



**OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
ROCHDALE
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

May 2000

**OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION**

CONTENTS	Paragraph
INTRODUCTION	1 - 3
COMMENTARY	4 - 11
SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Context	12 - 14
Funding	15 - 17
Council structure	18 - 21
The Education Development Plan	22 - 28
Allocation of resources to priorities	29 - 30
Recommendations	
SECTION 2: LEA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools	31 - 38
Support for the use of performance data	39 - 43
Support for literacy	44 - 49
Support for numeracy	50 - 53
Support for ICT	54 - 58
Support for schools causing concern	59 - 63
Support for school management	64 - 67
Support for governors	68 - 71
Recommendations	
SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	
Corporate planning	72 - 75
Financial support	76 - 82
School infrastructure services	83 - 85
Recommendations	
SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION	86 - 96
Recommendations	
SECTION 5: ACCESS	
The supply of school places	97 - 100
Admissions to schools	101
Promoting social inclusion	102 - 109
Behaviour support	103
Attendance	104
Looked-After Children	106
Provision of education otherwise than at school	106
Support for ethnic minorities	110 - 113
Recommendations	

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 105 schools. The response rate was 82 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 13 primary, four secondary and two special schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. The four townships which make up Rochdale Metropolitan Borough are a mixture of Manchester suburbs, mill towns and Pennine villages and moorland. It is an area of long-standing economic decline with higher than average levels of deprivation. There is a high proportion of ethnic minority pupils for whom English is not their first language.

5. The performance of its schools and pupils is below average. At the age of 16, the proportion of pupils in Rochdale schools attaining five A*-C grades in their GCSE examinations is 7.5 per cent below the national average. Although improving year on year, with a significant rise in attainment in 1999, the rate of improvement over the last three years is slower than the national rate.

6. In such a context, it is critical that the LEA is focused on school improvement. It is not. At the time of the inspection, its lifelong learning policy and review panel had created few policies relevant to school improvement and reviewed none, and no scrutiny system has been built into the modernised Council structure. The LEA's management and actions have substantially more weaknesses than strengths.

The following functions are weak and fundamental to the school improvement agenda:

- scrutiny of spending patterns in the LEA and schools;
- strategic management and planning;
- the formulation of an Education Development Plan;
- monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools;
- support for the use of performance data;
- support for improving standards of literacy;
- identification of schools causing concern;
- support to school managers;
- support for pupils with special educational needs;
- support for improving behaviour/reducing exclusions;
- support for pupils who do not attend school.

A number of functions are exercised well:

- support for improving standards of numeracy;
- support for schools identified by OFSTED as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses;
- support for governors;
- support for improving rates of pupil attendance;
- support for the children of Travellers, and those whose first language is not English.

7. The LEA is failing to take reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory and regulatory duties in the following areas:

- the monitoring and management of the control of secondary school budget deficits;
- issuing statements of special educational needs within the required timescale;

- arranging that the special educational provision specified is made for those pupils for whom the LEA maintains statements of special educational needs;
- making arrangements for the provision of suitable education for pupils who are not attending school.

8. The leadership of the LEA, both councillors and senior officers, has allowed serious deficiencies in secondary school budgetary control and support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) to drift for too long a period. The LEA is failing to deliver effective support for some of its most vulnerable pupils. SEN provision is poor and pupils not on a school roll receive inadequate provision or, in too many cases, none at all. This is a situation that requires immediate attention.

9. There are also weaknesses in the way that the LEA is discharging its duties in relation to school improvement. The work of the advisory service is not aligned well with the principles of intervention in inverse proportion to success. Although it is improving, there is not a constructive partnership between the LEA and all of its schools based on a mutual recognition of the functions and contributions of each partner. Schools are not in a good position to judge the value for money provided by the support service it receives from advisers. The costs of many other LEA services are not transparent.

10. Section 13A of the Education Act 1996 states, in terms, that an LEA shall ensure that it is exercising its functions relating to education provision with a view to promoting high standards in its schools. The cumulative weight of the weaknesses set out in paragraphs 6-8 above signal that Rochdale LEA is not, at present, successfully promoting high standards in its schools.

11. The LEA lacks the drive, vision, relationship with its schools and general capacity required to carry forward the agenda of promoting school improvement at the pace necessary for Rochdale's pupils.

SECTION ONE: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. Rochdale has a population of around 200,000 divided into the four distinctive township areas of Heywood, Middleton, Rochdale and the Pennines, each with its own 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. In January 2000 there were 37,175 pupils in Rochdale schools, of whom approximately 27 per cent, higher than the national average, were eligible for free school meals. The ethnic minority population, of which 70 per cent are from a Pakistani heritage background, is also higher than the national average. At the time of the inspection, nursery provision was under formal review because it is not geographically distributed according to demand.

14. The LEA currently has 105 schools - eight nursery schools, seven special schools, 76 schools in the primary phase and 14 schools in the secondary phase. Eight of the schools were formerly grant-maintained; six primary and two secondary. Key features of school and pupil performance are:

- attainment in English and mathematics at Key Stages 1-3 is below national averages and expectations. The rates of improvement in both English and mathematics have kept broadly in line with national figures. There are two exceptions: in mathematics at Key Stage 2, attainment is in line with national averages; and in English at Key Stage 3 the rate of improvement lags well behind that found nationally;
- GCSE results are improving year on year but are lower, and improving at a slower rate, than national averages. The proportion gaining five or more A*-C grades is 7.5 per cent below national averages;
- permanent exclusions in secondary schools are in line with national averages but are below those of similar LEAs;
- rates of attendance in secondary schools are in line with statistical neighbours but remain below national averages; rates of unauthorised absence of secondary school pupils are in line with statistical neighbours but higher than national averages;
- there are currently two schools judged by OFSTED to require special measures and one deemed to have serious weaknesses. A further eight schools (three secondary and five primary) have been identified by the LEA as a cause for concern.

Funding

15. The LEA has, with the exception of one year, maintained expenditure on education slightly above its Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) over the last five years. It has also increased funding in school budgets in real terms by £743,000 over

the last three years. Despite this, in 1999/2000, its expenditure on schools overall and its proportion of funding delegated to schools were both significantly below the national average. Funding of primary schools is particularly low, not due to any policy of prioritisation of other phases, but stemming from the original and long standing primary/secondary funding split when delegated funding was introduced in the late 1980s.

16. Significant features of its expenditure on Education in 1999/2000 include:

- an Education budget of £96.881 million, which is 2.6 per cent above its Education SSA;
- a Local Schools Budget (LSB) per pupil of £2486, that is 4.6 per cent lower than the Metropolitan average;
- expenditure on central administration of £47 per pupil that is 4.4 per cent below the national average and within the Secretary of State's target of £65 per pupil;
- delegation of the LSB of 80.6 per cent is above the target of 80 per cent, but 1.9 per cent below the national average. The LEA plans to meet its 6 per cent target for increased delegation by delegation of funding for secondary school meals, central support services, the Standards Fund and the full increase in the Education SSA;
- total delegated funding per pupil is significantly lower than the Metropolitan average: it is 9.3 per cent lower for primary schools, 3.1 per cent lower for secondary schools, and 16 per cent lower for special schools;
- areas of low expenditure, including support for school improvement linked to the Education Development Plan, the Education Welfare Service (expenditure per pupil is the lowest among Metropolitan authorities), provision for pupils with statements of special educational needs and home-to-school transport;
- areas of high expenditure, including under-fives (including nursery schools) that is the highest of 33 metropolitan authorities, non-devolved specific grant (of which 72 per cent is infant class size funding), SEN Support services for both pupils with and without statements, and education otherwise than at school;

17. Total capital expenditure has increased from a base of £1.94 million in 1997/98 by £1.44 million in 1998/99 and a further £0.77 million by 1999/2000. An overspend of about £400,000 on SEN Statements occurred in 1997/98. An additional £298,000 (full year growth of £538,000) was approved in September 1999 due to the inability of the Council to predict the level of spending at the time the budget was set.

Council structure

18. The political leadership of the Council has changed seven times since Rochdale MBC was established in 1974. It has been under overall Labour control since May 1996. In May 1999 it modernised its structure establishing a number of policy and review panels and an executive.

19. Two of the policy and review panels are relevant to education: lifelong learning and social inclusion. The function of each panel is solely policy formulation and for this purpose each panel decides upon its own annual work programme. The lifelong learning panel, the one most directly related to education policy, will have met six times in 1999/2000. Panel meetings deal with one or two issues. This year they have considered early years, post-16 and adult education, special educational needs and the anti-bullying strategy. Although each of these issues is important, the pace and programme of the panel are not sufficiently focused on the necessary school improvement agenda. The LEA intends to develop the work of these panels to cover scrutiny, performance review, Best Value, and medium term financial planning, but they are not developing quickly enough to adopt these challenging additional responsibilities.

20. The other new body in the Council structure, the executive, is made up of 10 councillors but does not include any member of the lifelong learning panel, even though education accounts for over half of Council spending. Although the majority of the meetings and reports are public, the report detailing an unexpected £730,000 overspend on one secondary school budget was tabled on the private agenda. Unlike many modernised Council structures, there is no system of scrutiny: this does not meet the expectations of the 1998 Modernising Local Government White Paper.

21. This new Council structure does not work in support of school improvement. Its policy development function cannot keep pace with the required rate of change and its overall make-up, as yet, provides inadequate scrutiny.

The Education Development Plan

22. The Education Development Plan (EDP) has Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) approval for three years (subject to the condition that modifications on literacy were received by February 2000) and was implemented from April 1999.

23. The six priority areas for improvement are:

- pupils' learning;
- school management and leadership;
- child, school, home and community;
- pupils' key skills in literacy, numeracy and information communication technology;
- supporting schools with weaknesses;
- disseminating good practice.

24. The areas for improvement suitably reflect both national and local priorities and were derived from planned consultation and the substantial involvement of schools. Although the EDP has links to the borough's corporate strategy and other statutory plans, the strategy for improvement is not sufficiently explicit or clear to the majority of schools.

25. The plan is weak. The audit does not provide an adequate baseline upon which to build developments. It is not based upon a thorough analysis of available evidence, including performance data, local evaluation of schools' performance and a review of OFSTED inspections. Issues arising from such readily available evidence, for example the need to improve the quality of financial management and planning in schools, do

not have sufficient prominence in the plan. Action on special educational needs is not integrated well.

26. The action plans in the EDP have shortcomings. The relationship between the activities and what needs to be done to bring about school improvement is not clear. Activities are often insufficiently prioritised and have success criteria that lack precision and are not easily measurable. In the school survey and during visits to schools justified concerns were expressed in about a third of schools about the lack of clarity and over-ambition of the intentions within the plans. There is scepticism in a significant minority of schools about the LEA's capacity to deliver the programme.

27. There is an adequate structure for monitoring and evaluating the LEA's progress. Monitoring for each priority area is set around a working group of officers, professional associations and staff from schools. Working groups are starting to bring about improvements; for example in numeracy, action plans are being modified and success criteria sharpened as priorities emerge more clearly.

28. The targets published in the EDP for Key Stage 2 and GCSE are, in the main, challenging and realistic. Results from 1999 indicate satisfactory progress overall towards meeting the targets. However, progress being made by individual schools is not even. For example, between 1998 and 1999 the percentages of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C declined in five out of 14 schools. In English at Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils gaining level 4 or above declined in a quarter of schools and in mathematics there was a similar reduction in nearly a fifth of schools. In the light of 1999 results at Key Stage 2, a significant minority of individual school targets look either over-optimistic or insufficiently challenging. The targets set for the attainment of looked-after children are not based on firm evidence.

Allocation of resources to priorities

29. The match between the LEA's resources and its priorities is generally satisfactory, with the exception of funding for primary schools. Although primary school budgets have had significant increases in real terms, these still fall short of the LEA's aspirations that arise from its needs-led formula. The absence of challenge to the role and purpose of services to schools, has limited the opportunities for improvements in value for money. The basis for resource allocation to key plans, such as the EDP, and to individual services is also not clearly defined.

30. The Council has a clear and comprehensive strategy for the implementation of Best Value. A continuous improvement model has been developed and a process for fundamental review is being introduced. Benchmarking is gradually playing a greater part in the work of the Council and new performance indicators are being developed. A five year programme of reviews has been devised. The LEA has identified special educational needs, early years provision and the Language for Educational Access Programme (LEAP) service for the first year of review. It has also provided training for service managers, and allocated responsibility to a senior manager for the coordination and implementation of the Education department's response to Best Value.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the Education Development Plan the LEA should:

- develop and make better use of performance data to enable a more robust audit of needs;
- ensure that all identified weaknesses are covered within priority areas;
- ensure that success criteria are clear and easy to measure;
- ensure that targets set for groups of pupils and by all individual schools are challenging and realistic and that any targets set are reviewed in light of any new evidence.

SECTION TWO: LEA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools

31. The Education department has recently restructured into four divisions. Strategy, information and external links division and the curriculum and management support division cite school improvement as their main objective and maintain close links with each other. However, support for school improvement from the other two divisions, pupil support and school support, is inconsistent, and sometimes poor.

32. School support services, such as personnel and information and communication Technology (ICT) for administration contribute positively to school improvement, but advice and support for secondary schools with significant deficit budgets are poor. A lack of transparency in the targeting of resources and funding arrangements is hampering rather than assisting schools in developing their ability to manage their own affairs and to evaluate their performance. The presentation of data and analysis of performance are not in a form which can be easily accessed by schools and hence are of limited use in the process of setting and agreeing targets. Weaknesses in the EDP make it difficult for the Education Department to evaluate its effectiveness against clearly defined and measurable success criteria. Support for improving the attendance of pupils is good and leads to improvement, but support for pupils with special educational needs or education otherwise than at school is poor, sometimes very poor, and does not lead to improvement for those pupils who may need it most.

33. A local version of the Code of Practice on LEA-school relations, circulated to all schools in November 1999, sets out clearly the responsibilities and accountabilities for supporting improvement by both the school and the LEA. Most schools visited are clear about the national principles guiding the LEA code, particularly welcoming the accepted right of schools to be given the maximum discretion to manage their own affairs and to make decisions for themselves. However, despite appropriate measures to consult and inform, fewer than half the schools visited were familiar with the local code. The move towards more openness and transparency, especially about the funding decisions, is appreciated in principle but not yet apparent in practice. A significant minority of headteachers have limited confidence that the local version of the Code of Practice will be implemented quickly and with conviction. For these schools especially, the partnership with the LEA is not built on secure relationships, based on the mutual trust and respect, needed to support school improvement.

34. The curriculum and management support division is led by the principal adviser and provides the main school improvement thrust of the LEA. It consists of nine advisers and eight advisory teachers and support staff who, together with administrative support, form the inspection and advisory support service (IASS). It has only been partially successful in establishing its key role in monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools.

35. In primary and secondary schools, the link adviser fulfils the LEA's monitoring role through a defined programme of six half-day school visits. Written reports following these visits are at the best modest and in the majority of cases are insufficient to enable a school to determine strengths and weaknesses in their practice and to plan for improvement. For successful schools visited, the LEA monitoring system fails to take account of schools' often extensive and well planned programme for self-improvement.

There are also areas, the most notable example being in assisting and challenging schools to set realistic targets, where generalist advisers are seen by the more advanced schools as lacking rigour and credibility.

36. Major shortcomings in the monitoring programme of schools are recognised by the directorate. There are sensible moves towards new models for making monitoring and support processes more coherent and challenging, and relating them more closely to schools' own self-evaluation. The authority has not, yet, defined its role in relation to the schools which are performing well and in need of a light touch approach, where six half day visits are in excess of need. The guidance of the Code of Practice on LEA-school relations and the role of advisory services is not being implemented through a standardised package of monitoring of this nature.

37. Almost all schools subscribe to a service level agreement (SLA) to buy-back a specified number of half-day advisory sessions (nine days in secondary schools and seven days in primary schools). The price that the school pays for this (just over a hundred pounds per session) falls well short of the actual cost of the service. There is confusion about the particulars of the entitlement and where, if at all, the LEA's prescribed monitoring programme fits into the agreement. Few of the schools visited had planned strategically to make best use of the SLA entitlement. Given that schools are not aware what the different components of monitoring and support cost, and the lack of agreed performance targets against which the service can be evaluated, it is difficult for schools or the LEA to judge whether the service provides value for money.

38. Although fully recognised as an area for development, it is a significant weakness that the LEA has no mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of advisers. While most schools are satisfied by the guidance from the link adviser, not all advisers are equally effective in helping schools to develop and not all have made the necessary adjustments to their role in relation to schools

Support for the use of performance data

39. The LEA made a belated start in compiling and analysing data to provide support for schools in evaluating their performance, monitoring pupils' progress and attainment against reliable benchmarks, and setting appropriate targets for individuals, groups and the whole school.

40. Using very limited resources, the range and quality of the data and analyses provided have extended and improved substantially in the last three years. This resource is strengthened by a strategy for its use in school improvement, particularly target setting. A large quantity of timely data and analysis, in tabular and graphical form, is now provided to all schools. Increasingly, some useful baseline information is included, together with local, regional, national and similar school comparisons. However, the usefulness of this information is reduced by poor presentation, and lack of clarity and guidance. This is a particular problem in schools with limited expertise in this work.

41. Of those visited, four primary and one secondary school made skilled and sophisticated use of data to facilitate effective planning for school improvement. These schools are able to judge with confidence and accuracy challenging targets, and plan the improvements which should enable them to be met. The majority of the schools

visited have not reached this stage, and four primary and one secondary remain very insecure. The two special schools visited lacked confidence and expertise in this area, and had difficulty in setting appropriate targets. The urgent need of weaker schools for well-differentiated and targeted guidance and training is not met adequately: the LEA's use of its advisers in performing this function is not sufficiently well targeted at those schools most in need.

42. Link advisers generally seek to help their schools to set appropriate targets and develop a full understanding of the importance of challenge. Most advisers stimulate constructive discussion of target setting in the schools, but this is less evident in those primary and secondary schools where there is well developed use of data and understanding of the target setting process. The degree of informed challenge presented to schools by their link advisers is not consistent.

43. Policy and plans for the development of this area of work in the LEA lack clarity in relation to the range, quantity, quality and lucidity of data provided for schools, and training needs in both the LEA and schools. Success criteria are imprecise and monitoring is less than adequate. Identification and dissemination of good practice are insufficient to aid development.

Support for literacy

44. Standards of attainment in literacy are improving at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. The 1999 National Curriculum test results for English at Key Stage 2 increased by seven percentage points, two percentage points above the national average. Currently 67 per cent of pupils attain level 4 and above against the LEA target of 77 per cent by 2002. This improvement, however, conceals major variance in the standards achieved by individual schools and significant differences in attainment between boys and girls.

45. Support for the National Literacy Strategy in Rochdale was slow to start and was characterised by unsatisfactory training which, although it covered the necessary ground, failed to enthuse. There has been a lack of urgency to support the literacy hour and a few schools wishing to implement the strategy early needed to go outside Rochdale for advice.

46. The strategy for improving literacy was not originally clear within the EDP; there is a wealth of activity identified, much of which is valuable, but insufficient analysis of data to focus the work appropriately. It was a condition of approval of the EDP that additional documentation be submitted to the DfEE demonstrating that there would be adequate coverage and targeted action. As a consequence, the LEA has developed a much clearer idea of its priorities. There is still insufficient statistical and analytical evidence, including information about gender differences in attainment, to draw schools' attention to emerging trends and issues and to enable clear targets to be set for different aspects of the English curriculum.

47. Relevant systems are now in place to provide for schools needing an intensive level of support. Training is becoming more tailored to schools' needs and the support of consultants, in both intensive and non-intensive schools, is valued. Schools appreciate the added support available through the leading literacy teacher initiative.

48. There has been intensive monitoring of the implementation of the literacy strategy. Although link advisers have received training to carry out this role, subject expertise and confidence remain variable. In the majority of schools visited, comments and notes written as a result of the monitoring are of limited value. Support and training for subject leaders have been patchy and, for a quarter of schools visited, disappointing. There are signs of improvement. In two schools visited, the link adviser had worked effectively with the subject leader to help them develop skills in monitoring the curriculum and the quality of literacy teaching.

49. Attainment in English at Key Stage 3 is lower and improving at a much slower rate than national averages. The proportion gaining Level 5 and above is eight percentage points behind national averages. Many of the LEA's initiatives to improve standards of literacy in secondary schools have only recently been established. Although schools welcome actions and activities, it is too early in the implementation of the plans to judge the impact of the work.

Support for numeracy

50. Over the last three years standards in mathematics in the primary schools improved unevenly, but broadly in line with the national trend. Standards achieved in National Curriculum tests are in line with those of statistical neighbours: they are below national averages at Key Stage 1 but in line with national averages at Key Stage 2. In 1999, the rate of improvement of pupils achieving Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 was three percentage points better than the national trend. However, the lower achieving schools are now often improving very much faster than formerly, and faster than others in the LEA. This range of attainment and improvement was exemplified in the schools visited.

51. Many primary schools in the LEA undertook some preparatory work before the National Numeracy Strategy was introduced. A few schools made appropriate changes to their resources and to teaching approaches. At least one school made successful and extensive use of the Strategy-related training offered by an earlier-starting neighbouring LEA. Schools were well prepared for the start of the Strategy, and its implementation and management are proving very successful. Action is taken to meet the expressed and observed needs of schools: a particularly successful example being a valuable starter pack of materials for mental and oral mathematics. Courses and conferences have been routinely attended by both senior and middle managers of schools, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and governors. The subsequent 'cascade' training in the schools has been well supported and monitored. Schools have responded positively to the training and in the schools visited, some indications of improving standards were found in teachers' assessments and reports of their observations. In particular, pupils' depth of understanding of number and grasp of concepts is developing well. In all, the quality of the planning and action to introduce the National Numeracy Strategy is very good.

52. The numeracy consultants are having a strong, positive impact on the schools. Many schools are very enthusiastic about their support and characterise consultants' approaches as well-informed, enthusiastic and dynamic. The confidence and development of the work of school numeracy co-ordinators is further aided by their regular meetings with the consultants and the well-produced, informative newsletter. Monitoring of the Strategy has now begun and is providing useful feedback.

53. Development planning for mathematics and numeracy includes all phases, and in particular provides appropriate support for secondary schools. Secondary departments have been represented on the initial numeracy conferences and considerable interest has been generated. Although an LEA mathematics adviser attends secondary heads of department meetings, and members of the numeracy team are working currently with one secondary school and its feeder primary schools on a pilot investigation of Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 progression issues, the secondary schools visited seek to become more fully informed and involved.

Support for ICT

54. Although a minority of the schools visited have well developed facilities for Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and their pupils receive their National Curriculum entitlement and attain satisfactory standards, the majority are well behind the national average in ICT provision and standards.

55. The LEA's ICT development plan was recently produced and sets out a sound framework for supporting the improvement of both facilities for ICT and standards of attainment in schools. It also recognises the importance of improving the use of ICT in the whole curriculum, but is less precise about how this is to be achieved. This plan, which is now in its first phase of implementation, incorporates a sound LEA strategy for the local implementation of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) initiative. This integrated programme promotes steady, carefully planned development in the schools, linked to several strands of appropriate training and thorough monitoring. All schools have been expected to produce their own ICT development plans and good first-stage support has been provided. Many schools have managed this well.

56. Up to now there has been very limited support for, and monitoring of, the work of individual schools. The very recent appointment of a teacher adviser is intended to provide schools with the support they need. As a result of lack of contact and paucity of information, a few primary and secondary schools visited feel insecure, and several feel that the phased implementation of the NGfL initiative does not fit well with their own existing plans.

57. The Education Department Information Technology (EDIT) service, which has been particularly concerned with administrative ICT, is now becoming closely involved in technical support and setting up curriculum computer facilities in schools. The services provided are of good quality, but liaison with schools is not sufficiently close to ensure their particular requirements are met. After the EDIT networking of the ICT room, one primary school found that its long established use of video-conferencing was no longer possible.

58. An impressive, commercially-sponsored project concerned with digital film making and editing has created some valuable and enduring links with professional film makers. This provides one of a number of strands of enrichment for well-motivated and gifted pupils in this work.

Support for schools causing concern

59. Following OFSTED school inspections, Rochdale has two schools in special measures and one with serious weaknesses. In addition, there are three secondary and five primary schools defined by the LEA as causing concern. The action plan within the EDP for supporting schools causing concern is clearly set out and activities are well sequenced. Success criteria are measurable but targets are not always set at a sufficiently high level.

60. There are good central organisation and support mechanisms for schools placed in special measures or judged to have serious weaknesses following OFSTED school inspections. For each school a task group is set up of senior officers and school representatives to help sharpen action plans and oversee progress made in implementing the plan. Close monitoring and good levels of support enabled two schools to be removed from the special measures category promptly. Schools feel well supported and generally make good progress. A characteristic of the work of IASS in schools with weaknesses is the high profile and successful development work undertaken with subject leaders.

61. The LEA has an unsatisfactory track record in intervening promptly and taking vigorous action where there are concerns about a school. It has tolerated especially weak financial management, inadequate leadership and low standards of attainment in circumstances where it should have acted quickly and sharply. A significant number of schools causing concern have been taken over by new headteachers without appropriate induction, support systems, or networks to help them tackle difficult challenges. About a third of schools visited have limited confidence in the ability of the LEA to support them if things go wrong, and over a quarter of headteachers expressed this view in the school survey, including 80 per cent of secondary school headteachers.

62. The LEA recognises that it has not always been aware of all of the difficulties experienced by schools. A promising new, but as yet largely untested, protocol has been devised for the early identification of schools at risk or causing for concern. The new protocol has a logical structure and sound mechanism for agreeing any additional funding and resources, but not all schools are familiar with it.

63. Several schools on the LEA's concern list were visited during the inspection. In most cases advisers are providing welcome support and guidance, although this is noticeably not as well co-ordinated as that for schools identified as a concern through OFSTED inspections. Not all schools concerned were explicitly aware that they were of specific concern to the LEA nor of the exact nature of that concern. Both of these shortcomings are covered within the new protocol for working with schools causing concern.

Support for school management

64. The LEA's promotion of support for newly qualified teachers (NQT), and the staff responsible for their induction, is effective. The schools visited, where there were NQTs, were found to be providing a very full programme of induction, including appropriate monitoring and feedback, assessment and support. The authority is aware that current funding arrangements for NQTs are inadequate. Discussions are taking place with headteachers on a more satisfactory basis for devolving the grant.

65. In recent years, apart from energetic responses to each crisis, the only regular support provided for school managers has been from the link adviser, a number of relevant LEA courses and the universally available national and other agency provision. Only recently (from April 1999) has a limited programme of induction to the LEA been available to new and acting headteachers, including introductory visits and an allocation of adviser time. No systematic support has been provided for deputy heads or middle managers in schools, and headteacher appraisal is in abeyance. After his appointment in July 1996, the current Director withdrew from the programme of LEA meetings with headteachers for two terms in 1997. The damage caused to the relationship between the LEA and some headteachers by this removal of a formal channel of communication and consultation persists.

66. A representative working party of the LEA has been discussing provision for the support of school management, which has a high priority in the EDP. These extended discussions have only now led to a modest programme of support been proposed and acted upon.

67. As things stand, although coping headteachers obtain limited support for the development of their management capabilities from the school's link adviser and out-of-borough sources, and some support for the induction of new headteachers is becoming available, this is a poor aspect of the LEA's performance.

Support for governors

68. The support for school governors is good. School governors are kept well informed on current issues and the local educational agenda. A governors' helpline ensures questions are answered fully and accurately and a much praised newsletter provides an accessible digest of the papers setting out national and local initiatives, and places current and approaching matters for discussion in their context. The clerking service, which is bought back by almost all schools, provides a very full and stable service of administrative and meeting support through its well trained and well informed officers. The range and quality of support were praised by governors in schools visited.

69. There is a substantial programme of training courses for governors including those provided by officers from the four divisions of the LEA, covering both current developments and the knowledge and skills required by governors. The quality and value of the LEA courses is recognised by governors in evaluation and attendance is satisfactory or good, but timing is often difficult for working governors. In addition, governors often accompany headteachers and staff on training courses. Such attendance on National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy courses has been specially arranged. The programme of governor support is managed with very modest expenditure and provides very good value for money.

70. The role of governors in the LEA is developing through extensive consultation, involvement in planning and preparation for changes and new developments. Governors are also increasingly involved in monitoring the work of the schools, including the management of school improvement. However, as yet very few governors take part in the target-setting meeting of headteacher and link adviser, or become involved in the decisions which effect school improvement.

71. Almost all governors met during school visits praised the increasing openness and transparency of the LEA's senior officers in much of their decision making, but noted that this is not always reflected in individual dealings with the Education office.

Recommendations:

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

- develop the skills of advisers in their role of monitoring and challenging performance and establish stronger quality assurance systems to ensure more rigour and consistency in their work;
- review the link adviser visiting programme to ensure that monitoring is in inverse proportion to success;
- accelerate the progress towards school self-evaluation;
- ensure that the cost of the LEA's support services, including the advisory element, are clear and transparent.

In order to improve support for the use of data and target setting, the LEA should:

- enhance the quality of presentation and clarity of the data and analysis provided to schools;
- arrange appropriately differentiated training for LEA and senior school staff;
- disseminate the established good practice within the LEA;
- develop a medium-term policy and practical plans for monitoring, with clear success criteria.

In order to improve support for literacy, the LEA should:

- improve its systems for providing relevant data and statistical evidence about standards in literacy;
- adopt a more strategic and focused system for monitoring literacy which makes planned use of the expertise of advisers, and which provides quality information to schools.

In order to improve support for numeracy, the LEA should:

- ensure that secondary schools are kept informed and involved in the successful numeracy developments;
- inform secondary school mathematics departments of the LEA's intentions and involve them in short-duration, clearly targeted planning for the future.

In order to improve support for ICT, the LEA should:

- provide more support for individual schools, and establish a programme of regular monitoring;
- consult upon and establish a code of practice to guide the curriculum-related work of EDIT.

In order to improve support to schools identified by the LEA as causing concern, the LEA should:

- swiftly implement the new protocol in consultation with schools.

In order to improve support for school management, the LEA should:

- take action to ensure the early introduction of adequate provision for the support of management in schools;
- provide full information about school management-related support and training provided by other groups and agencies.

In order to improve support for governors, the LEA should:

- deal more explicitly in information and training for governors with matters related to the management of school improvement.

SECTION THREE: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

72. The Council's strategic management and planning of education have fallen far short of that required to address the considerable current and future challenges it faces. The absence of strategic planning by the LEA presented a substantial agenda to the Director of Education upon his appointment in 1996. At that time the Council lacked a planning and a performance management framework. Until 1999, there was no written Council or LEA strategic plan. A business plan culture existed which relied heavily on service planning and an assumed, but unwritten, corporate identity. Sole reliance on one year service planning contributed indirectly to the reactive nature of the LEA's service management.

73. The Council has six corporate challenges for 1999 – 2001. Within the overarching headings of regenerating the borough and combating poverty and social exclusion there is action planned to:

- improve the local people's educational attainment and skills levels;

and the authority will:

- support improvements in education and training through the lifelong learning partnership group.

74. These were not well known in the schools visited and not well integrated into the LEA's planning. As stated earlier, the LEA's new lifelong learning policy and review panel has spent the majority of its time discussing issues related to pre- and post-compulsory school education and not focused sufficiently on school improvement issues which effect the bulk of Rochdale's school-age population.

75. Some of the LEA's statutory plans such as the Early Years development and childcare plan and the School Organisation Plan are adequate. However, planning and the implementation of plans across the department and the Council are often weak. A good example of this can be evidenced by a brief analysis of the Council's children's services plan 1996 – 1999. Four of the aims related to the work of the LEA have not been achieved and the under achievement has rarely been reported. We agree with schools which are understandably sceptical about the ability of the LEA to deliver the current corporate challenges or departmental aspirations.

Financial support

76. The LEA's support for school budgets, its leadership in setting the right expectations of school financial management and its challenge where challenge was necessary, have shown significant weaknesses in recent years.

77. Rochdale's strategy for funding schools and its policy and advice to schools at risk of a deficit budget has in some instances fallen far short of its aspirations, resulting in very serious consequences for the LEA. In recent years the LEA's consultation with its schools has been poor on the setting of its budget priorities both for the Education budget as a whole and for school budgets. Total delegated funding per pupil has been,

and continues to be, significantly below the national average in all three sectors. The LEA has not provided clear or adequate leadership to schools on the stewardship of their budgets.

78. DfEE Circular 2/94 makes it clear that LEAs are precluded from funding expenditure in excess of school budget shares, and where deficits nonetheless arise, schemes should make appropriate provision for their recovery. At the end of 1998/99 secondary school budget balances in Rochdale were 3.7 per cent in deficit, with seven out of 12 secondary schools having deficits of greater than 2.5 per cent of their budget share. Of greatest concern are four secondary schools that have a cumulative deficit of £1.4 million, with one school estimated to have deficit of £730,000 this year.

79. The scale of secondary school budget deficits in Rochdale is alarming. Three schools have deficits in excess of £200,000 that have now existed for over five years, with no realistic strategy for paying them off. One school's deficit, recorded at the year end April 1999 as £400,000, leapt to £730,000 following LEA investigation. The LEA has decided not to use its powers of formal intervention in this case as it is confident that the deficit can be repaid. In view of the scale and history of secondary school budget deficits in Rochdale, this optimism is misplaced.

80. Investigation of these significant and longstanding deficits by internal audit has revealed examples of poor financial management and non-compliance with its recommendations, including the absence of regular reporting of the financial position to governing bodies. In some cases, recovery plans have been of poor quality and unrealistic. Reports to members have not sufficiently highlighted the stubborn scale of the deficits in three secondary schools.

81. The financial situation of these secondary schools is not yet mirrored in the primary sector, although there are signs that primary schools may also be at risk because of the combined impact of current funding levels and of falling school rolls over the next two or three years. A revision of the formula leading to the introduction of a needs-led model is a key step in the right direction.

82. The LEA is beginning to tackle this agenda with something like the depth of strategic thinking and planning necessary. On the positive side, consultation with schools over the education budget this year has been more open, particularly over the deployment of the Standards Fund. The LEA has expressed its commitment to an increase in funding in real terms for primary schools, including the passing to schools of the full Education SSA in 2000/2001. Three of the schools visited indicated that there has been tighter management of deficits over the last six months and an improvement in the quality of advice given. Financial advice and support have also received a positive response overall in the school survey, with insufficient support for external grants the key concern to all sectors. Nevertheless, the scale and intractability of some deficits remain a significant challenge to the LEA and the schools concerned.

School infrastructure services

83. Rochdale has delegated a low proportion of its funding of management support services to schools, but the proportion increased in April 2000. Services such as finance, personnel, payroll and buildings are set out, with others, in a service specification that is basic though accessible. These services vary in quality, and

schools do not know their full cost. The LEA has also not provided schools with information on services from alternative providers. As a consequence, schools' ability to judge soundly the value for money of LEA services, and alternatives to them, is limited.

84. Personnel services are one-third delegated, and this provision achieves 100 per cent buy back. The service carries out its statutory responsibilities adequately and support for employment, recruitment, retention and employee relations is good. Comprehensive and appropriate model policies are in place and overall the service is responsive and allocated according to need.

85. The LEA's support for maintenance, refurbishment and renewal of school buildings has been weak in places, although after a slow start, it is now making better progress with its Asset Management Plan. The LEA acknowledges, on the basis of the 50 per cent of completed condition surveys, that its estimate of £28 million for the backlog of repairs and maintenance work is likely to be an underestimate. There have been 15 school closure days in the last 12 months owing to health and safety reasons. School premises and support for structural building maintenance were both judged to be below satisfactory in the school survey. The known level of need in recent years has attracted increased funding from the New Deal for Schools, which has grown from £0.92 million in 1997/98 to £2.23 million in 1999/2000. Although the LEA's level of reactive maintenance was low in 1996/97 it has increased significantly over the last two years. Schools do not always know the priority of outstanding work and have not always been given the outcomes of condition surveys. Technical advice did however achieve a better than satisfactory rating across all sectors in the school survey, and the LEA's Asset Management Policy statement is adequate.

Recommendations:

In order to improve strategic and financial management, the LEA should:

- review the work programme of the lifelong learning review panel to focus more clearly and more frequently on the key issues relating to school improvement;
- improve, and give sufficient weight to, the reporting of school budget deficits;
- rigorously implement plans to remove school budget deficits and put in place strategies to prevent them recurring on this scale.

SECTION FOUR: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

86. The LEA's SEN policy published in 1998 is poorly presented and unclear. It fails to establish a clear monitoring role in relation to the implementation of policy and use of resources. These are significant weaknesses in an LEA where the SEN budget has been overspent in three years out of the last four.

87. Strategic planning for SEN is weak. The LEA established a strategy group and action plan in September 1999, but the pace of the work is too slow and many of the recommendations of the District Audit Report of 1997/8 remain outstanding. The LEA has no realistic strategy to increase the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. In its policy statement in the EDP it declares that it will determine, by December 1999, its strategy in relation to the organisation of special schools with regard to age groupings, inclusion policies and links with mainstream schools. None of this has occurred.

88. The 17 mainstream schools visited and the LEA's special schools remain unclear about the LEA's strategic direction in relation to inclusive education and the future role and the function of its seven special schools, a high proportion for an LEA of this size.

89. Spending on SEN is considerably lower than the national average. The percentage of pupils with statements is close to the national average but the proportion of pupils with statements who attend mainstream schools is low, and the proportion attending special schools is above the national average. There are no specific plans to change this balance.

90. A high proportion of pupils are placed in special schools outside the borough. There has been insufficient strategic consideration given to the merits of securing alternative provision within Rochdale, particularly for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and those with visual impairment. Targets to reduce the number of placements out of the borough are too modest.

91. The management of the SEN budget is unsatisfactory. In three out of the previous four years the budget has overspent. At the beginning of the financial year 1999/2000, there were no reliable data or systems in place to make accurate predictions about future expenditure. Mid-year, in September 1999, the Council approved further substantial growth of £298,000 (£538,000 full year costs) as the backlog of statutory assessments began to clear. In reporting to the Executive, requesting approval for the additional spending, senior LEA officers expressed a lack of confidence in their own ability and mechanisms to forecast and analyse the factors which impact on its spending, indicating that the budget predictions remain, in their words, "uncertain" and "less sure".

92. The LEA is failing to take reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory duty to have regard to the Code of Practice in the administration of the statutory assessment process. The percentage of statements completed within the recommended timescales is exceptionally poor, falling from 11.4 per cent in 1996/7 to 3.7 per cent in 1997/8. Recent changes in the administration system improved this rate to 21 per cent in Autumn 1999. Nevertheless, this is still a poor performance, with four out of five parents, pupils and schools involved in this process still subject to undue delay. The situation is hindered by a lack of clarity with regard to who makes decisions, and based

on what criteria, regarding progression through the stages of the Code of Practice. Draft criteria exist, but these have been established very late in the day compared to other authorities. Although they were circulated to schools or members in April 1999, they are described by the LEA itself as “prepared some time ago ... incomplete ... and in need of further consideration”. In the subsequent period, such further consideration has not led to improvement.

93. In the school survey, more than half the primary schools found it necessary to respond in additional written form about poor SEN provision in the LEA. In quantitative terms, the response from primary schools on all 13 indicators relating to special educational needs was significantly below the average of all authorities surveyed and on nine of the indicators it was the lowest.

94. Almost all support for pupils with statements and those at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice is provided by a centrally funded and staffed pupil development support service (PDSS). This service is currently subject to long overdue reforms. The elements of the PDSS that provide for pupils with low incidence SEN, such as hearing, vision and speech and language impairments, are effective and welcomed in schools. However, the overwhelming majority of the PDSS provides a generic learning support service to schools. It has suffered recently from the volatility associated with large numbers of temporary appointments of staff. Although the work of individuals is sound and welcomed, the inconsistency of delivery militates against improvement for pupils and schools. In schools surveyed and visited, the LEA was frequently failing to arrange for the special educational provision specified in pupils’ statements to be made. Proposals to delegate the significant funds that resource this service are at an advanced stage. They have been subject to full consultation and are broadly welcomed in schools in principle. Nevertheless, schools are not yet clear of the detail of the proposals and, considering Rochdale’s track record on the financial management of this service, schools are anxious about inheriting future difficulties.

95. Although accorded a high priority in the EDP, the LEA makes no arrangements to monitor or review the progress and attainment of pupils with SEN, particularly in relation to the £3.5 million it spends in supporting them. The LEA does not collect information from schools to support their own monitoring and evaluation, nor does it have systems to enable schools to account for how they use SEN resources. As a consequence it provides unsatisfactory value for money.

96. A restructuring of the Department, completed in Spring 1999, has, for the first time, established a discrete pupil and student services division to manage this area. There is some cause for optimism: in one year, the backlog of statutory assessments has been reduced and the speed of conducting assessments improved. Overdue reform of the PDSS is in hand and an action plan is now in place that is driving organisational improvements. The formation of the pupil welfare and inclusion section is a sensible development. However, strategic planning remains weak and these improvements have not yet had an impact in schools.

Recommendations:

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

- rewrite the policy and produce a strategic plan for special educational needs which:
 - improves levels of inclusion;
 - gives a clear role to special schools;
 - includes effective procedures for the monitoring of SEN provision;
 - evaluates the progress made by pupils with special educational needs.
- continue to improve administrative performance and meet all relevant statutory duties;
- provide a funding strategy for special educational needs based on sound information, which is clearly understood by schools and enables them to plan their special needs provision more effectively.

SECTION FIVE: ACCESS

The supply of school places

97. The LEA 's planning for school places has been effective in the past and as a consequence it does not have a significant surplus place problem. Although in January 1999 there were 10 per cent surplus places in the secondary sector, pupil numbers are estimated to rise by 683 by 2002, which will result in a substantial reduction. Also in January 1999 there were three per cent surplus places in primary schools. However these overall figures mask the need for the LEA to support the development of four individual secondary schools (with surplus places ranging from 204 to 356) and two primary schools (with 107 and 177 surplus places): these schools have surplus places greater than 25 per cent.

98. The match between the LEA's special school provision and its numbers on roll is less satisfactory. While surplus capacity was about 10.2 per cent in January 1999, this again masks variations between schools meeting different types of SEN. For example, surplus capacity in MLD provision is high at 15 per cent. Forecasting demand for special school places requires analysis of a range of interacting factors. Such an analysis is currently absent from the LEA's planning and as a consequence resources are not deployed to best effect.

99. Both the LEA's Infant Class Size Plan and the School Organisation Plan are adequate, although they too would benefit from more developed and detailed analysis. The LEA's forecasting of pupil numbers has been insufficiently accurate over the last three years, varying by at least two per cent. The School Organisation Committee is in place although at an early stage in its development.

100. The LEA, in its Early Years development and childcare plan, gives appropriate recognition to the need to change its pattern of provision to improve its match with social need. It also aims to ensure that all four year olds receive the offer of a nursery place and to expand opportunities for three year olds. The LEA hopes to achieve this by 2001 through a range of initiatives that include closing three nursery schools, and opening 18 new nursery classes and two pre-school units, the latter to be run jointly with social services.

Admissions to Schools

101. Overall, the LEA's management of admissions has been satisfactory. Information for parents on admissions criteria and arrangements is comprehensive and clear. The LEA is also making adequate progress with the implementation of the Admissions Code of Practice with the support of a headteachers' group. Admissions criteria have operated effectively in the past when applications for school places have been from Heywood, Middleton, Rochdale and the Pennines. The LEA has not sufficiently considered the impact of the ease of access rule on oversubscribed schools if the proportion of applications were from outside these areas to increase further, as is the current trend. The LEA has successfully reduced the time taken to resolve appeals with most being heard by mid June, despite a significant overall increase in the number of appeals to secondary schools.

Promoting social inclusion

102. The LEA's Education Development Plan records unacceptable levels of disaffection among some groups of pupils and an aim to secure better and more effective ways of combating disaffection. The LEA is not on course to achieve this aim.

103. The LEA's first **behaviour support** plan, submitted to the DfEE in December 1998, is a poor document: there are few specific targets or success criteria and no plans for evaluation over time. This is a matter of greater concern because ambitious plans for this group of pupils, outlined in the Council's children's services plan 1996-1999, have failed to come to fruition.

104. In terms of key performance indicators, the LEA has more weaknesses than strengths. Although rates of **attendance** have improved slightly, year on year, for the last five years, they remain stubbornly below 90 per cent across the secondary phase. Rates of permanent exclusion in secondary schools have also reduced in the last two years and remain below national and neighbouring authority rates, but the trend is upwards again this year. The rate of fixed term exclusions rose by 26 per cent in 1998/9 and the rate of unauthorised absence has risen incrementally since 1996: these are indicators which cause concern. In addition, the proportion of pupils placed in independent special schools outside the authority is high, and rose in 1998/9. This places substantial demands upon the LEA's resources, including 12 pupils whose total annual placement fees exceed one million pounds.

105. The LEA has taken sensible measures in recent months to brigade together all services relating to social inclusion under the heading pupil welfare and inclusion. There is a clear action plan with reporting of progress to date. This has not yet had an impact in schools. The schools visited are not familiar with the behaviour support plan, nor recent initiatives such as the establishment of the education intervention team of six learning support assistants to promote improvements in behaviour in early years' environments. Schools have an expectation that the LEA should provide external support, on demand, to meet the needs of pupils with behavioural difficulties. Because the LEA has no clear, overt criteria which define when it will, or will not, intervene, then the mutual expectations of schools and the LEA differ, and the needs of pupils are not met. The LEA has been more successful in promoting improvement when it has made use of Standards Fund monies to finance school-managed initiatives, such as the £80,000 support for the pupil inclusion project established in one of the secondary schools visited.

106. The LEA's plans for a Pupil Referral Unit to meet the needs of some pupils who are permanently excluded from school were shelved. There is inadequate alternative provision in place. The LEA has good knowledge of pupils who are out of school and records the attainment of **looked-after children** but this does not form the basis of the targets it has set. During the inspection there were 190 pupils who were excluded, chronic non-attenders or not on a school roll: of these, 90 per cent were receiving less than five hours education per week and a quarter were not recorded as receiving any provision at all. This is unacceptable. The LEA manages an imaginative 'Access to Education' scheme for disaffected pupils in Years 10 and 11 but it is over-subscribed and insufficient to meet the level of need. A sample of case files revealed that the LEA's response to emerging issues of disaffection such as chronic truancy, exclusion

and instability at home is too little, too late. The LEA is also failing in its statutory duty to ensure that **children who are educated at home** by their parents are receiving appropriate education: no visits to these families to monitor the quality of education have been made by the LEA for two years.

107. The LEA's education welfare service, which supports improvements in pupil attendance on a day-to-day basis, provides a better model of intervention. It is well managed and clearly targets its efforts on schools with greatest need. Although this is not always popular, it is effective, and for the first time this year more than half of the secondary schools have attendance rates above 90 per cent. The commitment of individual education welfare officers was highly praised in schools.

108. The LEA has a small but significant and sustained Traveller population, including children with particular and complex needs. The number of **Travellers'** children registered in the LEA's schools in 1998/9 was 114. Successes in improving school attendance and involving parents in activities within pre-school groups and schools have been particularly influential.

109. Providing for the needs of these families and their children has been and is a story of outstanding and unprecedented success. The skill, imagination, persistence and dedication of this small team has not only established an area of excellence within the Rochdale, but has become a national leader in this field.

Support for ethnic minorities

110. Rochdale has a substantial ethnic minority population. The number of pupils entering the education service with little or no English is increasing. This figure was 2,600 in 1980 and now exceeds 4,000.

111. The service consists of a central support LEAP group, which sets out to address the disadvantage caused by language factors. The group works intensively and very effectively in teams in the 24 schools with significant ethnic minority populations. Many other schools have much smaller numbers of pupils with an EAL need. These schools are intended to be provided with proportional support, but some have to press hard to obtain it. The annual survey of language need conducted throughout the LEA using standardised language descriptors provides useful data. However, sudden changes in patterns of choice of school can lead to new demands which, belatedly, catch the service by surprise. One school in the west of the borough suddenly acquired a 20 per cent ethnic minority population with a serious EAL need. The school has been left to its own devices whilst it has attempted to persuade officers that a need exists.

112. The intensive language work in schools is very successful. Analysis of ethnic minority achievement shows that as pupils acquire English, their attainment becomes similar to, or exceeds, the rest of community. Ethnic minority groups underperform at baseline, at the end of Key Stage 1 and, to a lesser extent, at the end of Key Stage 2. At GCSE they reach similar attainment pattern to whole population.

113. The language work of the service is successfully supplemented by a resource centre with loan facilities, a good, integrated training programme and a well managed and effective programme of work in the community, including fostering the involvement of parents with the school. The LEA has an appropriate equal opportunities policy and

its response to the findings of the Macpherson Report is of good quality. The service is extensively supported in this range of work by other groups on the LEA's team and other agencies.

Recommendations:

In order to promote the social inclusion of pupils who are not in school, the LEA should:

- Share with schools clear criteria which define levels of intervention;
- Improve and increase the quality and quantity of educational provision for pupils who are not in school and monitor that provision with greater rigour.

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the Education Development Plan, the LEA should:

- develop and make better use of performance data to enable a more robust audit of needs;
- ensure that all identified weaknesses are covered within priority areas;
- ensure that success criteria are clear and easy to measure;
- ensure that targets set for groups of pupils and by all individual schools are challenging and realistic and that any targets set are reviewed in light of any new evidence.

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

- develop the skills of advisers in their role of monitoring and challenging performance and establish stronger quality assurance systems to ensure more rigour and consistency in their work;
- review the link adviser visiting programme to ensure that monitoring is in inverse proportion to success;
- accelerate the progress towards school self-evaluation;
- ensure that the cost of the LEA's support services, including the advisory element, are clear and transparent.

In order to improve support for the use of data and target setting, the LEA should:

- enhance the quality of presentation and clarity of the data and analysis provided to schools;
- arrange appropriately differentiated training for LEA and senior school staff;
- disseminate the established good practice within the LEA;
- develop a medium-term policy and practical plans for monitoring, with clear success criteria.

In order to improve support for literacy, the LEA should:

- improve its systems for providing relevant data and statistical evidence about standards in literacy;

- adopt a more strategic and focused system for monitoring literacy which makes planned use of the expertise of advisers and which provides quality information to schools.

In order to improve support for numeracy, the LEA should:

- ensure that secondary schools are kept informed and involved in the successful numeracy developments;
- inform secondary school mathematics departments of the LEA's intentions and involve them in short-duration, clearly targeted planning for the future.

In order to improve support for information and communication technology (ICT), the LEA should:

- provide more support for individual schools, and establish a programme of regular monitoring;
- consult upon and establish a code of practice to guide the curriculum-related work of EDIT.

In order to improve support to schools identified by the LEA as causing concern, the LEA should:

- swiftly implement the new protocol in consultation with schools.

In order to improve support for school management, the LEA should:

- take action to ensure the early introduction of adequate provision for the support of management in schools;
- provide full information about school management-related support and training provided by other groups and agencies .

In order to improve support for governors, the LEA should:

- deal more explicitly in information and training for governors with matters related to the management of school improvement.

In order to improve strategic and financial management, the LEA should:

- review the work programme of the lifelong learning review panel to focus more clearly and more frequently on the key issues relating to school improvement;
- improve, and give sufficient weight to, the reporting of school budget deficits;
- rigorously implement plans to remove school budget deficits and put in place strategies to prevent them recurring on this scale.

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

- rewrite the policy and produce a strategic plan for special educational needs which:
 - improves levels of inclusion;
 - gives a clear role to special schools;
 - includes effective procedures for the monitoring of SEN provision;
 - evaluates the progress made by pupils with special educational needs.
- continue to improve administrative performance and meet all relevant statutory duties;
- provide a funding strategy for special educational needs based on sound information, which is clearly understood by schools and enables them to plan their special needs provision more effectively.

In order to promote the social inclusion of pupils who are not in school, the LEA should:

- share with schools clear criteria which define levels of intervention;
- improve and increase the quality and quantity of educational provision for pupils who are not in school and monitor that provision with greater rigour.

© Crown copyright 2000

**Office for Standards in Education
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE**

Tel: 0207 421 6800

This report may be produced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are produced verbatim and without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

A further copy of this report can be obtained from the Local Education Authority concerned:

Rochdale LEA
Education Offices
PO Box 70
Municipal Offices
Smith Street
Rochdale
OL16 1YD

It may also be downloaded from the OFSTED website: www.ofsted.gov.uk