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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used *The Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of the work of the local education authority (LEA) to support school improvement.

2. The inspection involved the analysis of data and scrutiny of documentation from the LEA, information from school inspections and audit reports. Discussions were held with LEA members, staff in the Education and Leisure Directorate and in other Council departments as well as representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on the aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 124 schools. The response rate was 85 per cent.

3. The inspection sought to establish the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to a community nursery centre, 11 primary schools, five secondary schools, one secondary special school and two pupil referral units (PRUs). The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's school improvement strategy. The visits also considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Salford Council serves a severely deprived area although there are pockets of comparative affluence. Youth unemployment is high and crime is rife. Schools face a considerable challenge in engaging pupils in learning. Some schools achieve remarkable results in relation to the task they face, but a number are complacent and under-performing. Standards in primary schools are in line with those found nationally but are less good in secondary schools. In both sectors, standards are improving at a faster rate than found nationally.

5. The common sense of purpose shown by elected members, officers and schools is a strong feature of the LEA. The Council is committed to urban regeneration and has been successful in attracting additional resources to Salford to the benefit of schools.

6. The LEA has made a significant contribution to school improvement in recent years and has successfully discharged the majority of its functions. In particular, there is excellent leadership of the Inspection-Advisory Service whose main function is to support school improvement. There is also a highly effective and well-developed, comprehensive strategy for supporting schools causing concern.

7. Schools in Salford benefit from a well-led and clearly focused Directorate. The senior management are a new team and have all been appointed to their current posts within the last three years. The leadership has successfully created a climate of well-balanced support and challenge that is recognised by schools and has permeated, not only the inspection advisory service, but increasingly other services as well. Relationships with schools are good; schools are well informed and autonomous. There is a clear commitment to school improvement and schools are expected to rise to the challenge. Overall, strategic management of the LEA is sound and improving. The LEA meets its statutory duties.

8. Although schools are well funded generally, too much of the budget continues to be held centrally and schools are not provided with services differentiated according to their needs. A lack of transparency in costs means that schools are unable to judge the value for money of services that they receive. Moreover, schools have been poorly served by the LEA in the past on the maintenance of school buildings and the management of surplus places. In combination, these have also reduced the level of resources available to schools. Progress is being made but far too late; removal of places has not yet gone far enough, particularly in the Roman Catholic sector. Tough decisions have yet to be taken on secondary reorganisation.

9. In addition, the LEA's performance in fulfilling functions relating to special educational needs (SEN) is unsatisfactory. Aspects of SEN provision is effective in practice but the lack of an up-to-date SEN policy confuses well-intentioned and potentially successful initiatives.

The following functions that were covered in the Inspection are judged to be effective:

- identifying and securing improvements in schools causing concern
- inspection and advisory support for school improvement;
- implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Education Development Plan;
- the establishment of effective partnerships with schools;
- liaison with other services and agencies;
- early years provision;
- admission arrangements to schools;
- support for school management and governance;
- provision of payroll, personnel and financial support services to schools.

The following functions are performed inadequately:

- the maintenance and improvement of school buildings;
- management of school places;
- delegation of funding to schools;
- specification of services to schools and identification of their costs;
- strategic management of special education;
- strategic management of Information and Communications Technology.

Overall strengths outweigh weaknesses.

10. The new LEA management team has the capacity and commitment to undertake the action required on the recommendations made. Commitment from elected members will be required to carry through the tough decisions on school places and to resource improvements to school buildings. The LEA is well placed to tackle some difficult and challenging issues and is aware of areas requiring improvement. In all of the functions currently performed inadequately, improvement strategies are already in place and showing some degree of success.

SECTION ONE

THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

11. The City of Salford is one of ten metropolitan councils in the county of Greater Manchester. Its population has declined at a rate of over 11 per cent between 1981 and 1991 - twice that of Manchester as a whole and currently stands at 225,900. Salford is a city of contrasts - comprising business districts, inner city residential areas and suburbs that neighbour open countryside. Unemployment has recently fallen to a level close to the national mean, although youth unemployment remains high. Crime is rife with 15 out of every 100 residents reporting as being the victim of crime. On the basis of the index of local deprivation, Salford is the 23rd most deprived district in England.

12. Of the adult population, only 8.1 per cent have a higher education qualification, compared with 13.5 per cent nationally. Entitlement to free school meals is well above the national average in both primary (31 per cent) and secondary (26 per cent) schools. Despite the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs, the proportion of statemented pupils in primary schools (2.2 per cent) is well below the national mean; in secondary schools, the proportion (4.6 per cent) has recently risen to exceed that found nationally. A slightly smaller percentage of pupils attend special schools than is the average for other metropolitan authorities. Only 3.1 per cent of the school population are of ethnic minority origin compared with 10 per cent nationally. In 1998 the proportion of pupils staying on in full-time education post 16 was 48 per cent, one of the lowest in the country, with the proportion not in education, training and employment being very high at 23 per cent.

13. Salford maintains 113 schools comprising three nursery schools, 86 primary schools, 17 11-16 secondary schools (one was formerly grant maintained), seven special schools and four pupil referral units (PRUs). Nursery provision is available in all but four of the LEA's primary schools. In January 1998, 72 per cent of nursery age and younger children were offered full time places; all receive at least part-time provision. Although three secondary schools are over-subscribed, seven have more than 25 per cent surplus places¹ and six out of the 17 have less than 600 pupils.

14. The LEA has a fluctuating pupil population. A significant proportion of pupils annually (about 9 per cent) leave the LEA at the end of Year 6 to attend either maintained schools in neighbouring LEAs or those in the independent sector. Some primary schools experience high pupil mobility, one with a rate as high as 60 per cent between Reception and Year 6.

¹ Based on More Open Enrolment (MOE) figures, January 1999

Performance

15. A detailed analysis of the performance of schools was supplied to the LEA in an OFSTED Profile. It highlights these features of performance:

- OFSTED inspectors judged the attainment on entry to primary schools to be poor in 64 per cent of schools;
- Primary schools attain better than secondary schools. A higher percentage of pupils at Key Stage 1 attain Level 2 than is found nationally and at Key Stage 2 attainment is in line with the national mean. However, at both Key Stages 3 and 4 attainment is below the national average, but in line with that for the LEA's statistical neighbours;
- Rates of improvement in attainment between 1995-8 are, in most cases, often significantly greater than improvements nationally. For example, at Key Stage 2 rates of improvement in all the core subjects exceed those found nationally. In the same period, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE A*-G grades and A*-C grades rose by 11.5 per cent and 5.9 per cent compared to national rates of 2.3 per cent and 3.5 per cent respectively;
- OFSTED inspection data shows that primary schools overall are performing in line with primary schools nationally; secondary schools are judged less well. For example, the management and efficiency of only half of secondary schools were considered to be good or better compared with over 70 per cent nationally; similarly, standards of achievement were judged to be good in only one-third of secondary schools compared with 58 per cent nationally. Only 44 per cent of secondary schools were judged to be good or very good overall compared with almost 70 per cent nationally;
- Since OFSTED inspections began in 1993, six schools have required special measures. Two have closed and a further three have made sufficient progress to no longer require special measures. One of these still has serious weaknesses and is to be closed. Only one, a special school, remains in special measures. Since September 1997, six schools have been judged by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses. Three made sufficient progress to be removed from that category last year, leaving one high school (previously in special measures) and two primary schools with serious weaknesses;
- Two primary schools have been awarded beacon status;
- Attendance rates in primary and secondary schools are significantly below national averages but are improving in secondary schools. In 1998/9 the proportion of pupils permanently excluded from secondary schools reduced by 23 per cent from a level that was more than double the national average. The

number of exclusions from primary schools has reduced and is now in line with national averages.

Funding

16. The Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) funding allocation for Salford in 1999/2000 was higher than the average for other metropolitan authorities. The Council has continued to budget to spend above SSA and thus incorporated all of the 1999/2000 education SSA increase into the education budget.

	1997/88	1998/99	1999/2000
Budget (£m)	88.217	97.035	99.675
Education SSA (£m)	82.195	91.005	95.234
Budget as % of SSA	107.3%	106.6%	104.7%

17. Within the overall education budget, allocation to the phases varies in relation to the SSA. Spending on children under five is 47 per cent higher than the SSA whereas funding for primary and secondary schools is 1 per cent and 6.2 per cent above SSA, respectively.

18. Although the LEA's Local Schools Budget is relatively high (£2620 per pupil compared to the average for metropolitan authorities of £2586 per pupil), the LEA delegates a low percentage of the budget (77.4 per cent) to schools ranking Salford the eleventh lowest amongst all LEAs in England.

19. The LEA has been successful in securing grants from other sources to enhance education provision. For example, Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) contributed over £0.5 million to schools' budgets in 1998/9 and over £0.3 million in 1999/2000. The LEA has provided matched funding to take up its full standards fund allocation in 1999/2000. Nine schools are benefiting from resources allocated through the Salford and Trafford Education Action Zone.

20. Central expenditure per pupil is high, particularly in the areas of strategic management, special education (para 98), school transport and education welfare (para 112). For example, the LEA spends £68 per pupil on home to school transport compared with an average of £41 per pupil in all metropolitan authorities.

Council Structure

21. Salford City Council consists of 56 Labour and four Liberal Democrat elected members. The Council is, appropriately, undergoing modernisation in response to the Government's national agenda. From mid-December, the nine committees, including education, will be replaced by a cabinet of ten members and four scrutiny committees. The corporate agenda will be shared equally between three scrutiny committees with the fourth, Quality and Performance, assuming responsibility for evaluating progress on the Council's performance indicators, including those relating to education.

22. The Council is organised into eight directorates including Education and Leisure. The implementation of the Council's work is co-ordinated by the Director's Team consisting of the chief executive and the other seven directors. One particularly interesting feature of the Council's work is the management of new initiatives. Each director has responsibility for an area of the City and will act as the lead person in relation to localised corporate developments. This arrangement does ensure that directors are aware of the council's broad span of work and gain an appreciation and understanding of the interrelationship between the work of different directorates. There are clear links between plans and priorities.

The Education Development Plan

23. The LEA has a comprehensive and coherent approach to school improvement. It has published three core documents: the Education Development Plan details the LEA's strategy for school improvement; *Managing for Success* describes the principles and provides the framework for school planning and self evaluation; and the *School Statistical Profile* facilitates schools' quantitative evaluation and target-setting procedures. The Education Development Plan has been approved by the Secretary of State for three years.

24. The Education Development Plan builds on the good planning practice established Council-wide. This has ensured that targets are consistent and that there are well-defined links between plans. It is a good plan with many strengths, in particular, the emphasis on the dissemination of good practice. It reflects national priorities whilst clearly focusing on local needs. It is based on a clear rationale and detailed audit of current performance. The involvement of headteachers in the formulation of the priorities, the comprehensive consultation process and well structured systems for monitoring and evaluation provide a powerful vehicle for effective school improvement. The LEA has a high profile and effective strategy for informing school staff about the Education Development Plan and of progress made. All schools are well aware of the LEA's priorities, approve of them and have integrated appropriate actions into their own school development plans, which in the majority of cases were cross-referenced to the Education Development Plan.

The priorities defined in the Education Development Plan are:

- to improve attendance of secondary pupils, in particular by addressing condoned absence;
- to raise levels of literacy, language skills and numeracy and address the under achievement of boys;
- information and communication technology;
- academic progress and motivation of pupils, particularly boys, aged 9-13;
- self evaluation and assessment;
- improve GCSE results, including those of girls in mathematics and science;
- schools needing special support;

- improve behaviour and reduce exclusions.

25. Activity plans have clearly focused and appropriate actions, measurable success criteria, realistic timescales and detailed resource information. However, there is insufficient focus on supporting secondary schools to raise the quality of teaching at Key Stage 3. The focus of the priority on 9-13, whilst rightly tackling primary-secondary transition issues, does not include sufficient action to raise levels of attainment. Insufficient emphasis is given to strategies to improve the support to pupils with special educational needs despite a number of successful developments within the LEA. There are no targets for ethnic minority pupils.

26. The LEA has set challenging targets with its schools. Good progress has been made by primary schools in meeting their Key Stage 2 Year 2000 literacy and numeracy targets with 70 per cent of pupils achieving the expected standard this year. However, much still need to be done if schools are to reach the extremely challenging literacy target of 84 per cent by 2002. The numeracy target of 78 per cent of pupils achieving at least level 4 by 2002 is a more realistic goal. Progress on all but one of the priorities is good as was confirmed by the LEA's progress review carried out in June. Progress on the behaviour and exclusions priority was initially poor but has now improved.

27. The LEA has rigorous systems for monitoring the progress of the implementation of the Education Development Plan. Reports are made to elected members and distributed to schools. This signals both the LEA's determination to raise standards and the open approach that is being adopted.

28. A review of the Education Development Plan is under way which will incorporate developments arising from the government's Excellence in Cities initiative and rightly build upon the outcome of the first annual report of the Plan scheduled for the end of November. Headteachers have already accepted the need for Key Stage 3 targets to feature as an integral part of the Excellence in Cities strategy.

29. The preliminary work undertaken to introduce the Excellence in Cities initiative has been successful. Eight secondary headteachers were involved in workshops to draw up the bid. Headteachers in the schools visited recognised the major contribution made by the Inspection and Advisory Service in co-ordinating the initial stages of the project within a very tight timescale.

Allocation of Resources to Priorities

30. The Council is largely successful in allocating resources to its education priorities. However, there are some significant areas of concern about the level of delegation of resources and the effectiveness of the deployment of funds. The Council gives a high priority to education spending and in 1999/2000 has budgeted to spend 4.6 per cent more than the education SSA. Within the overall distribution of resources, it gives a high priority to expenditure on children under five, special educational needs, education welfare and school improvement. These accord with the priority of the Council to invest

in overcoming the social deprivation issues in the City. It has failed to invest sufficiently in the repair and maintenance of school buildings and resources have been wasted through an unwillingness to tackle the large number of surplus places.

31. Until recently, the LEA has been insufficiently rigorous in monitoring the effectiveness of the use of education resources, although an effective review of nursery provision has been undertaken. Education spending has lacked transparency and too high a proportion of education expenditure is retained centrally. Schools have not been provided with adequate details of the distribution of resources to different services, nor the cost of the services provided to them. This has meant that schools have been unable to assess the value for money of service provision.

32. Changes are now under way to address this. A commitment has been made to increase the level of delegation in the next financial year. Service agreements are being drawn up and the costs of services identified to schools. The Council has been proactive in grasping the Best Value initiative, with a significant element of the Council's programme covering education services. A Best Value pilot review is already under way to examine the comparatively high costs of SEN transport arrangements; this is thorough, examining the entitlement of pupils to transport, transport contracts and the potential benefit of delegation of resources to schools. Mechanisms are in place to carry out a rolling programme of Best Value performance reviews of other high cost central services including the music service, education welfare service, behaviour support service, governor service and libraries and information service.

33. A timely review of the funding formula for schools is under way to which representative headteachers are contributing. The review is considering a range of issues, including primary funding, future delegation of resources to schools and patterns of SEN funding.

34. The LEA spends a higher amount (£29 per pupil) than the average for metropolitan authorities (£19 per pupil) on centrally funded school improvement. The resource implications of the Education Development Plan are clearly stated; it is thoroughly and effectively costed. The priorities and activities are appropriately funded with over a quarter of the budget of £2.3 million concentrated on raising levels of achievement in literacy, language and numeracy. Support for schools causing concern is costly and accounts for over one-fifth of the budget this year—however, it is also extremely effective. There are occasions when some activities, for example in the area of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) support, could be more appropriately funded through delegation of resources to schools.

Recommendations:

In order to provide schools with greater financial autonomy:

- consultation with schools on fair funding should lead to a greater level of delegation of resources. (Para 32)

SECTION 2

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

35. The Education Development Plan sets out a very clear strategy for raising standards and is consequently leading to further improvements in schools. The provisional results in both National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations in 1999 indicate that the LEA is making good progress. Management services, in particular, personnel, payroll, finance and the management of admissions, contribute positively to school improvement.

36. However, there are weaknesses in the way that the LEA performs some of its functions that undermine its school improvement strategy. Firstly, the low level of delegation and lack of transparency in costs restricts schools' ability to make their own spending decisions; moreover, schools are concerned about the way in which funding is distributed (paras 17 and 33). Secondly, the tardiness of response to a high level of surplus places in both sectors has reduced the funding available to schools. Thirdly, some school buildings are in a poor condition; the level of funding required to tackle the maintenance issues is a source of considerable concern. And finally, the lack of a strategic policy for SEN frustrates some otherwise effective developments in SEN provision.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

37. The LEA has embraced not only the philosophy but also the intentions of the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations. The leadership has successfully created a climate of well-balanced support and challenge that is recognised by schools and has permeated not only the advisory service, but increasingly other services as well. The clear commitment to school improvement is well understood by schools and they are expected to rise to the challenge; if they fail to do so action is taken. For example, meetings have been held with the heads and chairs of governors of schools that did not reach the expected level of performance in last summer's examinations. Visits to schools confirmed policy reflected practice.

38. The Inspection and Advisory Service (IAS) is held in high regard both by schools and the LEA as a whole. For a small LEA, it is a large service that covers the full range of subject specialisms and phases, despite recent contractions in size. It has a crucial role to play in supporting, monitoring, intervening and challenging schools.

39. An effective monitoring programme operates that was drawn up in full consultation with schools. Each school is allocated six half-day visits per year by an inspector-adviser. The set core programme includes target-setting and performance review. Whilst this programme helps the LEA to know its schools well, it is questionable

whether all schools require, or benefit from, this level of monitoring. There is some danger of creating, or reinforcing, a culture of dependency on the LEA.

40. The IAS is successful in its dual role of helping and supporting schools on the one hand and inspecting rigorously on the other hand. Schools are challenged. Clearly written "record of visit" forms are drafted by an inspector-adviser and agreed with the headteacher after a visit. The notes analysed for this inspection showed that schools were challenged to raise targets, reduce exclusions and improve standards in particular departments. However, governors are not routinely informed of LEA judgements and the system is too dependent on the headteacher to convey feedback.

41. It is a feature of the LEA that there is regular inspection of the quality of teaching and individual teachers are given constructive feedback on how to improve. The LEA does on occasion use senior staff to evaluate and challenge the effectiveness of the management of secondary schools.

42. There is currently no summary annual review to pull together all the constituent parts of the process. An annual review of each school is planned for July 2000 although schools are not yet fully aware of this.

43. The IAS receives good quality data on the performance of its schools from the Research and Information Team. This data is used well and is a key factor in the LEA's intervention strategy. The latter is clearly expressed and well understood by the schools. The LEA has intervened successfully on occasion over several years, acting on the data provided and its own monitoring information. This process is being continually improved. For example, the LEA has just identified several weak subject departments for additional support and, also importantly, beacon departments to help disseminate good practice.

44. The management of the IAS is of the highest quality. Its principal functions are well defined and closely aligned to the priorities in the Education Development Plan. Additionally, each member of the team is assigned individual targets and these are closely monitored. The team is well deployed to utilise individual strengths. This is underpinned by regular team meetings and a well resourced and extensive training programme. The service was reviewed in 1998; this led to an acceleration of the arrangements for the IAS to focus support at schools most in need. The work of the IAS is monitored effectively by the Education Committee and by an evaluation group including four headteachers; as a consequence, its practice is evolving to meet the changing needs of its schools.

45. The IAS is an expensive service but very effective. However, the delivery of INSET, particularly at secondary level where there are only 17 schools is not cost effective; in 1998/9 15 per cent of courses were cancelled. To address this, the LEA commissioned a review, consulted schools and acted decisively on the findings. As a result, secondary schools may now buy back a package of 24 sessions of in-school staff development support from subject advisors in addition to a reduced central course

provision. It is not yet clear if this is the most cost effective solution; in the case of one school visited, the provision was inflexible and poor value for money. The LEA is seeking a greater degree of collaboration with other LEAs to provide both cost-effective and more school-based support.

Collection and analysis of data

46. The provision of data to schools is a developing strength of the LEA. A well-led small central unit is very responsive to schools' requests and takes the initiative in leading schools to make more effective use of data. The service has justifiably earned a high credibility with the schools. The data has been used to underscore target setting. This has been a well thought-out strategy building on prior attainment and incorporating an element of challenge. There is some inconsistency in the implementation of the strategy; for instance, in about five per cent of the primary schools, targets for Key Stage 2 mathematics are too low. Appropriately, however, these targets are being reviewed in the light of the 1999 results.

47. Previously, the LEA has given insufficient attention to the value-added to pupils' standards of attainment as they progress through each Key Stage. The secondary school profile now contains an analysis for the progress made by pupils in the school from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. This is a key analysis in view of the overall dip in standards in the LEA and the over-complacent approach of some schools. The LEA has not collected data on the performance of ethnic minority groups and so cannot be sure their needs are met. This data is being collected for the Year 2000 national tests and examinations.

Support for Literacy

48. The LEA's support to primary schools in raising standards of literacy is sound and standards are rising. The attainment of pupils in English tests at Key Stage 1 slightly exceeds national averages and is in line with national averages at Key Stage 2. Improvements are faster than the national rate. Given the low attainment of pupils on entry to school it is a reasonable assumption that the high and costly commitment to early years provision is bearing fruit. Results at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are below national averages but improving faster than the national rate.

49. The LEA strategy for implementing the National Literacy Strategy is soundly managed by the English inspector-advisor and the literacy consultants. The literacy action plan is sound and it is being implemented satisfactorily. The quality of training is sound overall, ranging from satisfactory to good. Training delivered by the specialist literacy consultants is good whereas other providers are perceived by schools still to be coming to terms with the structure and the content of the National Literacy Strategy. In the school survey schools rated LEA support as good.

50. There is no comparable, comprehensive strategy at secondary level and schools rated LEA support as below the overall average for all LEAs surveyed. Some initiatives

are at an early stage of development. The LEA has identified good and weak departments through the effective analysis of data; six schools have been involved in summer literacy schools and the LEA has held a successful conference about extending the literacy hour into secondary schools at Key Stage 3. However, these measures have not yet made a significant impact on the Year 7 curriculum.

Support for Numeracy

51. Progress in raising standards of attainment in numeracy is satisfactory. By the end of Key Stage 2 the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in the mathematics tests rose from 63 per cent in 1997 to 70 per cent in 1999 which exceeds the LEA's target for Year 2000 (66.7 per cent). The LEA appears to be in a good position to reach its target of 78 per cent by 2002.

52. The implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy has been undertaken effectively by the mathematics inspector-adviser supported by two numeracy consultants. The numeracy action plan is sound. Many schools began to implement the National Numeracy Strategy prior to its formal commencement in September 1999. Of the primary schools visited, all but one showed significant improvements in their results.

53. An evaluation by participants of the training on the strategy was judged as generally good. The work of consultants in the schools receiving intensive support is useful and valued; consultants undertake a range of support including demonstrating lessons, monitoring and evaluating numeracy teaching and assisting with the development of schools' action plans. Teachers use the opportunity to observe the lessons and expertise of the LEA's 12 leading mathematics teachers.

54. The LEA is about to provide additional support to raise standards of under-achieving secondary school mathematics departments. This builds on existing good practice in which effective support has been provided to schools causing concern and in which standards have been raised. Although secondary schools are aware of the implications of the National Numeracy Strategy, there is no clear strategy to ensure the standards achieved by the end of Key Stage 2 are suitably improved in Key Stage 3.

Support for Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

55. The LEA rightly recognises the need to improve provision and support for ICT in schools and has identified this as a priority within the Education Development Plan. The school survey indicated that primary schools were satisfied with the arrangements for the introduction of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) and support for the use of ICT within the curriculum; secondary schools were less than satisfied. Moreover, an analysis of Salford schools' recent OFSTED reports indicated that weaknesses in ICT provision (facilities, teaching and professional development in ICT) were most frequently identified as a key issue.

56. The LEA's ICT development plan places insufficient emphasis on supporting schools to raise standards of attainment in ICT and of other subjects through ICT. This is more effectively tackled in the Education Development Plan that details more clearly the support to be provided to schools. However, there is no over-arching, visionary strategic aim and activities are piecemeal and uncoordinated. The LEA lacks a coherent shared vision with its schools about the future of ICT development within the city. This is of particular concern in the light of the considerable investment to be made in ICT through the Excellence in Cities initiative. Despite this, there are clear signs of progress. The LEA is at last beginning to develop a more coherent approach to ICT. An ICT working group with LEA officers, inspector advisers and headteachers has been set up. The LEA ICT plan is being reviewed, proposals are being developed for a one-stop shop for technical support and service level agreements with clear specifications are being developed.

57. Dissatisfaction about the implementation of the National Grid for Learning initiative was expressed in a number of schools visited. Complaints included inadequate information, conflicting advice on the purchase of hardware, lack of explanation on the implications of the specification provided to schools and inflexibility in meeting the needs of individual schools. There is no apparent mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of NGfL investment in raising attainment. Moreover, the LEA and schools have given too little attention to the security of computer equipment in areas vulnerable to crime.

58. However, there are pockets of good practice. Schools have recently received clear, albeit late, guidance on the production of their ICT policies with advice on identifying staff training needs. Some effective training has been provided by the LEA both in-house and at its training centre; overall, however, the schools visited considered the quality and relevance of the training as variable. Currently LEA plans to build broadband communication links through the Salford Intranet are aspirations rather than costed plans with clear timescales.

Support for schools causing concern

59. Over a number of years the LEA has developed a very effective strategy for supporting schools causing concern. The strategy, detailed in a supplement to the Education Development Plan, is clear, comprehensive and understood by schools. In the school survey, primary schools evaluated the support as good, secondary schools as at least satisfactory.

60. The LEA has four categories of schools causing concern, ranging from those in special measures to those needing special support as a result of, for example, reorganisation or the long-term absence of a senior member of staff. The LEA has increasingly effective measures for identifying schools in difficulties including a twice yearly annual review by senior officers of all schools' quantitative and qualitative data such as Ofsted reports, LEA reviews and reports. A project group considers, half-termly, the progress of schools receiving additional support.

61. All the schools visited that have received additional support recognise the significant contribution made by the LEA to their improvement. In cases when intensive support is required, a project officer is appointed to the school from the Inspection-Advisory Service who will co-ordinate strategies for improvement and draw on expertise from a wide range of LEA services as necessary. A mentor or associate headteacher may be designated to support improvements in a school's management. Associate headteachers have been successfully seconded on several occasions to schools in difficulties for a specific period, usually two terms.

62. Since the categorisation of schools began, a total of six schools have been placed in special measures. Of these, two have been closed, two have been removed, one no longer requires special measures but still has serious weaknesses (and is on a path to closure) and one remains. A total of three schools (two primary and the secondary referred to above) have serious weaknesses. The LEA has a good record of supporting schools in difficulties and numerous examples were provided of instances when early intervention had prevented a further deterioration in schools.

Support for school management

63. Support for school management and school self-review is good generally and is highly valued by the schools. However, Inspection reports indicate that there is a greater proportion of schools in need of substantial improvement in management than nationally. Improving management is an appropriately high priority in the Education Development Plan. In all of the schools visited, the quality of management is improving. HMI monitoring visits for schools in special measures and serious weaknesses have also noted significant improvements in leadership and identify LEA support and challenge as a critical factor.

64. Support includes a comprehensive range of written materials, most notably *Managing for Success* which delineates very clearly the role of the school and that of the LEA in each of the LEA's functions. There is a strong emphasis on promoting school-review and this is underpinned by the school profile and monitoring by the inspector-advisor. In the schools visited, inspector-advisors had assisted in setting up systems to monitor the quality of teaching. Where relevant, a combination of inspector-advisor and personnel support provided effective support in tackling capability and competence issues. A large number of competency cases (43) which are current are being tackled appropriately.

65. Effective induction of new headteachers takes place using a combination of LEA and peer support. In contrast to many LEAs, headteacher appraisal is operational. Headteachers and deputy heads are supported and encouraged by the LEA to attend national training initiatives. However, inspector-advisors do not always identify weaknesses in school management. Records of visits seen in schools did not always include comments on weaknesses in management that were later identified in Section 10 inspections.

66. With the exception of the introductory day, the programme for the induction of newly-qualified teachers (NQT) is well-regarded and there is an effective partnership between the LEA and its schools. This is reflected in the high level (81 per cent) of NQTs retained for their second year of teaching. In the school survey, the LEA scored highly on support for improving teaching methods, religious education, music tuition and the teaching of other subjects.

Support to Governors

67. Governors are generally well supported by the LEA and schools' views reflected this. Over 93 per cent of schools buy into the governor training service level agreement which reflects the flexibility, range and overall good quality of training provided. Training is effective, for example in increasing governors' involvement in target setting and reviewing the performance of schools. Governors feel well informed and appreciate the opportunity given to meet termly with the Director and Chair of Education. The provision of a governors' library and video loan facility, termly news-sheet, useful précis of policies and good consultation arrangements are all valued by schools.

68. Governors do not, as yet, receive all the information available on their school's effectiveness. For example, governors do not receive copies of the "record of visit" agreed between the inspector-adviser and the headteacher. An activity in the Education Development Plan to provide governors with an audit instrument to evaluate their effectiveness and identify subsequent training needs is well behind schedule. This, together with the annual review of schools and sharing of inspector-advisers' record of visits, will assist governors to fulfil their monitoring and evaluation role.

69. A high proportion of primary schools and over half of secondary schools buy into the minuting secretary service level agreement which provides for secretarial support for three full governing body meetings a year. This service is effective and appreciated by schools. Some governors would like to purchase more support than is on offer. In addition, a link officer, in many cases the school's inspector-adviser, attends the termly meeting of all governing bodies to act as clerk to the governors. The link officer introduces items and acts as a conduit for questions to the LEA. This arrangement has led to the speedy intervention of the LEA to resolve a number of problems in schools. Schools and governors value this role highly and the majority of schools visited indicated that they would wish to buy into this provision from April next year.

70. LEA governor vacancies have declined to 11 per cent from 15 per cent in 1998/9, but the number is still too high and some positions have been vacant for a lengthy period. Moreover, in a number of schools visited LEA governors only attend full meetings of the governing body, placing a heavy burden on the remaining, hard-pressed governors to service sub committees.

Support for Early Years

71. Provision for early years is extensive and successful. The early years and childcare development plan is a thoughtful document with clear direction which provides an effective framework for the further development of an already successful service. In the school survey, primary schools rated improvement in the quality of early years provision as good, placing it top of the 17 LEAs involved in the survey. Salford has an energetic and productive early years and childcare development partnership and has met all its statutory requirements ahead of time.

72. The provision for early years is well managed by the recently formed Early Years and Childcare Team funded jointly by the Education and Leisure and Social Services Directorates. Corporate working is a strong feature of the provision: the EAZ is funding some early years work and contributing to targets set in the Salford and Trafford Health Improvement Programme.

73. Expenditure is half as much again as that nominally identified in the SSA, but it is well directed and effectively applied, building on the LEA's long-standing tradition of investment in nursery education. A Best Value review is planned to look at the Community Nursery Centres jointly funded by education and social services. Early years work contributes to levels of attainment at Key Stage 1 that exceed national norms.

Recommendations

To raise standards of attainment:

- maximise the delegation of the IAS budget to schools, particularly in relation to training and curriculum support; (Para 45)
- target support and challenge to schools to raise the quality of teaching at Key 3, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy; (Paras 50 and 54)
- develop a vision and strategy for ICT which is shared with schools and:
 - focuses on curriculum support to schools to raise standards of attainment in ICT and of other subjects through ICT; (Para 56)
 - provides a clear training strategy which enables teachers to meet the government's targets for skill and expertise. (Para 58)

To improve the management and governance of schools:

- share school evaluation reports with governors to assist them in their role of evaluating the work of schools; (Para 68)

- complete and distribute an audit instrument for governing bodies to enable them to complete a self-evaluation of their effectiveness as detailed in the Education Development Plan; (Para 68)
- act swiftly to fill LEA governor vacancies within a stated timescale and encouraging all governors to play a full and equitable role. (Para 70)

SECTION 3

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

74. The City Council has a well-developed, clearly understood and effective corporate approach to strategic planning. The Council issued its first city-wide Strategic Plan in 1997 which provides a clear and realistic ten-year vision for the development of services. This Plan includes ten corporate objectives of which one is directly related to education and another to leisure. The objectives are supported by targets, which in the case of those relating to education are challenging yet feasible and appropriately focused on raising achievement. The Plan has since been reviewed to incorporate recent city initiatives such as the Education Action Zone and the Health Action Zone (both in partnership with neighbouring LEAs), the Salford Partnership Regeneration Strategy and the results of a "Quality of Life" survey of Salford residents.

75. The Council has succeeded in attracting substantial resources for the City through a number of regeneration strategies including three resulting from submissions for Single Regeneration funding.

76. Overall, the Council's plans are clear, concise, inter-related and appropriately focused. Targets relating to education are consistent, with only a minor number of exceptions. There are appropriate mechanisms for evaluating annually the effectiveness of corporate plans.

77. The Education and Leisure Directorate produced its first service plan within the corporate framework in April 1998; the Plan is updated annually. The plan links the strategic objectives for the Directorate, established in close consultation with the Education Committee, to the Council's strategic objectives; associated targets are clear.

78. Each service team produces a plan that should illustrate how the Directorate's strategic objectives are to be met. However, although team plans adopt a common format they vary considerably in quality; a number are poor. Generally, links with the Directorate's Service Plan are only notional and some fail to include success criteria or adequately quantify the resources required to achieve specified actions. The monitoring of performance relative to these plans is particularly well managed and effective within the Inspection and Advisory Service; it is less rigorous in other services. There is a consistently applied appraisal process to evaluate the performance of individual members of staff. The Education Committee has a Development and Performance Review Sub-Committee that reviews the performance of services on a thematic approach.

79. The leadership of the Education and Leisure Directorate is strong, purposeful and effective. There is an unequivocal commitment to raising standards and clear evidence of hard decisions being made. There is a very close and fruitful working relationship between the Directorate and elected members with a clear delineation of role and responsibility. Elected members receive clear advice and are ably guided by the Directorate. However, there was evidence that members were prepared to take their own initiative and challenge the work of the Directorate, on occasion. Decision-making is timely. Nevertheless, the new Council structure is seen as likely to speed up further the decision-making process. Financial decisions are timely: consultation of the budget implications for schools begins early and schools receive indicative budgets in good time. The school survey showed secondary schools were not satisfied with the timeliness of key financial information; this was not confirmed during the visits to schools.

80. The LEA has been proactive and successful in supporting the re-integration of the single, previously grant maintained school, back into the LEA. Financial issues have been dealt with fairly and sympathetically and the school is being encouraged to share experiences gained.

Partnership

81. The LEA has been effective in meshing together key plans, in part due to the productive relationships that have developed between the LEA and its partners. Representatives of the LEA's partners testified to the readiness of the LEA to develop links with those who could secure improved provision for Salford children. Links with the Training and Enterprise Council and Business Enterprise Partnership are strong, encouraged and valued; the accessibility of senior LEA officers and links with elected members are much appreciated.

82. The LEA's "joined-up" approach to planning and service provision is particularly effective in relation to those children and young people likely to experience exclusion from society. The Education and Leisure Directorate has a clear and active commitment to partnership with other council departments, the health authority and trusts, and the police. There are regular strategic and operational meetings involving health, education and social services to secure joint action on issues ranging from the administering of drugs to sick children to therapy services. The LEA's activities are characterised by coherence, effective judgement and a strategy based on partnership.

83. There are regular meetings between headteachers and the Director that present an opportunity to update schools on the latest initiatives. Headteachers have initiated their own very strong primary and secondary networks that provide effective support to one another. The good partnership developed means that the LEA is able to access this network as appropriate.

Management Services

84. The provision of information to schools about management services is poor. There is no unified presentation of information and there are very few service level agreements. Those service level agreements that have been drawn up (for example the repair and maintenance of audio visual equipment and a relief caretaking service) are, however, comprehensive and clear. The LEA has some way to go to provide schools with the quality of service planning they should rightly expect and is commonplace elsewhere. Nevertheless, some management services are contributing effectively to school improvement.

85. **Financial and Personnel Support Services** provide effective support to schools. Schools consider that advice on personnel issues is expert, timely and helpful. Budget forecasting is good and has helped schools to plan and take future budget decisions, as well as to control budget deficits. Budget problems, where they exist, relate to instabilities in pupil numbers. Effective mechanisms are in place to examine reasons for budget surpluses in some schools. Bureaucratic weaknesses in the management of the Standards Fund, highlighted by several of the schools visited, have not been fully resolved, but the management is being strengthened sufficiently to take account of the large expansion of resources through the Excellence in Cities and other initiatives.

86. Developments in **administrative ICT** have been well managed and the school survey indicates schools are more than satisfied with the support provided; this was confirmed in visits to schools. However, schools have been concerned about the fragmentation of technical support between different agencies and the costs of this support have not yet been clearly identified. School staff are being trained in the use of new administration software relating to attendance and assessment management. Financial and payroll software functions meet the basic needs of schools, but are to be upgraded to produce commitment accounting, on-line information and a more cost efficient payroll system.

Recommendations

In order to improve levels of service management:

- service team plans should be reviewed to state clearly their contribution to targets in key corporate and educational plans and to include costs and measurable and realistic success criteria; (Para 78)
- schools should be provided with a clear definition and specification for each service; details of costs; and methods by which the service is to be monitored and evaluated. (Para 84)

SECTION 4

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

87. There is no up-to-date SEN policy or overall strategy for the development of special education. The lack of a strategic view, for example, on the future of the special high schools (para 90), is creating understandable uncertainty and as a consequence is restricting the autonomy of special school headteachers. However, there is a strategic framework that outlines development plans until 2001 and provides for a range of provision on a continuum of need. There are examples of very good initiatives, for example, the development of barrier-free and language provision in primary schools with enhanced resources provides excellent examples of inclusive practice. Progress is being made towards a more unified approach to SEN; planning is increasingly collaborative and informed by an evolving process of consultation involving headteachers.

88. There has been an improvement in the timeliness with which pupils have their special educational needs assessed. The LEA takes reasonable steps to ensure that statutory assessment and statementing review procedures are completed within acceptable time limits although evidence from the school survey indicates that schools rate the efficiency of the statementing process as poor. Completion rates within the recommended period have improved considerably in the last three years to 87 per cent in 1998/9.

89. A statementing panel determines which pupils should receive a statement. However, the criteria for assessing each disability are not clear to schools and the resulting statements are too general: they lack the detail, specificity and the quantification advocated in the Code of Practice. Moreover, the current arrangements for allocating resources lack transparent criteria for ensuring pupil entitlement on a city-wide basis. This creates uneven and expensive provision, evident from visits to schools, which schools have difficulty in evaluating and the LEA in monitoring. However, the number of appeals and tribunals is low.

90. The LEA is making measurable progress in reducing both the numbers and cost of educating pupils outside Salford by making alternative provision within the LEA through "invest to save" initiatives. This has resulted in a well-managed expansion of the number of places available to pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties at one of the special high schools. Moreover, the Council is committed to building a new purpose-built special school for primary pupils as a result of the imaginative rationalisation of primary special school provision. A Private Finance Initiative (PFI) bid for funding to replace the three existing special high schools has also been submitted.

91. The LEA has recognised that there needs to be a fundamental review of provision and has set up a SEN Commission to commence work in January 2000. The arrangements mirror the successful strategy adopted in the formulation of the Education Development Plan and will involve active participation by SEN coordinators.

92. The LEA has the capacity and expertise to secure, through the work of the Commission, the required improvement to translate member and officer aspirations into equitable provision.

Statutory Obligations

93. The LEA, in making provision to meet special educational needs, either meets statutory requirements or is taking reasonable steps to do so. However, the low level of statementing in the early years and primary phase, coupled with insufficient support for pupils at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice, undermines schools' efforts at identification and early intervention work.

Improvement

94. In just over half the schools visited, SEN provision overall was judged as unsatisfactory. There are no clear procedures in place to evaluate or moderate schools' SEN registers or individual education plans. A representative of the LEA attends about one quarter of annual reviews. The rate of discontinuation of statements is high, the second greatest of all metropolitan authorities. In the schools visited, statements had been discontinued where pupils had made sufficient progress so as to no longer need that level of additional support.

95. Following a review earlier this year, the allocation of Education Psychology Service time to schools is based on school roll and this fails to reflect need. The five or six visits per year that primary schools receive are inadequate in some cases. The needs of schools without an education psychologist have not been met.

96. The learning support service is expensive but invariably well thought of by schools. Insufficient support is provided to meet the needs of pupils at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice. The sensory support service is well regarded and provides timely support.

97. Training for SENCOs is well thought of and effective. The LEA has made good use of its standards fund money to provide them with rigorous, high quality, accredited training. Two-thirds of schools' SENCOs have taken advantage of this. There were also some good examples of highly effective work by the SEN inspector-adviser including rigorous monitoring, review and training for class teachers, SENCO's and headteachers.

Value for money

98. Despite the Council's clear commitment to tackling the needs of SEN pupils by allocating a high proportion of the Local Schools Budget, 19 per cent (£18 million), to SEN, the needs of SEN pupils, in general, are not being consistently met. SEN provision is expensive; too much money is spent on a highly centralised service resulting in low cost provision: management costs need to be significantly reduced and more funding delegated or devolved to schools to meet the needs of individual pupils. In comparison with other metropolitan authorities, central expenditure on SEN is high at £181 per pupil compared with an average of £136 per pupil. Almost 40 per cent of the SEN budget is spent on fees for pupils in independent schools: over twice the average for metropolitan authorities. Expenditure on SEN transport and support for pupils with statements is also high. The current provision has some significant weaknesses and overall does not, as yet, provide value for money.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of special education provision:

- develop a SEN and Inclusion Policy which is underpinned by the principles of early identification and intervention; (Para 87)
- draft, in consultation with schools, a detailed long-term SEN strategy; (Para 87)
- review SEN funding with a view to increasing the amounts delegated or devolved to schools; (Para 98)
- develop transparent and equitable criteria for allocating resources to pupils and develop monitoring and evaluation arrangements for stages 3-5 of the Code of Practice. (Para 89)

SECTION 5

ACCESS

Supply of school places

99. There is an unacceptable level of surplus places in Salford schools. There are 16.8 per cent surplus places in primary schools and 20 per cent in the secondary sector. Almost one quarter of primary schools and 40 per cent of secondary schools have surplus places in excess of 25 per cent. Far too late there is now, nevertheless, a clear commitment, underpinned by action, to tackle this issue. However, the tardiness in taking action has resulted in funds being wasted on unused places and ineffective spend of capital and revenue resources.

100. In the primary sector, a two-part review of provision has taken place and is now being implemented. The process has mainly involved a reduction in capacity at existing schools to meet the Class Size Plan, although two schools are to amalgamate. However, the review has not gone far enough, with decisions regarding Roman Catholic voluntary aided schools not yet made. Consequently, the Council will not be able to meet its target of eight per cent surplus places and a number of schools will remain vulnerable because of their low pupil numbers. A continuing decline in pupil population in some areas is likely to accentuate this.

101. The review of secondary schools is scheduled for spring 2000 to build on the outcomes of the primary review. Two Roman Catholic schools amalgamated in 1998, but the merged school still has too few pupils. The merger of two other high schools, to be accommodated in a new building, is planned. Other high schools have pupil numbers that are too low to enable them to provide the full range of curriculum choice. The average size of secondary schools in Salford is almost the lowest among metropolitan authorities. Slowness in taking decisions is wasting valuable resources and could impact adversely on the implementation of the Excellence in Cities initiative in which resources are being targeted at particular schools.

102. The implications of this lack of urgency to tackle significant issues related to the efficient and economic use of public money can be illustrated by the LMS formula which substantially over-protects small schools. The smallest primary school receives over £39,000, nearly 16 per cent of its budget, from the small schools protection factor and the smallest secondary school an additional £113,000 (10 per cent of its budget).

Admissions

103. Admissions processes are administered effectively in the City and the admissions information booklet for parents has been revised to incorporate the requirements of the Code of Practice. There are a low number of appeals for places.

104. The School Organisation Committee has been established and has agreed the School Organisation Plan that establishes the principles on which future provision will

be based. The links between secondary schools and feeder primary schools works well and has contributed to the development of improved transitional arrangements in some areas. Elsewhere, however, the slowness in addressing the surplus places issue has made the feeder links less productive. Over-subscription in some secondary schools is likely to force a review of feeder primary schools links.

Property Management

105. The history of poor stewardship has had a serious impact on schools. There are substantial problems with the condition of many school buildings. Past levels of investment in building maintenance have been inadequate. Poor quality information on building condition has meant that investment has not been effectively prioritised. The process for setting priorities has not, in the past, been sufficiently transparent and has not been based on adequate consultation with schools. The slowness to grasp surplus places issues has meant that some past investment has been wasted. The principles of effective asset management have only recently started to be implemented.

106. In some of the schools visited, the quality of the school building and the impact that future repairs will have on their delegated budget is, rightly, a major concern to headteachers. The condition of roofs, external woodwork and other building defects is a serious problem in some schools. Some of these issues cause health and safety problems. Risk management processes have been established to examine health and safety issues, but the number of issues apparent on school visits indicates a need for these to be applied more vigorously in all schools. In many schools, accommodation is unsuitable and impacts on the teaching of subjects requiring specialist facilities.

107. Asset management planning provides the foundation to tackle these issues. Condition surveys of schools have been carried out and have identified a need for investment of over £37 million in the top two priority categories and £48 million in the third. In addition, investment to tackle the unsuitability of classrooms is required. The New Deal for Schools has increased the level of resources to repair school buildings; £1.62 million was secured in 1998/9 and a further £1.67 million in 1999/2000. A great deal more is needed; the LEA must ensure adequate provision is made to satisfy its statutory responsibilities.

Education otherwise than at school

108. The LEA meets its statutory duties in relation to provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school. Provision is soundly managed, well co-ordinated but expensive. It ranges from bedside and class provision for sick children at the Royal Manchester Children's Hospital School, through home and group tuition for pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers, to oversight of pupils educated at home by their parents; there are also four Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). There are effective arrangements for monitoring this provision.

109. The primary PRU is effective. Provision is underpinned by a commitment to ensuring no gap in full time education and the early and continued involvement of parents and carers. The secondary phase has a range of appropriate provision with three PRUs and a number of projects that give differentiated provision to meet both the academic and social needs of pupils. All pupils have at least 40 per cent provision and a number have full-time access to GCSE courses. The number of places broadly reflects existing and likely demand. The LEA has set itself the ambitious targets of full time provision for all permanently excluded Key Stage 3 pupils by September 2000 and for Key Stage 4 pupils by 2001.

110. A particularly effective and useful initiative is the computerised database for "pupils out of provision", which is reviewed and updated continuously, with formal, multi-disciplinary reviews held every six weeks.

Attendance

111. Levels of attendance at secondary schools in Salford are rising, albeit from a low base, but primary school levels have fallen slightly. Overall, attendance in both phases is well below that found nationally, but in line with that of the LEA's statistical neighbours. The level of unauthorised absence in secondary schools has reduced to that found nationally. Shared concerns amongst schools and the LEA have resulted, rightly, in a strong commitment to improvement by placing attendance as the first priority in the Education Development Plan. Overall, the activities within the priority, with an emphasis on the setting and systematic monitoring of individual school targets, provide a clear framework for development. Good progress has been made in the early phases of implementation.

112. The management of the Education Welfare Service is improving, although there still remains inconsistency in provision and its impact on school improvement. The service is large and has the highest cost per pupil, £19, compared with a mean of £12 per pupil for all metropolitan authorities. A service review was carried out in 1997/98 and has resulted in improved data provision through a new Management Information System. The LEA has sensibly co-ordinated a further, Best Value, review involving representative headteachers and officers, to refocus provision to make the service more effective and contribute more directly to school improvement.

113. There are a number of examples of particularly effective work. The Salford Truancy Project, cited by the government as a model of good practice in relation to social inclusion, focuses on whole-school approaches to improving attendance and was praised by those schools visited who had been involved in this work. There are effective links with social services and close links with the police to combat truancy. In the latter, the police stop all high school pupils in designated areas and refer them to the Education Welfare Service who follow up all cases of non-attendance. Moreover, the local authority has developed with its partners an effective Youth Offending Team, ahead of schedule. Amongst the best practice seen were the instances in which schools have taken full responsibility for tackling poor attendance as a high-profile whole-school

initiative. This has resulted in very high levels of GCSE entry and has freed up the Education Welfare Officer to concentrate on the school's highest priority cases.

114. There are two significant weaknesses. There was no evidence of challenge to those schools whose attendance was deteriorating; and provision is not differentiated according to need. Given the size and cost of the service and the shortage of resources in schools, the potential wastage of resources and opportunities arising from both weaknesses are far from negligible. Primary schools judged the support they receive as good whilst secondary schools considered it satisfactory. Despite this and the acknowledged signs of improvement, the service barely provides value for money.

Behaviour Support

115. The LEA is developing new and effective arrangements for handling exclusions and developing support for behaviour. The number of permanent exclusions in secondary schools declined by 23 per cent last year to 93 which, if sustained, will enable the LEA's target of 90 permanent exclusions per year by 2001 to be met. As a result of this good progress the LEA will be considering, in consultation with relevant groups, a downward revision in its 2001 target. The importance placed on improving behaviour and reducing exclusions is reflected in the significant allocation of resources, almost £0.3 million, in the Education Development Plan targeted on reducing exclusions through preventative approaches. The Behaviour Support Plan and the Education Development Plan complement one another with a clear, coherent strategic direction and relevant, well-judged and costed activities.

116. Two services contribute to behaviour support: the Admissions and Exclusions Service and the Behaviour Support Service; the latter with over 50 staff is large and expensive. These two services work closely and effectively together on early intervention and rapid response. Their work is underpinned by the principles of inclusion and helping schools to develop their own capacity to deal with behavioural issues.

117. Despite this, schools are not satisfied with the support they receive. The school survey shows that schools rate alternative provision for excluded pupils as poor and the quality of behaviour support as no better than satisfactory; LEA advice on the process of exclusion is considered good. Visits to schools highlighted a significant variation in the quality of service received. Where support was good there was evidence of proactive early intervention to prevent exclusion with in-school provision to ensure full time education for pupils liable to be excluded, effective counselling and behaviour management teaching to small groups of pupils at risk. Where support was unsatisfactory, there was a failure to respond swiftly enough, insufficient levels of support, or inadequate advice given to respond to the needs of challenging pupils.

118. However, the service is improving and becoming more responsive. The Admissions and Exclusions Team has developed improved administrative arrangements to ensure rapid response to potential and actual exclusions. They also provide advice and guidance, and distribute a newsletter to schools and social services establishments.

119. The work of the Behaviour Support Service is generally coherent and well directed, with somewhat greater integration in the primary phase than the secondary. The Service has developed a continuum of provision in both phases, a more systematic approach to school support and a sensible strategy for referrals for support. There has also been a significant increase in the demand from schools on the Service to provide school-based training in behaviour management and the development of behavioural policies, which visits to schools indicated was of good quality and of use. Overall, this is a service that is improving and making good progress towards providing effective support to schools.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

120. Child protection procedures are good and confirmed the findings in the school survey. All statutory duties are met and links between education and social services at formal and informal levels are productive and focused fully on the needs of the children. Relationships between both services and the health service are equally good.

Looked after children

121. Salford has 517 looked after children, about twice the national rate. Links between the education and social services departments are productive and effective at all levels. Both departments co-operated fully on the three key plans, for Children's Services, Behaviour Support and Quality Protects; developments of work with "looked after children" is well integrated into four of the Education Development Plan priorities. The joint work of the two departments has helped to produce effective plans with clear targets and procedures for attaining them.

122. This LEA is amongst the leaders in developing and implementing a strategy for looked after children. It is proactive in its work that includes raising the awareness of the issues for all those involved. An informative one-day conference was held in October to which school representatives, elected members and governors were invited. The LEA has performance data on all the pupils and is collecting targets on individual pupils from schools. Schools know their looked after children. The Education Development Plan includes appropriate targets for the LEA as a whole. Training for foster parents emphasises their responsibilities in supporting these children to do homework, target setting and promoting higher attainment. A post of a co-ordinator for Care and Education, funded by Education, has been created. Already there is evidence that the appointment is having a beneficial affect on provision; all children's homes now have a designated time for children to do homework. Schools have been asked to nominate a senior teacher to have responsibility for these pupils and evidence from the school visits indicated most had done so; the responsibilities of the nominee are clear.

123. However, unsurprisingly, the school survey and visits to schools showed that there is still some way to go to secure universal understanding of the issues and responsibilities related to these children. Overall, reasonable progress has been made

on the development of social and educational inclusion for these children; clear targets have been established and mechanisms to attain them are being implemented.

Ethnic Minority Children

124. There are significant weaknesses in the LEA strategy for supporting pupils from ethnic minority groups. There is a lack of clarity in the Education Development Plan about the provision of support and data is only just being assimilated on achievement. Data relating to racial incidents is not collected and the LEA has been slow to consider its policy for equal opportunities in the light of the McPherson report – a Staff Directorate Working Party has now been formed. These weaknesses are reflected in the LEA Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant submission. However, visits to schools and the school survey confirm that the support to individual pupils with English as an additional language is sound.

125. Support for **travellers** is sound. One hundred pupils are supported in 13 schools with a focus on raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. Project staff undertake joint planning with teachers and share resources and strategies. The Traveller Education Service has received additional funding to promote the successful transfer and retention of Gypsy Traveller pupils at the secondary phase and has increased the number attending one of the local high schools by providing additional staffing and resources.

Recommendations

In order to maximise the resources allocated to education:

- in consultation with the Dioceses, complete the review of primary places as a matter of urgency; (Para 100)
- take urgent action to significantly reduce the number of surplus places in the secondary sector; (Para 101)
- reduce the level of support provided by the small school protection factor. (Para 102)

In order to improve the condition of school buildings:

- increase the level of investment in school building maintenance, including the use of public-private partnerships; (Para 107)
- make the priorities for investment transparent and agree them with schools; (Para 105)

- review procedures to ensure that health and safety issues in schools are dealt with within an appropriate timescale. (Para 106)

In order to further promote social inclusion:

- review the allocation of education welfare officer time to ensure it is deployed to best effect and in proportion to need; (Para 114)
- improve provision for ethnic minority pupils by:
 - producing a policy dedicated to anti-racism and providing advice to schools; (Para 124)
 - systematically collecting data on racial incidents from schools; (Para 124)
 - identifying the needs of ethnic minority pupils and allocate resources accordingly. (Para 124)

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to provide schools with greater financial autonomy:

- consultation with schools on fair funding should lead to a greater level of delegation of resources. (Para 32)

To raise standards of attainment:

- maximise the delegation of the IAS budget to schools, particularly in relation to training and curriculum support; (Para 45)
- target support and challenge to schools to raise the quality of teaching at Key 3, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy; (Paras 50 and 54)
- develop a vision and strategy for ICT which is shared with schools and:
 - focuses on curriculum support to schools to raise standards of attainment in ICT and of other subjects through ICT; (Para 56)
 - provides a clear training strategy which enables teachers to meet the government's targets for skill and expertise. (Para 58)

To improve the management and governance of schools:

- share school evaluation reports with governors to assist them in their role of evaluating the work of schools; (Para 68)
- complete and distribute an audit instrument for governing bodies to enable them to complete a self-evaluation of their effectiveness as detailed in the Education Development Plan; (Para 68)
- act swiftly to fill LEA governor vacancies within a stated timescale and encouraging all governors to play a full and equitable role. (Para 70)

In order to improve levels of service management:

- service team plans should be reviewed to state clearly their contribution to targets in key corporate and educational and include costs and measurable and realistic success criteria; (Para 78)
- schools should be provided with a clear definition and specification for each service; details of costs; and methods by which the service is to be monitored and evaluated. (Para 84)

In order to improve the effectiveness of special education provision:

- develop a SEN and Inclusion Policy which is underpinned by the principles of early identification and intervention; (Para 87)
- draft, in consultation with schools, a detailed long-term SEN strategy; (Para 87)
- review SEN funding with a view to increasing the amounts delegated or devolved to schools; (Para 98)
- develop transparent and equitable criteria for allocating resources to pupils and develop monitoring and evaluation arrangements for stages 3-5 of the Code of Practice. (Para 89)

In order to maximise the resources allocated to education:

- in consultation with the Dioceses, complete the review of primary places as a matter of urgency; (Para 100)
- take urgent action to significantly reduce the number of surplus places in the secondary sector; (Para 101)
- reduce the level of support provided by the small school protection factor. (Para 102)

In order to improve the condition of school buildings:

- increase the level of investment in school building maintenance, including the use of public-private partnerships; (Para 107)
- make the priorities for investment transparent and agree them with schools; (Para 105)
- review procedures to ensure that health and safety issues in schools are dealt with within an appropriate timescale. (Para 106)

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