents in schools:

- more rigorous procedures must be put in place to ensure records of racist incidents and nil returns are sent to the LEA from all schools.

In order to strengthen service planning and performance management:

- all service units should produce annual service plans which identify priorities for development, actions to deliver these priorities, targets and success criteria, personnel responsible and timescales. These plans should link directly with the department's business plan and the council's priorities and provide a basis for the delivery of effective performance management arrangements.

In order to maximise the effective deployment of senior managers:

- the structure and organisation of the education service should be reviewed.

In order to strengthen the role and effectiveness of the scrutiny panel for education:

- the panel should have clear objectives for its work and plan its activities accordingly.

We also make the following recommendations:

In order to improve the use of education resources:

- the LEA should work with schools to reduce significantly the level of school balances.

In order to support the development of autonomous schools:

- devise consistent approaches to school self-evaluation and the dissemination of good practice.

In order to make monitoring more effective:

- ensure that written records of school visits are more consistently evaluative and of high quality, and are distributed to chairs of governors as well as to headteachers.

In order to inform a coherent and clearly focused strategy for the recruitment and retention of teachers:

- teacher vacancy data should be collected and analysed on a termly basis.

In order to improve the management of behaviour in schools:

- produce guidelines to support schools in developing effective systems for behaviour management.

APPENDIX 2: THE BEST VALUE REVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

1. The Best Value review (BVR) of special educational needs (SEN) was completed in October 2000. Provision for pupils with SEN was identified as an area of weakness by an LEA focus group review in 1999 and the OFSTED inspection of the LEA in 2000. It was, therefore, appropriate to subject it to a BV review. However, the review missed the opportunity to adopt a more radical, creative or imaginative approach to SEN provision.

2. The purpose of the review was to ensure that children with SEN are identified and assessed as early as possible and that appropriate support is provided to meet identified needs. The scope of the review embraced strategic management, statutory duties, direct service delivery, and monitoring and evaluation. Challenge was deemed as arising from national expectations and the recommendations of the OFSTED inspection report; this was inadequate.

3. The review team of six was drawn from LEA personnel and stakeholders, including headteachers, SEN co-ordinators, elected members, and representatives of the health authority and social services. The omission of parents, young people and governors is a shortcoming.

4. Comparison was weak. Comparative data used in the review was largely limited to readily available national comparative data relating to the statutory processes of SEN assessment, and the numbers and location of pupils with SEN. There was no tailored comparative data in respect of other key areas within the scope of the review, and no attempt to approach effective LEAs to draw on examples of good practice. In particular, no comparison has been sought with respect to the numbers and relative costs of low incidence services such as those for the visually and hearing impaired. The report acknowledges the poverty of locally available data on individual pupil performance and attainment but sets out no strategy to rectify this.

5. The LEA's monitoring and evaluation arrangements to ensure resources are effectively targeted have not been satisfactorily tackled in the review. In particular, the need to secure resources for pupils with additional needs, but without a statement, has not been adequately addressed. Moreover, there is no strategy to measure the impact of support services in raising attainment or increasing inclusion.

6. There is now a clear and coherent strategy for inclusion which has the support of the education community. There has been a recent dramatic improvement in the rate of completion of statements and in the attendance of LEA officers at annual reviews. Delegation of support services has now been agreed. However, these improvements did not stem directly from this review.

7. The review has not led to the production of a costed action plan and has relied on the existing post-OFSTED inspection action plan and emerging SEN strategic plan to deliver its recommendations. Nevertheless, although the review has helped to consolidate change already underway, it has not in itself, contributed to the process of change.

The SEN service in Tameside is **fair** and has **promising** prospects for improvement.

APPENDIX 3: THE BEST VALUE REVIEW OF THE EARLY YEARS SERVICE

1. The best value review of early years was completed in April 2001. Early Years was a sensible choice for review as it is a cross-cutting service involving education and cultural services, social services and the early years development and childcare partnership. Furthermore, provision for early years is a current national priority. The review was carried out appropriately, according to the LEA's rules. The review team included six senior officers, three from social services and three from education and cultural services, but there was no member from outside these two departments to provide objectivity and challenge. As part of the monitoring process, the cabinet deputy for lifelong learning receives regular reports on the review's progress.

2. The previous inspection of the LEA found that the support for early years was satisfactory. The quality of provision in nursery schools and classes was often good but there was a lack of understanding of the part that nursery education played in improving standards. The LEA's monitoring and evaluation were inadequate and its guidance on the staffing of nursery classes was not always followed. Since then, the foundation stage curriculum and early learning goals have been established. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 have improved at a rate greater than that found nationally and are now above national averages. Monitoring and evaluation are better, and are carried out against an appropriate range of indicators. However, the service has been slow to restate its guidance, which is just about to be issued, on the staffing of nursery classes; disappointingly, the number staffed solely by nursery nurses has increased in the past two years from seven to eleven.

3. The service meets its statutory responsibilities and has a clear and ambitious aim of universal provision of high quality throughout Tameside. It supports corporate aims in the authority's community plan and seeks to meet national priorities, such as the early identification of SEN. Expenditure on early years is above SSA and there are sufficient places for all three-year-olds in the borough, with take-up only one percentage point short of matching the best value performance target of 85 per cent. However, the approach to the collection of data on disadvantage is limited to free school meals. While the participation of vulnerable groups is greater than often found, they are comparatively under-represented in the take-up of Tameside's mainstream provision.

4. The review took account of strong local and national challenges. Consultation was thorough, using a range of surveys, a focus group and a statistical study, and involved appropriate groups such as children under five and parents. Appropriate comparisons involved national data, local audits and an early excellence centre in another LEA. In considering competition, the review examined costs across different types of provision. An effective balance is achieved between public and private provision and two privately funded initiatives have been used for rebuilding multi-agency early years accommodation.

5. The improvement plan is appropriately focused with its implementation likely to lead to improvement; however some of its timescales are not clear and its targets

are insufficiently specific for precise measurement. The review has strengthened a number of aspects of the service's work, including the quality of reports to elected members, the co-ordination of initiatives and co-operation with partners. It has also been influential in reshaping family support within social services. Although there are still areas for attention, the early years service has shown improvements, to which the best value review has contributed.

Early Years is a **good service** and has **promising** prospects for further improvement.

Appendix 4: THE BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CLEANING AND CATERING

1. The Best Value review of catering and cleaning services was completed in April 2001. The scope of the review was inappropriately limited to services provided to schools.
2. The review found that, following earlier delegation, secondary schools have been able to make substantial improvements in financial performance. Primary schools are overall reasonably satisfied with the quality and reliability of the service. However, the main issue faced by the service was the modernisation of schools' kitchen facilities, which have suffered from a lack of investment. This was a limiting factor in future improvement, particularly in the financial performance of the service. Currently, school meals run at a deficit with the cost of £1.39 per meal and a charge to pupils of £1.25. The service meets the DfES standard on nutritional content of meals. There is a higher than average percentage of take-up of meals overall.
3. The cleaning and caretaking service provides a full cleaning service to 40 per cent of schools and an advisory service on cleaning and caretaking for most of the remaining schools.
4. Immediate improvements have resulted from the BV review. The meals service has consulted more regularly with schools. To improve take-up further, good quality literature has been produced for pupils and parents, targeted particularly on schools where school meal take-up was low. The service has worked with schools to improve the quality and attractiveness of meals.
5. The BV review also improved the cleaning and caretaking service. Area managers have become more proactive in consulting schools regularly about their views. Focus groups have been held with school cleaners to discuss their views on the way that they can better interact with schools. The cleaning service also lacked investment for many years resulting in most of the equipment being ten or more years old. Since the review, there has been a programme of immediate investment.
6. The review recommended that partnership arrangements should be explored for both services, in order to ensure that the necessary investment could be made, particularly in kitchen equipment. Preliminary inquiries have been made with potential companies to enter into partnership arrangements. The initial programme in the action plan estimated the agreement could be completed by April 2002. However, since the review progress has stalled while the council undertakes its facilities management review.
7. Some comparative information was used in both reviews, but was not sufficiently well developed. Challenge was good, and resulted in a proposal for external partnership. Since the conclusion of the review, however, progress has stalled while the Council examines a wider range of services in its facilities management BV review.

School catering and cleaning in Tameside are both **fair** services and have **promising** prospects for improvement.

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