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IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
ROCHDALE
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION**

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APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (September 2000)*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The previous inspection of the LEA took place in January 2000 and the report was published in May 2000.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with elected members, staff in the education and other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 62 per cent. Use was also made of the LEA's own self-evaluation.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to four schools (two primary and two secondary). The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. For fifteen months support was provided by a neighbouring LEA, Blackburn with Darwen. The team examined documentation for this partnership, attended a meeting of the monitoring group and interviewed representatives of Blackburn with Darwen. The inspection considered whether the support provided by Rochdale LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in schools and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. OFSTED and the Audit Commission inspected Rochdale LEA in January 2000. The report, which appeared in May 2000 was highly critical. It referred to fundamental weaknesses in corporate leadership, strategic management, discharge of duties in relation to school improvement, provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and poor monitoring and management of the control of secondary school budget deficits. The report caused some initial shock but a further consultancy report, commissioned by the council and the then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), confirmed that the council needed to take urgent action.

5. Two years on, the picture is much improved and a radical transformation is taking place. It is a success story that is a credit to officers, councillors and schools alike. The council has taken difficult decisions, including increasing funding for education and that is now the council's top priority. In order to implement the necessary cultural change, peer support from another LEA, Blackburn with Darwen, was formally agreed. This partnership has operated for fifteen months and has been very effective. It is a model of good practice in LEA collaboration and has been a significant factor in accelerating the rate of change, particularly in relation to the LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention.

6. This is a small LEA that is actively seeking innovative solutions to improve its capacity. For instance, it is exploring ways of collaborating with other LEAs and has an imaginative approach to supporting professional development for teachers involving the setting up of a charitable trust. The new director brings determination, purpose and integrity to the role and provides very good leadership. The new education senior leadership team is establishing its credibility with schools. Headteachers are better informed and more involved in consultation and decision-making. There is openness and transparency in dealings with schools and this has led to a marked improvement in relationships; Excellence in Cities (EiC) has improved collaborative working with schools. However, not all schools are yet convinced and the legacy of the recent past still casts a shadow; some scepticism persists.

7. Planning in education is very much improved as exemplified by the new education development plan (EDP). In 2000 the EDP was judged to be poor but the EDP 2002-7 is sound with good features. Satisfactory progress has been made with 27 of the 30 recommendations made in the last report and progress was good or very good in over half. This is reflected in schools' performance. While results continue to be below national averages the gap is being closed as improvement rates for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 have been greater than that found nationally; this is particularly evident in the results for minority ethnic pupils.

8. The exercise of the following functions is good or very good:

- procedures for monitoring, challenge and intervention;
- support for numeracy;
- support for early years;

- services for human resources and finance;
- support for attendance;
- health and safety;
- statutory obligations for SEN; and
- effectiveness of collaboration with other agencies and partners.

9. The LEA exercises the majority of its other functions satisfactorily. For a number this represents very good progress compared to performance in 2000. This includes support for school management, SEN, financial decision-making and the quality of leadership shown by senior officers and elected members. The following are either not exercised satisfactorily or changes are so recent that they are not yet fully effective:

- use of performance data to inform strategic planning, monitoring of schools and target-setting;
- value for money in SEN provision;
- support for gifted and talented pupils in primary schools; and
- property services.

10. While there has been considerable improvement there is still a substantial agenda to be worked through in order to provide consistently good support to schools. There are still weaknesses in the quality of data and this hinders work in a range of the LEA's work. There has been good progress in resolving the issues in SEN provision. However, there is uncertainty regarding SEN strategy following an unsuccessful capital bid and a significant overspend on the planned budget for statements. Value for money for SEN is still unsatisfactory and special school buildings are in an unacceptably poor state. Demographic changes mean that action will be needed to resolve surplus school places. However, projected levels of capital expenditure are not sufficient to carry out the necessary work. Some secondary school budgets deficits, while declining, are still too high.

11. OFSTED ended its last report with the damning words "The LEA lacks the necessary drive, vision, relationship with its schools and general capacity". That is no longer the case. There has been good progress and support now has more strengths than weaknesses and is improving. The progress has been more than could reasonably have been expected in the short time available. The LEA now needs to do considerable work to consolidate what has been achieved so far and make further improvements. It has the capacity, the will and determination to do so.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. Rochdale has a population of around 200,000, divided into the four distinctive areas of Heywood, Middleton, Rochdale and the Pennines, each with its own township committee. It is a geographical mixture of Manchester suburbs, mill towns, Pennine villages and moorland stretching to the Yorkshire border and is divided by the M62 motorway.

13. Rochdale is the 29th most deprived local education authority out of 150 in England and has a very high incidence of social deprivation. In January 2002 there were 36,831 pupils in Rochdale schools of whom approximately 25 per cent, higher than the national average, were eligible for free school meals. The minority ethnic population is 15 per cent of whom 70 per cent are from a Pakistani heritage background. Both figures are higher than the national average. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need was 3.2 per cent, in line with the national average.

14. Since the last inspection the LEA has completed a review of nursery schools leading to their closure or redesignation and 18 new nursery classes have been opened. Rochdale is participating in the Asylum Seekers Dispersal Scheme. Demographic data indicates a significant reduction in pupil population in LEA primary schools over the next five years.

| TYPE OF SCHOOL | Number | NUMBER OF PUPILS |
|----------------|--------|------------------|
| Primary | 75 | 19,876 |
| Secondary | 14 | 14,393 |
| Special | 7 | 565 |
| Referral Units | 1 | 77 |
| Nursery | 4 | 171 |

Ten of the secondary schools cater for pupils aged 11-16 and four are 11-18.

15. There is a high level of transience averaging 9.5 per cent in secondary schools in 1998/9. Complete data for the current position is not available, but 'hot spots' are monitored and seven schools have mobility rates above 30 per cent.

16. In 2000/1 59.2 per cent of Year 11 pupils stayed in full-time education compared to 71 per cent nationally; the proportion progressing to work-based training is higher than the average in the region.

Performance

17. The previous inspection noted that performance on entry to school and at all key stages was below national averages. There has been good progress in raising the attainment of pupils particularly at Key Stages 2 and 4.

18. In general, results are in line with statistical neighbours and below national averages. For example, the percentage of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C at GCSE level in

2001 was 41.0 per cent compared to 41.3 per cent for statistical neighbours and 48.4 per cent nationally.

19. In a few instances, performance is better than this.

- In 2001, the percentage of pupils gaining level 4 or higher in each of English, mathematics and science was in line with the corresponding national figure. The percentage of Year 11 pupils gaining at least one GCSE qualification improved significantly in 2001 and was very close to the national figure.

20. In one instance, performance is worse.

- At Key Stage 1 the LEA average for pupils attaining the national expectations in writing and mathematics is below the corresponding average for both statistical neighbours and nationally. The figure for reading is well below the national one.

21. Overall the picture is positive since the last inspection. Improvement rates for 2000 to 2001 were above the national rate at GCSE level and for all three core subjects at Key Stages 2 and 3. At Key Stage 1, however, improvement rates have not kept pace with national developments.

22. In 2001, there has been a significant improvement in the achievement of minority ethnic pupils at GCSE level which has narrowed the attainment gap. For instance, the percentage of pupils with Pakistani heritage gaining 5+ A*-C grades increased by 6.4 per cent in 2001. The Key Stage 2 results also showed improvement.

23. In 2001, attendance in primary schools (93.8 per cent) was broadly similar to nationally (94.2 per cent) and better than for similar LEAs. Attendance in secondary schools (89.5 per cent) was below the national figure (91.1 per cent). The rates for permanent exclusions in primary and secondary schools have been consistently lower than for statistical neighbours but in line with national ones.

Funding

24. The overall funding per pupil from the education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for the LEA is slightly above the average for metropolitan authorities and slightly below the average for all authorities.

| SSA £ per pupil | LEA | Metropolitan boroughs | National |
|-----------------|------|-----------------------|----------|
| Primary | 2581 | 2532 | 2653 |
| Secondary | 3317 | 3264 | 3413 |

The spend against SSA has increased over the last two years and in 2001/2 was £0.8 million (0.75 per cent) higher than the education SSA.

25. The council has substantially increased the total funding available to schools and all schools have benefited. Secondary schools have received additional funding through EiC. Since the previous inspection, there is a commitment to take up the full Standards Fund allocation and this improved the resources for ICT in 2001/2. Further improvements are planned. In 2002/3, it is currently projected that the council will secure £28.3M in extra revenue resources from a range of sources

including Standards Fund, New Opportunities Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal and Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) projects. Capital resources have increased substantially. The council has, however, been unsuccessful in obtaining Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funding for special school reorganisation. Projected levels of investment are not sufficient to fund improvements to school buildings or to resource necessary reorganisation in primary, secondary and special school provision.

Council Structure

26. In May 2000 there were serious weaknesses, including inadequate scrutiny, and education was not properly represented on the executive. A consultancy report in September 2000 confirmed these weaknesses and made a number of recommendations. The council commissioned a peer review which reported in 2001. The council have acted promptly and decisively to the reports, and new committee arrangements were implemented in October 2001. Changes mean that the portfolio holder is now a member of the cabinet and one of the five overview and scrutiny committees has an education focus. The effectiveness of the new arrangements is analysed further in Section 5 of this report. There is a Labour administration (31 Labour, 21 Liberal Democrat and 8 Conservative elected members).

27. The education department has also undergone significant changes since 2000. An acting director was appointed in September 2000 and confirmed in the post in January 2001. Two assistant directors are newly appointed and the senior leadership team (SLT) was finally in place in August 2001. There are further corporate changes which affect education. A new chief executive took up post in June 2000 and a significant corporate restructure is due to be implemented in October 2002. The number of departments is being reduced from eight to six and to four by 2003/4.

28. Following the critical inspection report in 2000, the leaders of the LEA – elected members and the chief executive – resolved to take urgent action to remedy weaknesses. Against this background of committed leadership, Ministers agreed that Rochdale should develop a short-term partnership with another LEA. With the support of the then DfEE, a partnership was brokered with Blackburn with Darwen LEA whose strengths were acknowledged by the award of Beacon status by the then Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) and in a subsequent OFSTED report. This very productive arrangement is analysed further in section 5.

The LEA strategy for school improvement

i) Implementation

29. The implementation of school improvement plans is now sound with good features. This reflects very good progress since the last inspection when it was judged to be poor.

30. A new one-year EDP was produced in January 2001 to cover 2001/2. A post-OFSTED action plan was also constructed as a response to the 30 recommendations in a very critical OFSTED report. In 2001, the LEA met its EDP

targets for Key Stage 2 English, two of the three GCSE targets and for the secondary unauthorised absence targets. The LEA narrowly missed its targets for mathematics at Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils gaining 5+ A-C grades at GCSE and unauthorised absence at primary level. The 52 permanent exclusions were significantly worse than the EDP target of 31.

31. The LEA has made good progress in implementing the post-OFSTED action plan. Progress is at least satisfactory in 27 of the 30 categories and good or very good in 17 of these. Rapid progress has been made in improving strategic management, support for school improvement and for vulnerable children and in meeting statutory requirements for pupils with SEN. There is still a lack of clarity about the allocation of SEN funding and, despite a strong commitment to improving the quality of data, the necessary progress has not been made.

ii) **EDP2 2002-7**

32. The EDP is sound with good features. Plans for raising attainment in numeracy, literacy and for promoting pupils' social and emotional development are particularly good. There is generally a clear link between actions, activities, priorities and success criteria. The success criteria are measurable and appropriate. The plan targets support well on weaker schools and under-performing groups. There are suitable links to initiatives aimed at overcoming socio-economic disadvantage, for example, the neighbourhood renewal programme and EiC. Plans for promoting social inclusion are generally sound but it is clearer what the LEA intends to do to promote good attendance than for behaviour support and providing adequate provision for pupils with no school place. SEN is addressed well through each of the priorities. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation are well documented. The plan is vague about resources allocated to priorities.

33. The audit has significant weaknesses. It draws satisfactorily on data from the LEA profile and schools' OFSTED reports. For instance, the audit establishes the under-achievement of boys and this links to the appropriate actions in the school improvement programme. There is a list of strengths and weaknesses for the national priority areas. There are insufficient references, however, to the last inspection report and these are confined to positive comments. The analyses for pupils with SEN, teacher supply and the financial position are weak. The summary of the evaluation of EDP focuses on the revised plan for 2001-2, which limits its effectiveness. The analysis of the cost effectiveness of activities undertaken is superficial.

34. The 2004 targets are very challenging, particularly for Key Stage 2 mathematics. Schools are committed to the GCSE targets, but the schools' aggregated KS2 targets for 2003 are three per cent below the LEA targets.

Excellence in cities (EiC)

35. The EiC initiative is being satisfactorily implemented. It started in October 2000 and so was not reported on in the last inspection. The LEA was initially largely excluded by the schools but is now invited to be involved in all aspects of EiC work.

36. Satisfactory progress has been made in the last year in implementing the three key strands of learning mentors, learning support units (LSU) and provision for gifted and talented pupils. Well planned and coherent training is in place for learning mentors which draws widely on the expertise of services supporting social inclusion as well as the literacy and numeracy teams. Link mentors monitor progress in all schools and share good practice across clusters. Schools have adopted different models of using either a LSU or mentors, but all partners understand that intervention is planned, tailored to individual pupil needs and designed to minimise time spent away from mainstream lessons. Rochdale is a pilot partnership for EiC: Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), and its plan together with those of the two small zones in the partnership, focus appropriately on raising standards of literacy and oracy.

37. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are clear. A particular strength is the rigorous peer review visit to all the EiC schools by the three executive headteachers and the EiC co-ordinator.

38. Provision through the gifted and talented strand of EiC in secondary schools is sound with good features. There has been an effective audit of strengths and weaknesses, a sensible programme of enrichment activities and two successful summer schools. All secondary schools have co-ordinators, but some do not have sufficient time allocated to carry out their responsibilities.

39. **Support for gifted and talented pupils** overall is unsatisfactory. This is because, although there are suitable plans in the EDP 2002-7, there is currently no co-ordinated provision in primary schools.

Recommendations

In order to improve the impact of the EiC initiative:

- disseminate more systematically successful models of good practice within EiC schools and, where appropriate, to other schools including support for gifted and talented pupils; and
- the management of EiC should require schools to ensure that school strand co-ordinators have sufficient time and/or support for strand requirements to be met.

Allocation of resources to priorities

40. Arrangements for allocating resources have improved satisfactorily since 2000 and are now sound with good features. Consultation processes are much improved and far more transparent. A continuing weakness is the lack of clarity for the allocation of resources to meet special needs. There is, however, an active resources group as part of the school consultation mechanisms and the extent and quality of financial information given to all schools are now good. The mechanisms have been used effectively to establish school improvement and social inclusion as key priorities.

41. All government targets for the delegation of funds to schools have been met. Delegation, at 86 per cent of the Local Schools Budget is slightly higher than the metropolitan average of 85 per cent. A high proportion of standards fund resources is devolved to schools, 83 per cent compared to a metropolitan average of 78 per cent in 2001/02. Central expenditure is lower than the average for metropolitan authorities at £364 per pupil compared to £392. The council is on track to deliver £6 million of increased funding to schools by 2003/04 in three instalments.

42. The planning and use of SEN resources remain unsatisfactory. Overall levels of expenditure on SEN are now slightly higher than the average for other metropolitan authorities. There was an overspend in 2001/2, primarily due to increases in the number of statements made. This has not been well planned nor sufficiently managed and this has a detrimental effect on 2002/3. Substantial changes are being planned in SEN provision, but currently there is not a clear financial plan agreed with schools for the shift of resources involved. Neither is there a clear rationale for the delegation of additional educational needs and SEN resources to schools. There is currently a working party, involving schools, which is developing proposals for necessary changes to the formula for 2003/04.

43. Deficit budgets in secondary schools remain an issue for a small number of secondary schools, primarily because of the scale of the historic deficits in these schools. Monitoring systems have improved and positive work has been done with the schools to develop recovery plans, described more fully under financial support services. Levels of surpluses have been increasing in some primary schools and are now too high overall. The LEA has established systems to call schools to account for high levels of surpluses, but it is too early for these to have had an impact.

Recommendations

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- reinforce efforts to eliminate deficit budgets in particular schools;
- improve the clarity of funding for SEN by agreeing with schools a strategy for medium term funding changes; and
- distribute SEN resources to schools according to individual needs of pupils.

Promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value

44. The LEA's approach to continuous improvement is sound with good features, as it was in 2000.

45. The consultancy report which followed the previous inspection identified actions that needed to be taken to improve services. Effort was rightly concentrated on addressing these issues and scheduled Best Value reviews were appropriately put on hold. This is an effective strategy. This report identifies measurable improvements in many services which were unsatisfactory in 2000.

46. For the longer term, performance management processes to sustain these improvements are being developed, but are only partly in place. An appropriate programme of Best Value reviews is planned. The hierarchy of plans through the community strategy, the corporate strategy and service plans, with a link in to individual performance are currently being developed. The Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) now focuses corporate action on an annual basis. Performance Indicators are being reported to members on a quarterly basis and the scrutiny process is now in place and beginning to develop effective action. Schools have been provided with good guidance on the application of Best Value processes and have to account annually for their application of these.

SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Summary of effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement

47. The LEA now provides sound support, which is a marked improvement on 2000 when support was judged to be poor. The advisory service was not well deployed, there were major shortcomings in the monitoring of schools, and intervention strategies lacked clarity and were poorly implemented. The LEA has made very good progress in all these functions. The quality and use of performance data remains a weakness, but, overall, there is good potential for further improvement.

48. Schools testify strongly to the improving effectiveness of the LEA. Of the 12 relevant categories in the school survey, the schools judge that there has been progress in 11, and significant progress in seven. However, schools still perceive the support as being less good than that provided by other LEAs. Discussion with headteachers and visits to schools confirm the inspection view that, while there has been good, and sometimes very good progress, much work remains to be done.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

49. Procedures for monitoring, challenge and intervention are now good. They have been devised in collaboration with Blackburn with Darwen LEA, modified after consultation with schools, and are clearly documented. Following a review, the work of the advisory service was reorganised in September 2001 and the role of the school adviser changed to that of school improvement officer (SIO). Link SIOs have attended governing body meetings in all schools to explain the new role which is now well defined and sharply focused on monitoring and challenge. The work of the advisory service is now aligned well with the principles of intervention in inverse proportion to success.

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

50. The monitoring of schools is unsatisfactory because of weaknesses in the quality and use of data by the LEA. Schools' expectations have been raised but not realised owing to the absence of key personnel and some under-capacity. The school profile could be useful, but schools report that it too frequently contains inaccuracies and arrives too late in schools. The LEA is not able to respond adequately to the needs of individual schools. Work on value-added analyses is less advanced than in other LEAs and the smallness of the LEA limits the scope for local comparisons. Transfer of data between schools is still paper-based. The LEA acknowledges these weaknesses and is actively addressing them. Newly purchased software, which permits pupil level data to be analysed, should significantly improve the quality of information. The LEA is sensibly seeking to overcome capacity issues by collaborating with other LEAs.

51. Each school is entitled to two SIO visits per year. This is part of the new revised role and only the first visit focusing on school review/target setting had been completed at the time of the inspection. The joint annual review has started well and is well received by schools. Strengths of the arrangements include the good

preparatory training for SIOs, schools and governors and the involvement in the review of a comprehensive range of LEA services. SIOs offer increased challenge and good quality notes of visits identify strengths and areas for development including senior management issues. A weakness is that the notes from monitoring visits are not routinely copied to governing bodies. The target setting process is not sufficiently rigorous and is undermined by the weakness of the LEA data. There is insufficient attention in the review process, and in LEA monitoring of schools generally, to performance in foundation subjects.

Recommendations

In order to improve monitoring and challenge:

- implement plans to improve pupil tracking at both school and LEA level and the transfer of data between schools;
- strengthen procedures so that aggregate targets set by schools are in line with LEA targets and reflect the additionality of EiC; and
- ensure that records of monitoring visits are copied to governing bodies.

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

52. Support for schools causing concern is a mixed picture. In the 18 months following the 2000 inspection, LEA support continued to be unsatisfactory and this is confirmed by HMI monitoring visits. As a consequence, the number of schools with serious weaknesses increased from one to seven, often associated with ineffective LEA support or alerts. One school slipped from serious weaknesses into special measures. Following guidance from Blackburn with Darwen and the reorganisation of the advisory service, support has improved in the last six months, is now sound and there is every prospect of further improvements. The SIS now effectively co-ordinates support to schools in special measures and those with serious weaknesses. New arrangements mean that the progress of these schools is now well monitored by elected members. The improvements in provision are beginning to be reflected in data. There are two schools in special measures and four have serious weaknesses, two more than at the time of the first inspection but three fewer than six months ago. There are clear exit strategies for further supporting schools.

53. The number of schools designated by the LEA as causing concern has increased from eight in 2000 to 16 currently. This is partly the consequence of applying more rigorous procedures but also the result of some weaknesses in identification. Schools and governing bodies are informed appropriately of the reasons for inclusion in this category. Good systems have been established including response plans by the school, statements of action by the LEA and the agreement for targeted resources. Less clear are the criteria for exiting from this category. The strength of these procedures give confidence that the number of schools being designated by OFSTED as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses should reduce.

Recommendation:**In order to improve support for under-performing schools:**

- monitor the effectiveness of intervention strategies including time spent as a school causing concern and improve the analysis of data to identify additional support.

Support for literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3 strategies

54. Support for numeracy is good as it was in 2000. Support for literacy and the Key Stage 3 strategy are both sound with good features. This reflects sound progress in literacy since it was previously unsatisfactory with significant weaknesses in the quality of training and planning. The Key Stage 3 strategy was not reported on in the last inspection.

55. The strategies are well managed and roles and responsibilities are clear. A principal SIO has the overall responsibility for implementing national initiatives including these three. This facilitates the good cross-phase communication and working. It also underpins the improvements in management of the literacy strategy which is now cohesive and strategic since the restructuring of the advisory service in 2001. There has been a positive response to initiatives aimed at improving the transition of pupils from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3; for example ninety five per cent of Rochdale schools used bridging units. The widespread use of such guidance materials laid a firm basis for the Key Stage 3 strategy.

56. The literacy support has been strengthened considerably since the last inspection. The range and quality of training offered to schools has improved, as has the identification and dissemination of good practice. The LEA uses a range of approaches well, including nine leading literacy teachers, four leading literacy primary schools and a Beacon school for pupils' writing.

57. Some of the changes are still so recent that it is too early to judge their impact. However, there was a promising set of results in 2001 and the gap with national averages was reduced at Key Stages 2 and 3 for both English and mathematics. At Key Stage 1, there is under-performance by boys and there are insufficient planned activities to address this. The use of standardised test scores to identify targets schools at Key Stage 3 is too rudimentary, particularly as the strategy widens to encompass other subjects. That apart, the LEA is making good use of extra resources available as part of national strategies and has the capacity to improve further.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

58. As in the previous inspection, LEA support has more strengths than weaknesses although the picture has changed. The LEA has made good progress in addressing the recommendations made in 2000 but, in doing so, the rapid expansion of ICT equipment in schools has severely stretched the central resource and prompted some justified criticism from schools.

59. Attainment by pupils has improved significantly since the last inspection. The percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above in Key Stage 3 ICT in 2001 is close to national averages. The percentage of pupils achieving an accredited award in ICT at Key Stage 4 in 2001 is well above national averages.

60. The LEA's determination to improve support for ICT is reflected in its decision to match for the first time, the grant funding for the National Grid for Learning. As a result, the LEA has made good progress in improving the level of ICT provision in schools, so that the computer ratios per pupil have increased to close to national averages. The uptake and completion of New Opportunities Fund training for teachers are above national averages.

61. The LEA has established comprehensive monitoring of provision, levels of attainment and weaknesses identified by OFSTED inspection reports. Useful self-assessment guidelines are issued to schools to help them to audit their needs and develop ICT plans. The level of support to primary schools has increased, boosted by additional advisory teachers and advanced skills teachers (ASTs). The monitoring system now in place will enable the LEA to target support more carefully at the greatest need. Levels of support for secondary schools and for ICT in subjects of the curriculum are unsatisfactory. Advice on assessing pupils' work is given to some primary schools but has not been extended to secondary schools.

62. An appropriate code of practice is established for the arrangements to provide support for ICT. The rapid expansion of ICT equipment across schools, has led to some schools experiencing delays in the technical support service for both curriculum and administration.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for ICT:

- provide support to all schools in assessing pupils' work;
- increase support for the development of ICT in subjects of the curriculum; and
- improve access to technical support to match expanded provision in schools.

Support for ethnic minority groups including Travellers

63. Support is sound with good features. It was judged to be good overall at the time of the previous inspection. The quality of training and support by individual staff continues to be high and well-regarded. As reported in section 1, attainment improved significantly in 2001. However, the service has not yet completed the transition from being a language development unit to promoting attainment across the curriculum in line with identified need.

64. In April 2000, in line with statutory regulations, 85 per cent of the EMAG was devolved to schools. In June 2001, the support team was re-named the Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) team to reflect the wider scope of their work and the management responsibilities located in the school improvement service. During this period of

considerable change, the EMA team has provided a good range of high quality training for mainstream teachers, including joint training as part of the literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3 strategies. There has also been continued good support for the small number of schools with significant ethnic minority populations. Sound progress is being made in re-focussing the work in the remaining majority of schools but has been slowed by weaknesses in the data. The new procedures are not yet fully established; schools rate provision as being below the average for other LEAs.

65. One hundred and twenty asylum seeker pupils have been successfully admitted into schools as part of the national scheme. This process has been effectively supported by strong inter-agency working and good support from the twelve schools involved.

66. The administration of EMAG is satisfactory. The criteria for the funding formula are transparent and have been carefully negotiated with headteachers. The use of the grant, however, is not rigorously monitored and not securely established within the SIO monitoring programme. The EMA team has developed a self-evaluation tool but its use has not been widely promoted.

67. Support for children of Travellers is very good. The Traveller education service is part of the restructured Rochdale additional needs service and is currently supporting 201 Traveller children residing in the borough. The service, though small, is experienced and well established, and has developed strong working relationships with Traveller families. Much success has been achieved since the last inspection in improving the levels of school attendance; from 34 to 50 per cent in secondary schools, and from 81 to 88 per cent in primary schools. Good support at the primary/secondary transfer has helped to increase the numbers of pupils in secondary schools. The service maintains an individual profile of all Traveller children and works closely with schools to set individual targets and to monitor progress. Multi-agency working is a strong feature of the service and very good links have been established with Sure Start, the housing department of the council, the Literacy team and the education welfare service.

Support for school management

68. Support has more strengths than weaknesses. It was poor in 2000 and there has been good progress on the recommendations in the report, particularly in strengthening the link adviser role. There is good potential for further improvement.

69. The LEA provides appropriate advice and training to help schools improve their capacity for self-evaluation with effective support from Blackburn with Darwen LEA. Over 80 per cent of schools participated in training at the beginning of the academic year and follow-up training has since been provided. Schools' evaluation of this training, aimed at senior managers, has been overwhelmingly positive. The subsequent joint annual review process placed schools in one of three categories in terms of their capacity for self-evaluation. This is being used well to target support at schools with the greatest need.

70. The LEA identifies the needs of senior managers effectively. There is positive support for national training programmes and take-up is good. A systematic

programme of support has been provided for new and acting headteachers. This programme includes trained headteacher mentors, enhanced School Improvement Officer support, network meetings and drop-in sessions, all of which have been well received by participants. For senior managers requiring additional targeted support, the LEA has made effective use of associate headteachers and consultants, particularly where there have been management weaknesses in schools causing concern. Collaboration with another LEA is facilitating the development of a pool of trained headteachers and deputy headteachers who can be called upon at short notice to work in schools experiencing management difficulties. The LEA facilitates the dissemination of good practice in management at both senior and middle management levels through its effective use of ASTs, leading mathematics and literacy teachers and through the management expertise within two local Beacon schools.

71. While support for middle managers in the core subjects has been provided, the LEA recognises the need to develop a more comprehensive programme of support. This work is being developed through the LEA's established links with a university centre for educational leadership.

Support for governors

72. Support for governors is sound with good features as it was at the time of the previous inspection. Action has been taken to improve the quality of information and training for governors on matters relating to the management of school improvement, in line with the recommendation in the previous report. This includes the setting up of a governors' forum and regular newsletters. The percentage of unfilled vacancies for LEA nominated governors is half the national average. The joint annual review process for schools, introduced in autumn 2001, includes a representative of the governing body.

Support for Early Years

73. The LEA's support for early years education is good and there is a coherent approach to developing provision. At the time of the last inspection, the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan aimed to ensure that all four year olds received an offer of a nursery place by 2001. This target has been achieved, together with the provision of childcare places for all three-year-olds, in excess of national targets. The LEA has completed a review of nursery provision, which changed its pattern of provision to better match social need within the borough. The authority has one fully operational Sure Start programme, one coming on line and two at the planning stage. Rochdale is also a mainstreaming pilot for Sure Start, one of only four nationally. The LEA has made very good progress in improving early years provision within the borough.

74. The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) has been very effective in supporting and developing more diverse early education and childcare provision within the borough. A strong feature of the work is the highly effective multi-agency working, in particular with social services and health. The recent co-location of all early years services within one site has further served to

enhance a more co-ordinated and coherent approach. Work funded by the Children's Fund is also established within the early years team and is reported to the EYDCP.

75. The early years team provide an extensive training programme available for schools, voluntary and private providers. Training needs are identified by an analysis of inspection reports and monitoring of school and early years settings. The early years team has developed a local quality assurance scheme for all providers and is in the process of linking this work to the proposed national standards. Training in school self-evaluation for nursery staff and Foundation Stage co-ordinators has been commissioned from a neighbouring LEA and is scheduled for implementation later this year. Good working links with the school improvement service enable support to be effectively targeted at schools causing concern. The early years team leader participates in the termly meetings where services share information on schools' performance. The structure of support for nursery providers causing concern has been developed in line with SIOs for the maintained sector. Provision for young children with SEN is good and includes a pilot supporting children with severe and complex needs. Provision for children with communication difficulties opened in one nursery school in September 2001 and involves a teacher, speech therapist and a nursery nurse working intensively with a small number of children.

Support for school management services

76. The LEA's advice to schools on procurement of services is satisfactory overall. Service level agreements are now much clearer, schools have been offered alternative levels of service and the costs of some services have been benchmarked. Negotiations are at an early stage to set up a brokerage system for alternative providers.

77. Since the previous inspection the quality of most services to support school management has improved. The most significant progress has related to financial services where the quality has improved from poor to good. The strategic costs of financial support services, payroll and personnel have been clearly identified and the appropriate level of resources is now delegated to schools. Property services however, are unsatisfactory.

78. **Financial support** to schools is now good. The position on deficit and surplus budgets is regularly monitored by officers and reported to members. Extensive work has been done, particularly with the four schools with the largest deficits, to help with the establishment of effective financial control systems, to stabilise the situation and to prepare plans to repay the deficits. Good use was made of temporary secondment of staff and there was effective joint work between finance, personnel and school improvement staff to improve school management and tackle overstaffing. However, the scale of the problem means that schools will take up to six years to repay all of the deficits.

79. The council's financial systems work reliably. Reconciliation between the council's and schools' systems works smoothly overall and errors are resolved promptly. Support to schools to manage budgets is good and they have access through the service agreement to the level of advice on budget setting that they choose. Links have been developed between finance, personnel and school

improvement staff to identify schools causing concern. Financial information to service managers is good.

80. **Personnel support** is good. Model procedures are being updated and staffing has been increased to take account of increased responsibilities. Schools gave an improved rating to the service in the school survey.

81. **Administrative ICT** has more strengths than weaknesses. Positive action is being taken to improve the administrative ICT infrastructure in schools. Schools have been encouraged to develop networks with an appropriate range of financial and database software. They have had access to electronic communications for around three years. Broadband connections are planned to be in place in 20 per cent of schools by August 2002. The pupil level annual school census returns were successfully completed in January 2002. Achievable plans are in place to implement electronic transfer of data in time for September 2002.

82. Weaknesses include delays in infrastructure development because of past decisions not to take up Standards Fund grants, shortage of resources in technical support until recently and the lack of access by schools to a council intranet for management information. Corrective action is being taken in these areas, but although primary schools consider support is satisfactory, secondary schools do not yet feel well supported.

83. **Cleaning, caretaking, catering and grounds maintenance services** are satisfactory. They are secured through a mix of in-house services, private contractors and by direct provision by schools. Quality processes have been used. Review of the services has been thorough, costs have been benchmarked and customer requirements for improvements of service have been investigated and improvements made.

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

84. Support for schools in obtaining teachers to fill vacant posts has more strengths than weaknesses. It was not reported on in the previous inspection.

85. The proportion of teacher vacancies in Rochdale is significantly below the national average. This disguises the recruitment difficulties individual schools face and an overall reduction in the number of applications for posts at all levels. The LEA provides effective support to the recruitment process for headteachers. The data collection on other teacher vacancies to support longer term planning is weak. For instance, there is no data to show the ethnic composition of the teaching force and hence no consideration of whether recruitment strategies need to be considered. The LEA's audit of need for the EDP identifies teacher recruitment as a significant concern. Satisfactory strategies are being put in place to enhance the supply of newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

86. The LEA manages, in partnerships with schools, a recruitment pool for NQTs. This strategy has substantially improved recruitment over the last two years. The training and support for NQTs are highly satisfactory. Schools and NQTs are supported in the induction year by the effective work of ASTs and well targeted

monitoring by SIOs. The LEA has a good record of retaining NQTs into their second year of teaching, with 78 per cent remaining with their schools in September 2001.

87. The Rochdale Education and Learning (REAL) Trust, established in June 2001, offers a comprehensive professional development programme. Schools in Rochdale, as full partners in the trust, are becoming closely involved in identifying their continuing professional development needs through this innovatory development. Best practice research grants to promote action based research, ASTs, Beacon and specialist schools are all starting to be used effectively in the LEA's strategies to improve the quality of teaching and promote the dissemination of good practice. The headship training plan, published in January 2002, has appropriate induction arrangements for headteachers including mentoring and support for school self review. The LEA has promoted for all teachers the Teacher Sabbatical scheme and take-up has been good.

88. Teaching assistants are used well by schools in the LEA to reduce teacher workload, improve inclusion and raise achievement. A teaching assistant co-ordinator has been recruited to develop training and support, including routes for teaching assistants to achieve qualified teacher status. The early indications are that the quality of the training and support provided is good and has the potential to expand the pool of qualified teachers available to Rochdale schools in the future.

Recommendation

In order to improve strategies for the supply of teachers:

- improve the collection and analysis of data to support the council's inclusive workforce strategy.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

89. There are more strengths than weaknesses in the performance of services to support schools. SIS is now clearly focused on school improvement and is well managed which reflects very good progress since 2000. The work of SIOs is prioritised, monitored and reviewed effectively. Strategic planning for SIS and other services is sound. Communications with schools are also sound. Deployment of staff is good generally, matches services priorities and is differentiated according to the schools' needs. This is the case for SIS, the education welfare service and the behaviour support service. Special needs services have been restructured, and there is an improving match to need. The policy is well established but deficiencies in the quality of data hinder the implementation on occasion.

90. Staff are well qualified. The SIS team reflects phase needs and has recent senior management expertise in primary and secondary schools. They have undertaken extensive and appropriate training for their revised specialist role. Although new practices are not yet fully embedded, the SIOs have credibility with schools which report some very good practice. Two long-term absences mean that this support is stretched and this leads to increased workloads. Sickness of key personnel has also adversely affected support for data collection and analysis and

SEN. There has been rapid change in services and schools still have some concerns about the overall capacity to support their needs.

91. School Improvement Officers (SIOs) take an effective lead on policy issues, for instance, the 14-19 curriculum. There are gaps in subject expertise and brokerage arrangements in the past have been ad-hoc and support to schools patchy. This is now being addressed through the REAL Trust and has considerable potential.

92. There is a satisfactory performance management system. Links between services plans, team plans and targets for individual members of staff are in place for SIS and are being developed for other services. Individual performance management reviews were used well to restructure and focus the SIS on the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Summary of effectiveness of LEA's special educational needs (SEN) provision.

93. The LEA has a satisfactory policy for SEN and a succinct five-year strategic plan for the education service that prioritises inclusion within the strategic aims. The targets are ambitious and elected members, officers and schools are committed to their achievement. Implementation has started with an extensive and well-managed review of special schools. There is an over-reliance at present on special school provision to meet the needs of pupils with statements of SEN, despite an increase in the number of pupils with new statements placed in mainstream schools. Systems have yet to be put in place to monitor the LEA's and schools' use of resources and to monitor the progress made by all pupils with SEN. In view of the overspend in 2001/2, this means value for money is unsatisfactory.

The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

94. Strategic planning for SEN has more strengths than weaknesses. At the time of the last report, strategic planning was judged to be poor. The LEA has made good progress since the last inspection by developing a satisfactory SEN policy and successfully restructuring the support services.

95. The LEA has developed its SEN policy and implementation strategy following an effective consultation process with schools and governors. It is clear and well presented and provides a sound basis for improvement. The policy defines pupils' entitlement and reflects national and local directions for inclusion. There is an effective framework for the policy that has established: appropriate targets, actions and timescales for the development of support and challenge to schools; a fair and transparent funding strategy; effective partnerships; specialist provision matched to need, and proposals for monitoring impact and pupil progress. Although the policy is monitored regularly and slippage is identified, remedial action is sometimes slow. The absence of a comprehensive SEN audit and the delay in developing an agreed system with schools for monitoring and recording the progress of all pupils with SEN are significant weaknesses in the implementation of the plan.

96. A key element of the SEN strategy is the review of the role of special schools and the development of a strategy to co-locate special education provision on mainstream sites. The good consultative process conducted by the LEA has achieved a high level of agreement among special schools, parents and members. A capital resources bid through the PFI was the intended source of funding for this proposal. However, the council's bid for PFI credits was unsuccessful and will be re-submitted. The education department is developing sensible alternatives to maintain the principles of the review within available resources but these have not yet been subject to consultation with key partners.

Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for SEN:

- carry out an SEN audit and implement effective systems for monitoring and recording the progress of all pupils with SEN; and
- consult with elected members, schools and the wider community about alternative proposals to maintain the momentum for the review of the special schools in the council's inclusion strategy.

Statutory obligations

97. The assessment and administration of statements have improved and are now good. The last inspection criticised the LEA for failings in the administration of the statutory assessment process within the recommended timescales and for undue delays in making provision. The restructuring of the SEN service has significantly improved the leadership and effectiveness of the SEN assessment team. There are effective administrative systems for following up advice from education psychologists and the other agencies involved.

98. All statements, with and without exceptions, were completed within the advised time limits in 2001-2002. The number of statements maintained by the LEA has increased to 3.2 per cent of the school population, which is in line with similar metropolitan authorities. The quality of statements is satisfactory with good supporting advice from educational psychologists and an effective quality control system to ensure consistency. The quality of individual education plans is variable. This is recognised and training is being provided to special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) to improve consistency.

99. The parent partnership service is provided by a local voluntary agency. A comprehensive contractual agreement forms the basis for service levels and quality. Relationships with the LEA are good and parents are now well supported by the service.

School Improvement

100. The LEA's management of the implementation of the Code of Practice is satisfactory. The LEA has developed clear criteria for referral for statutory assessment and issued interim guidance for the revised Code of Practice. The early indications are that schools value the restructured Rochdale additional needs service and it is an effective step forward to support the SEN policy and school improvement strategy.

101. The LEA's provision and monitoring for pupils with statements of SEN are satisfactory. There is sound progress with the use of p- scales in all special schools, together with some limited extension to mainstream schools. The lack of agreed criteria for Stages 1 to 3 of the original Code of Practice and the absence of

monitoring information from schools about the progress of all pupils, however, limits the overall effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement.

102. Support for SENCOs is good, through both the SENCO network and the provision of high quality training. They have been supported with appropriate training for the implementation of the revised Code of Practice and a model policy has been provided for use with governors. The review of SEN services is providing the impetus to reshape the specialist support for autistic spectrum disorders, physical disability and sensory impairment. Specialist services are making a positive impact in their support to develop staff confidence in teaching and learning strategies appropriate to the needs of pupils with SEN. The education psychology service has a clear rationale for the deployment of staff and schools can decide how the time is used to best meet their needs. The review of the work of the education psychology service has resulted in the effective targeting of early intervention at pre-school provision.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for school improvement:

- revise the criteria for SEN in the light of the Code of Practice.

Value for money

103. Value for money remains unsatisfactory, though this represents an improvement from poor in the last inspection. The absence of a comprehensive SEN audit continues to restrict the LEA's capacity to evaluate the progress made by all pupils with SEN against the resources spent.

104. Members took a decision, following the last inspection, to increase the education budget by £6m over three years at a cost to other key services. However, in making a major improvement in the completion of the assessment and statement processes there has been an unplanned and significant shift of this resource to support spending on SEN statements.

105. The delegation of SEN resources to schools has been too slow and not prioritised. Pre-statement support has recently been delegated to schools using a fixed sum and key stage assessment results. The LEA has made a sound start to review the pressures on SEN funding. A working group has been set up to review the formula for delegation to improve the match of SEN funding to the pattern and level of need. It will also consider how the reliance on statements and out of borough places can be reduced.

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

106. Support is sound with good features. This reflects good progress since the last inspection which recorded that the LEA was failing to provide effective support to some of its most vulnerable children. There have been marked improvements, particularly in support for pupils with no school place and for children in public care. The Travellers' service continues to make an outstanding contribution and the performance of minority ethnic pupils has improved faster than for other pupils in the borough. The education department has been slow, however, to implement the council's policies to combat racism but the pace has quickened in the last year. Overall, the momentum established has the potential to bring further improvements.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

107. The strategy is sound with good features. There is a strongly stated commitment to inclusion. It is well represented in corporate plans including the draft community plan and the five-year education strategic plan. The LEA has developed useful projects to promote social inclusion through the use of external funding and in co-operation with voluntary and other agencies, for example, the work with the Children's Society on anti-bullying strategies. There is significant funding through SRB, the Children's and Neighbourhood Renewal funds and these contribute significantly to the promotion of inclusive practice. The LEA reports that there is a significant transient population. There is a small-scale education research project monitoring this issue, but it has not yet resulted in a well-articulated strategy. At the corporate level, a recently approved housing strategy has the potential to make a positive contribution.

The supply of school places

108. The previous inspection identified that planning for school places was effective and as a result the LEA did not at the time have a significant surplus places problem. The LEA planning for school place provision is currently sound with good features and the LEA is well placed to handle the reducing primary population, while still meeting pupils' needs.

109. The School Organisation Committee is working effectively and has taken decisions in relation to primary school reorganisation in one area and is well briefed on the work of the special schools review group. The School Organisation Plan provides a satisfactory description of school places issues in the borough but plans for reorganisation are not yet developed. Improved relations between the LEA schools and the dioceses since the previous inspection form a strong basis for tackling future reorganisation issues. Systems for forecasting pupil numbers have not been sufficiently accurate in the past, but have been improved and are now satisfactory.

110. There are currently 9.5 per cent surplus places in the primary sector and ten primary schools with surplus places more than 25 per cent. Both of these are around the average for metropolitan authorities. Reduction in the primary population

means that surplus places would increase to 12.7 per cent by 2004/05 if nothing were done and supply and demand for nursery places are still out of balance in some areas. The LEA has a target to reduce surplus places to 6 per cent in its strategic plan and is embarking on a programme of area reviews during 2002 and 2003.

111. There are currently 7.2 per cent surplus places in the secondary sector, around the average for metropolitan authorities and rising secondary pupil populations are reducing the number. Low pupil numbers have given cause for concern in two schools, but positive action is being taken to improve their popularity by addressing the school improvement agenda. Discussions are taking place with diocesan and other partners to devise a strategy for future provision.

112. There is sixth form provision in four schools, two community and two aided schools. Participation rates post-16 are low in Rochdale and some sixth forms are too small to be economic and deliver a full curriculum. Following the 16-19 Ofsted area wide inspection in April 2001, the Rochdale borough learning partnership has developed a constructive action plan which will involve increased partnership between schools and other providers and address such issues. The LEA participated effectively in the development of this plan.

Recommendation

In order to ensure a future balance between supply and demand for school places:

- the LEA should review and take necessary action on the provision of nursery, primary and secondary places.

Admissions

113. Admissions were not inspected in detail, but LEA self-evaluation and the school survey confirms that the management of admissions remains satisfactory. Information to parents is clear and admissions criteria are operated effectively. The time taken to resolve appeals has been reduced.

Asset management

114. Asset management planning is now satisfactory and the strengths of the service outweigh the weaknesses. In the previous inspection, the LEA support for maintenance, refurbishment and school buildings had been at times weak, but there was progress with its Asset Management Plan. Since that time, LEA responsibilities in this area have increased significantly. However, support for schools, both in terms of the management of large building projects and advice on the building responsibilities of schools, has not kept pace with developments and is unsatisfactory.

115. The condition data submitted to the DfES indicated that Rochdale was in the highest quartile among LEAs in terms of the extent of investment required to deal

with building condition backlog. The LEA originally had problems with meeting DfES requirements for standardisation of data. These problems have now been resolved and as a result the overall level of backlog is now estimated to be £35 million, rather than the initial £55 million. The LEA has met all of the DfES requirements for submission of condition and suitability information and for preparation of the required elements of the asset management plan. On the DfES assessment in December 2001, the elements of the plan were all judged to be at least satisfactory and most were good.

116. There is a considerable shortfall in the resources required for investment in the maintenance and improvement of school buildings in Rochdale. Special school buildings are in very poor condition. Levels of replacement of buildings have been very low and until recently the total levels of investment were also low. In addition, capital resources are required for the special school reorganisation, future primary school places rationalisation in some areas and some rationalisation in the secondary school sector. The most recent two years of new deal for schools resources, together with devolved formula capital available to schools have substantially increased the levels of investment available. This has been used to improve the condition of some schools. There is still, however, a large gap between the need for investment and the resources available. As reported earlier, the council bid for PFI credits of just under £40 million to fund the special school reorganisation, but the bid was unsuccessful. Investment in maintenance of school buildings is not helped by schools switching resources delegated for repairs and maintenance to other priorities.

117. The asset management planning processes have improved the quality of information available to schools and the dialogue with schools about establishing priorities for investment. Schools are not, however, currently adequately supported in carrying out their property responsibilities. There are insufficient resources to effectively project manage the substantial increase in capital projects or to provide technical advice to schools on their building priorities. Some action has already been taken to start to correct this through a reorganisation of the services provided by the local authority and the brokering of property support through alternative providers.

Recommendations

In order to improve the condition of school buildings, the LEA should work with schools to:

- develop an investment plan which identifies the capital and revenue resources necessary to improve and maintain in the long term the condition of school building stock; and
- ensure that schools receive effective advice for property issues and management of capital projects.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

118. LEA provision has more strengths than weaknesses, a marked improvement since 2000 when it was poor. In particular, the LEA has remedied its failure in its statutory duty to ensure children educated at home receive appropriate education. The LEA has laid firm foundations for further improvement.

119. There are clear realistic and costed plans to provide by September 2002 full time education to pupils excluded for more than 15 days. The average time currently is 12 hours, in itself a significant improvement on 2000 when over 90 per cent of pupils were receiving less than five hours education per week. Accurate pupil tracking systems have been established. A significant development is that support is now well organised through a pupil referral service, which is being suitably expanded for September 2002 onwards. Some weaknesses remain as re-integration rates are low for secondary schools and, while being 100 per cent for primary schools, they are nevertheless slow.

120. A good 'education at home' policy is now in place. The LEA has produced clear guidance for children educated at home by their parents. Monitoring arrangements for both welfare issues and pupils' academic progress are satisfactory. There is also effective home tuition arrangements for sick children. Through recent work with the Health Action Zone and effective use of Sure Start, the LEA is improving the provision of educational programmes for teenage parents.

Attendance

121. Support for attendance is good as it was in 2000. Despite fluctuations in attendance, improvement is taking place.

122. The LEA policy and strategy on school attendance are clear and unambiguous. They are effective, understood by schools and they provide good guidance. Good management ensures that the majority of education welfare officer (EWO) time is well-focused on specific target schools. There is also a small central reserve of time and resources to secure flexibility within constrained resources and to provide the opportunity to secure even greater focus on target schools. An effective example is work with a voluntary aided primary school involving pupils, teachers and parents to discuss and tackle issues arising from extended leave of absence abroad. The outcome has been an improvement of four per cent in the school's attendance figures over the last year.

123. Truancy sweeps in co-operation with the police have been maintained and subsequent police/EWO joint visiting of parents has been particularly effective. There is a very robust approach. This includes a system by which parents of pupils recording above average absence are asked to attend a panel at the Town Hall. This provides a formal, unfamiliar and measured setting to help develop a serious joint exploration of the pupil's absences, leading to improved co-operation of all the partners to secure better attendance.

Behaviour support

124. Strengths now outweigh weaknesses. In 2000, support was judged to be unsatisfactory and the behaviour support plan (BSP) was poor, containing few specific targets or success criteria. Since then there has been sound progress. Through links with the EiC there is a solid foundation for further improvement.

125. There is a new improved BSP. A strength is the specific arrangement for regular monitoring and evaluation of the plan and the clear, strategic direction it sets. A significant weakness is that it is not based on a rigorous audit and the actions proposed do not explain sufficiently how the targets will be achieved. The LEA has worked effectively with Blackburn with Darwen to establish protocols that are clear and well understood by the schools. The behaviour management and development team (BMDT) liaises with school clusters and SIOs to identify schools needing additional support, and this leads to sound targeting.

126. In the school survey, primary and secondary schools rate provision as unsatisfactory, but the inspection team judge it to be better than that. In part, the schools' view arises from a perceived gap in the LEA continuum of provision. The BMDT focuses appropriately on improving whole school strategies and teachers' behaviour management skills. There is limited in-class provision, but sound, improving support is provided for primary schools through additional projects. This includes effective work with the Children's Society resulting in improvements in anti-bullying measures in schools and other settings and an effective outreach project from a beacon special school.

127. Many developments are comparatively recent and have not yet had the desired impact. For instance, permanent exclusions are well above the target set. However, new initiatives particularly through EiC give optimism for the future. This includes the use of learning mentors, learning support units and a more collaborative approach to tackling behavioural issues. A former secondary headteacher is working closely with EiC staff to develop alternative curriculum approaches in secondary schools. The appointment of an inclusion officer has strengthened the co-ordination and monitoring of policies and procedures.

Recommendations

In order to improve the support for behaviour:

- secondary schools and the LEA should co-operate to reduce the number of permanent exclusions; and
- the LEA should evaluate the impact of provision to inform the BSP and the specific actions to be taken.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

128. The arrangements for health and safety are now good and support for welfare and child protection is sound with good features. The previous inspection judged health and safety provision to be satisfactory, but provided no judgement about

welfare or child protection. In the survey, both primary and secondary schools rated health and safety support as good, and better than at the last inspection. Child protection procedures were rated the same as previously by primary schools and worse by secondary schools.

129. The LEA has clearly defined policies for health and safety and school security. These policies are supported by well-established procedures for monitoring and dealing with areas of significant risk. Information, guidance and training are comprehensive and available to all schools. Responsibilities are clear, support is expert, and monitoring of practice is effective. The costs of the service are centrally held, well planned and carefully monitored, securing good value for money.

130. In relation to welfare and child protection, the LEA takes sound steps to meet its statutory obligations and is fully represented on the area child protection committee. There is a database of designated teachers of whom 80 per cent have had training in the last two years, based on revised arrangements for child protection and the framework for assessment. The relationship between education and social services at the strategic level is good. Working arrangements between teachers and social workers are more variable. This is attributable more to the level of vacancies in social worker posts (approximately 33 per cent) than to any lack of system or willingness to work well together.

Children in public care

131. Support for children in public care (CiPC) is satisfactory. It was judged to be unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection and there was specific criticism of the failure to use information about prior attainment as the basis of target-setting. This particular criticism has been fully addressed and progress is sound.

132. There are currently 190 pupils of statutory school age in Rochdale public care and about a quarter of them are educated outside the LEA. Performance in recent years has been low; for instance, in 2001 no pupils gained five higher GCSE grades. However, cohorts are small and the LEA does now have a detailed, comprehensive database. LEA analysis supports the very challenging target of 20 per cent for the percentage of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C.

133. The new inclusion officer and a senior teacher with responsibilities for CiPC lead developments well. All schools have a designated teacher and there is regular provision for training them together with foster carers and residential staff. Information and training on personal education plans has been sound. Some children do not have an assigned social worker, but in these cases there is direct support from management in social services.

134. Elected members play an appropriate role as corporate parents, both individually and through the Quality Protects Forum. They attend the Forum regularly, receive reports on the progress and attainment of individuals and groups, and visit the units. Their contribution is sound and improving. Officers of the two departments work well together and contribute fully to the joint development of plans and improving practice. Opportunities for young people themselves to contribute to that process are unclear. Partnership is good, and so is consultation although at

school level there are some discontinuities owing to staff shortages. The work of the education team is securely based on the inclusion team plan which itself sits firmly within departmental and statutory plans. There is a draft joint policy for the two services but it is recent and suffers from insufficient specificity about actions to be undertaken and ways of judging progress/success. There is a firm basis for further improvement.

Recommendation

In order to improve provision for children in public care:

- ensure that the proposed joint policy is fully discussed with children in public care.

Measures to combat racism

135. The LEA's current self-evaluation judges provision to be satisfactory now and the findings of the inspection team confirm the LEA's judgement. The LEA's strategy to combat racism at the time of the last inspection was good but progress in the intervening period has been limited. The council's prompt response to the recommendations of the McPherson report on *The Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence* was not followed through sufficiently within the education service. There was a hiatus in development and it has only been since summer 2001 that the education directorate has started to develop a more coherent approach to combating racism. The proposed developments set out in EDP2 to promote racial equality demonstrate good capacity for further improvement.

136. In the aftermath of the racial disturbances in nearby authorities and the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in September 2001, the LEA, together with key partners, has taken appropriate and effective action. In collaboration with the Rochdale Equality Council, sensitive advice and guidance were issued promptly to all schools. An inter-agency group initiated by the police was established to share intelligence about potential racial incidents so that appropriate strategies and resources could be deployed. This inter-agency approach proved effective and has been maintained.

137. The reporting of racist incidents involving schools has improved over the past year. Schools are encouraged to report any racist incidents to the LEA and to the police. All reported incidents are followed up by the LEA in order to assess the level of support required by the school. The number of reported incidents for the first half of the current academic year was low. The LEA re-issued schools with existing policy documents on anti-racist education and combating racist incidents. Plans are in place to review and update these documents in light of recent legislation and national reports. Training for headteachers and governors on policy development and the implications of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 was commencing at the time of the inspection. The LEA has recently commissioned a race audit of all schools which will form the basis of a strategic plan on race issues for the authority.

138. The council introduced its inclusive workforce strategy in response to the recommendations of the McPherson report. Equality targets have been set and

progress on increasing the employment of ethnic minorities within the council workforce has been monitored. Currently within education however, reliable data on the ethnicity of the teaching force is not available. The introduction of new software by the education personnel team will address this issue and enable the LEA's stated commitment to a more ethnically diverse teaching force to be translated into meaningful equality targets. Future work of the EMA team will focus on the CRE's school standards 'Learning for All'.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction

139. The 2000 report was very critical of many aspects of corporate working. The planning and implementation of plans were often weak. The leadership of the LEA, both councillors and senior officers, was poor and the scrutiny of council decisions was weak. The arrival of a new chief executive and elected members' resolve to improve matters have been significant factors in the rapid progress made on all fronts. The pace has been relentless, and the necessary reorganisations and new appointments are detailed in section 1 of this report. There is now strong and effective leadership from the chief executive, senior elected members and the Director of Education. The new education senior leadership team (SLT) is also establishing its credibility with schools.

Corporate planning

140. The quality of corporate planning with respect to education is now satisfactory and improving. The council has identified four specific priorities for the next five-year period; one of these is to increase young people's educational and training achievement. This reflects the high priority now afforded to education. The EiC director is an ex-officio member of the education SLT and this underpins effective working between the LEA and EiC. Longer term planning is still being developed. During the inspection, the five-year corporate strategic plan went to council and progress towards a community plan is on course. The BVPP links well with education plans. Overall, there is sound and improving cohesion in policy and planning in relation to education.

141. The quality of education plans is improving. As reported earlier, the new EDP2 is a considerable improvement on the first. The five-year education strategic plan is a useful, succinct document that draws together all the educational initiatives, targets and success criteria. There are still weaknesses, for instance, in the behaviour support plan but generally it is a positive, improving picture producing greater clarity of purpose and coherence between plans.

Leadership of elected members and officers and decision-making

142. Elected members have given strong leadership to bring about the necessary sea-change in culture and attitudes. They have accepted the severe judgements in the last inspection report and subsequent consultancy reports and supported the changes wholeheartedly. Their willingness to do so demonstrates a departure from previous established practice and has surprised their critics - and probably themselves. The portfolio holder for education has increased status, and has made a more influential and valued contribution. Financial decision-making is open, timely and effective - a marked improvement. Members have taken difficult decisions, for instance, to find the extra funding for education and to bring secondary budget deficits under control. Advice to elected members is generally good, but there was an insufficient range of options presented in conjunction with the special schools

review. The scrutiny process is developing well, but at this early stage has yet to show its teeth.

Partnership

a) External agencies

143. Collaboration with other agencies is sound with good features and there has been satisfactory progress since 2000. There is a good corporate lead through central articulation of the local strategic partnership steering group which provides a consultative template to ensure all the key local agencies and individuals are engaged productively in the council's development of its services and activities.

144. The LEA has developed a strong strategic approach to work with external partners. Relationships with health and police are good at strategic and operational levels. For instance, joint work with police on attendance contribute to the Access to Education project for Key Stage 4 excluded pupils. Similarly with the Health service, joint work on excluded pupils and on 'Healthy Schools' initiatives and Sure Start are also examples of success. Work with the dioceses is sound and improving, while that with the EYDCP is good.

b) Other LEAs

145. Partnership arrangements with other LEAs are very good and particularly with Blackburn with Darwen. The partnership between these two LEAs has been very effective both in terms of how it operated, the outcomes achieved and the rapid way in which Rochdale's capacity as an LEA has developed since the last inspection. The full commitment and involvement of elected members from both LEAs have been critical to the success of the partnership. Arrangements for partnering were well prepared through full and interactive consultation with members, staff and schools in both LEAs, so that fears were allayed and trust and commitment built. A small group of Rochdale headteachers became part of a scrutiny group which monitored the progress of the partnership. Clear aims and protocols, defined and staged outcomes and rigorous monitoring arrangements were put in place at the start of the partnership and underpinned by a signed agreement between the two LEAs.

146. A key advantage of working with a successful LEA was access and training in current and proven models of practice. Officers from both LEAs engaged in peer and team working, jointly visiting schools in both LEAs. Skills and expertise were built rapidly and Rochdale personnel at all levels were exposed to a culture and ways of working built upon a philosophy of challenging existing practice. Blackburn with Darwen benefited from the partnership too. The experience provided good professional development for its own staff and both LEAs gained from joint reflection on professional practices.

147. Blackburn with Darwen gave support on most of the major weaknesses identified in the last inspection report: data management; strategic financial planning; the EDP; support for school improvement including schools causing concern; the

behaviour support plan; performance management systems; SEN and social inclusion.

148. The majority of the specified outcomes in the joint agreement are in place and improvement has taken place since the last inspection in all areas. The least progress was made in data management where both of these small LEAs proved vulnerable to staff illness and turnover. The most rapid improvements are in the support for school improvement and in particular the deployment of SIOs and the clear way in which Rochdale has defined and shared with schools, its key functions of monitoring, challenge and intervention.

149. The rapid improvement in Rochdale's capacity as an LEA is due to its willingness to improve and collaborate with others. Successful experience of partnership working has encouraged Rochdale to readily seek support from other LEAs on specific areas. The effectiveness of the partnering arrangements between Rochdale and Blackburn with Darwen is helping to drive forward plans for a federation of some North West LEAs to share expertise across core and traded services. The LEA is also part of a Pathfinder project to evaluate the use of out of borough placements for pupils with additional educational and social needs. The LEA has been helped by sensitive but demanding partnering arrangements with a successful LEA which also wanted to learn from the process. The model is worthy of further dissemination.

c) Schools

150. Partnership with schools is sound and improving. This is a marked improvement on the previously stated position. The consultancy report in September 2000 commented that the leadership had lost the confidence of headteachers and other key stakeholders. The LEA has striven to re-establish that mutual trust. The school survey and discussions with headteachers show that it is succeeding but, because of the turbulent recent past, some schools retain the scars and are yet to be convinced. The director has led the drive to regain the confidence of headteachers by delivering on promises. There is now transparency and openness and headteachers are much more involved in consultative procedures which they value. This is particularly evident in the general consensus reached for the SEN strategy allied to the PFI bid. Schools have often operated in isolation and the EiC is playing a significant and positive role in changing that culture. The LEA has also been able to provide support to promote sharing and collaboration to make the maximum use of resources.

151. Communications within the LEA have improved. Schools report that officers are very accessible and the director meets half-termly with all headteachers simultaneously. However, attendance by secondary headteachers is often poor although this is partly because there are similar inputs to their own separate meetings.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes a small number of recommendations. The major finding is to implement policies and plans which are still relatively new. Fundamental amongst these are:-

- the EDP 2002-7;
- the corporate strategy, Aiming High.

These provide a challenging agenda for the medium term and provide the basis for good further development. Two issues need to be resolved fairly urgently in order to facilitate further rapid progress. There are the quality and use of data and a strategy for SEN agreed by all partners as an alternative to the preferred option which is dependent on PFI funding.

SECTION 1: The LEA strategy for school improvement:

In order to improve the impact of the EiC initiative:

- disseminate more systematically successful models of good practice within EiC schools and, where appropriate, to other schools including support for gifted and talented pupils; and
- the management of EiC should require schools to ensure that school strand co-ordinators have sufficient time and/or support for strand requirements to be met.

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- reinforce efforts to eliminate deficit budgets in particular schools;
- improve the clarity of funding for SEN by agreeing with schools a strategy for medium term funding changes; and
- distribute SEN resources to schools according to the individual needs of pupils.

SECTION 2: Support for School Improvement

In order to improve monitoring and challenge:

- implement plans to improve pupil tracking at both school and LEA level and the transfer of data between schools;
- strengthen procedures so that aggregate targets set by schools are in line with LEA targets and reflect the additionality of EiC; and
- ensure that records of monitoring visits are copied to governing bodies.

In order to improve support for under-performing schools:

- monitor the effectiveness of intervention strategies including time spent as a school causing concern and improve the analysis of data to identify additional support.

In order to improve support for ICT:

- provide support to all schools in assessing pupils' work;
- increase support for the development of ICT in subjects of the curriculum; and
- improve access to technical support to match expanded provision in schools.

In order to improve strategies for the supply of teachers:

- improve the collection and analysis of data to support the council's inclusive workforce strategy.

SECTION 3: Special Educational Needs

In order to improve the strategy for SEN:

- carry out an SEN audit and implement effective systems for monitoring and recording the progress of all pupils with SEN; and
- consult with elected members, schools and the wider community about alternative proposals to maintain the momentum for the review of the special schools in the council's inclusion strategy.

In order to improve support for school improvement

- revise the criteria for SEN in the light of the Code of Practice.

SECTION 4: Promoting Social Inclusion

In order to ensure a future balance between supply and demand for school places:

- the LEA should review and take necessary action on the provision of nursery, primary and secondary places.

In order to improve the condition of school buildings, the LEA should work with schools to:

- develop an investment plan which identifies the capital and revenue resources necessary to improve and maintain in the long term the condition of school building stock; and
- ensure that schools receive effective advice for property issues and management of capital projects.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- secondary schools and the LEA should co-operate to reduce the number of permanent exclusions; and
- the LEA should evaluate the impact of provision to inform the BSP and the specific actions to be taken.

In order to improve provision for children in public care:

- ensure that the proposed joint policy is fully discussed with children in public care.

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