



Office for Standards  
in Education

**Oldham**

**Local Education Authority**

**Inspection Report**

**Date of Inspection: May 2004**

**Reporting Inspector: Malcolm Wall**



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## **Basic information**

Name of LEA:	Oldham Local Education Authority
LEA number:	353
Address of LEA:	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council PO Box 40, Civic Centre West Street Oldham OL1 1XJ
Reporting Inspector:	Malcolm Wall
Date of Inspection:	May 2004

## Summary

### Introduction

Oldham is an urban borough with some outlying rural areas and villages. There is severe deprivation in the majority of the council's wards. Overcoming the aftermath of civil disturbances in May 2001 has been a major challenge for the whole community. In the wake of these there have been a number of official inquiries and reports. The Oldham Independent Review reported in December 2001. A subsequent inspection by the Audit Commission in November 2002 found the corporate governance in Oldham council to be weak. It was followed by a progress assessment report in December 2003. In May 2004 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee reported on social cohesion. They were impressed by much of what they saw but were concerned that many of the underlying issues were not being tackled quickly enough.

A substantial programme of regeneration and investment is beginning to bring improvements and new facilities. However, the increased concentration of minority ethnic communities in some schools and areas of the borough poses a significant challenge to the council's priority of promoting community cohesion.

Standards of attainment are almost always below national averages but are generally in line with those found in similar authorities<sup>1</sup>. Improvement rates are above the national rates for mathematics and science at Key Stage 2 and for all three core subjects at Key Stage 3. They are in line with national trends for the percentage of pupils gaining five or more higher grades at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level.

Since the previous inspection in 2000, there have been significant changes within both the council and the education and culture directorate. In September 2001, a new political constitution was introduced. In May 2003, Labour took control of the council from the Liberal Democrats. However, both parties regard education as a major priority; schools and other major stakeholders report no major changes of emphasis or direction.

In December 2003, the executive director for education and culture was seconded to the council's corporate development team to prepare for the implications of the Government's Green Paper 'Every Child Matters'. The education and culture directorate has subsequently been restructured and strengthened, with two senior officers temporarily assuming leadership responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Oldham LEA's statistical neighbours are: Rochdale; Kirklees; Walsall; Tameside; Stoke-on-Trent; Coventry; Bolton; Southampton; City of Derby; Salford.

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**Main findings**

**Summary:** Oldham local education authority (LEA) has made highly satisfactory progress since the previous inspection and is very clear about its strengths and weaknesses. Its overall effectiveness and capacity for further improvement are also highly satisfactory. Strategic planning for education is a strength, in particular the school improvement strategy and its contribution to raising achievement and improving community cohesion. Improvement rates for pupils are mainly above the national rates at Key Stage 2 and for all three core subjects at Key Stage 3. The gap in the performance of minority ethnic pupils and key vulnerable groups is closing. There has been a marked improvement in the provision made for meeting special educational needs (SEN). Since the civil disturbances in 2001, the education service and schools have collaborated effectively to introduce a range of initiatives to extend the cultural awareness of pupils. There remains more to do, particularly in encouraging all schools to contribute fully to community cohesion, but schools are optimistic about the future.

<b>Areas of strength</b>	<b>Areas of weakness/for development</b>
<b>Corporate leadership of education</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determination to promote community cohesion through improving all schools and raising standards</li> <li>• Education plans are closely linked to the council's key priorities</li> <li>• Good support for early years education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak corporate management information systems</li> <li>• Lack of clarity about the council's central charges to education</li> <li>• Slowness in reviewing the formula for funding schools</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy for education and its implementation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy for school improvement</li> <li>• Monitoring and challenging schools, and good use of high quality data to target support to schools</li> <li>• Maintaining and replacing school buildings</li> <li>• Planning school places, and supporting parents in getting a school place of their choice for their children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three schools recently placed into special measures</li> </ul>
<b>Support to improve education in schools</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for raising standards at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and the achievement of minority ethnic pupils</li> <li>• Support and training for governors</li> <li>• Helping schools to recruit and keep teachers and other staff</li> <li>• The school improvement service, and financial and human resource services for schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient support for gifted and talented pupils in primary schools</li> <li>• Insufficient co-ordination of management services to support schools</li> <li>• Lack of clarity about the costs of some services</li> </ul>
<b>Support for special educational needs</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procedures for statutory assessment and early intervention, and the firm commitment to the inclusion of pupils in mainstream schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of parental supporters, particularly from minority ethnic communities, to work with the parent partnership</li> <li>• Complexity of funding for mainstream schools</li> </ul>
<b>Support for social inclusion</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good quality classroom support material and a wide range of initiatives in place to promote community cohesion</li> <li>• Provision for pupils without a school place and support for improving attendance in schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient involvement of all communities in the initiatives to improve community cohesion</li> <li>• Not all looked after children have an up-to-date personal education plan</li> <li>• Low representation of minority ethnic groups in middle and senior management posts in the council's workforce</li> </ul>



**Recommendations**

**Key recommendations**

**Targeting of resources:** urgently review the formula for funding schools to ensure that resources are targeted appropriately.

**Effectiveness of the identification of underperforming schools:** ensure consistent challenge and monitoring of schools to improve the early identification of those causing concern.

**Community cohesion:** strengthen engagement with partners and communities to further improve community cohesion.

**Other recommendations**

**Corporate leadership of education**

**Targeting of resources**

- Review the allocation of central support charges to education and ensure that these provide value for money.
- Work with schools to reduce high surplus balances.

**Strategies to promote continuous improvement:** develop service improvement plans by ensuring greater consistency in the specification of the resources allocated to priorities and by strengthening the quality of evaluation.

**Strategy for education and its implementation**

**Support to improve education in schools**

**Support for gifted and talented pupils:** devise and implement a strategy to support gifted and talented pupils in all primary schools.

**Planning and provision of services to support school management:** improve the coherence and co-ordination of the arrangements for offering management services to schools.

**Support for special educational needs**

**Value for money for SEN:** put in place arrangements to further delegate special educational needs resources to schools as part of the wider review of the funding formula.

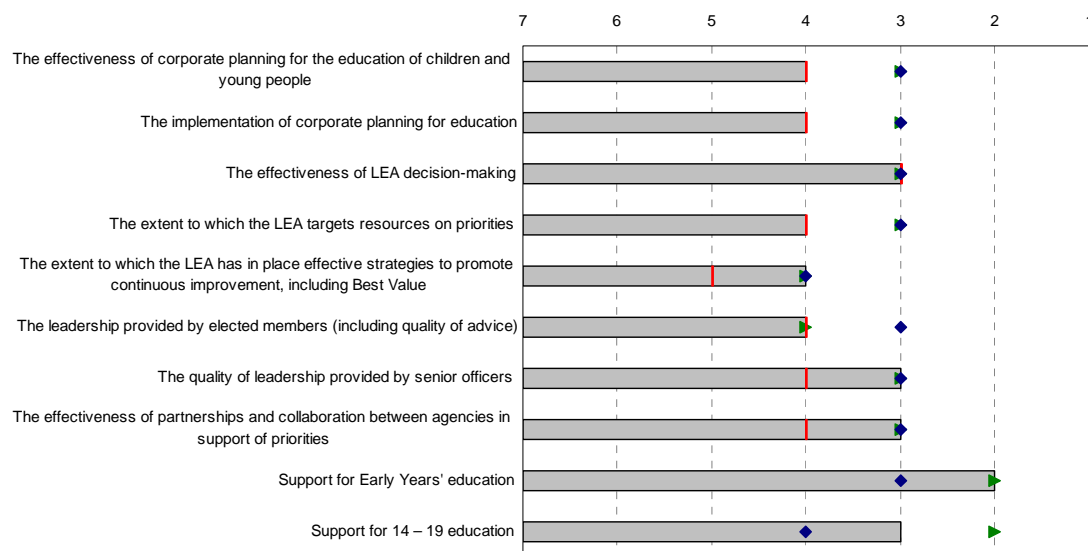
**Support for social inclusion**

**Looked after children:** ensure that all looked after children have personal education plans that are regularly reviewed and updated.

**Promoting race equality:** ensure that the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 are met, by monitoring and reporting the composition of the workforce.

## Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

### Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

### Corporate planning for education and its implementation

1. Corporate planning and its implementation continue to be satisfactory. Although education has a high priority within the council's plans, a corporate governance inspection in 2002 identified significant weaknesses in the council's corporate capacity. As a consequence, the council is now the subject of a formal engagement by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and has been required to produce an improvement plan. This is one of a series of external interventions that have been necessary to move the council forward. A monitoring board, which regularly assesses progress, now provides a clear focus to the council's corporate planning in order to drive the improvement necessary.

2. The collective determination of elected members, officers, schools and other partners to promote community cohesion and economic regeneration through raising standards and improving schools is unambiguous. Strategic planning in the education and culture directorate is a strength. The Education Development Plan (EDPs) effectively links the work of the directorate to the council's corporate objectives, as do individual service improvement plans. The directorate does not yet have in place an overarching strategic plan but plans are in place to develop one.

3. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) published its community strategy in 2002. This built on the earlier work of the Oldham Partnership and the Oldham Independent Review commissioned in the aftermath of the civil disturbances in 2001. The community

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strategy rightly identifies a vision for the borough that places well-educated people at the heart of a local learning partnership. However, subsequent and extensive consultation has refocused the vision and strategy for the regeneration of Oldham on how to translate the community strategy's broad statements and aspirations into workable policies which engage local people. The outcome, *Oldham Beyond* published in April 2004, provides a clearer and more imaginative strategic direction for the borough. Developing a learning community is prominent among the major themes, which are coherent and support the vision of a self-confident community, at ease with itself and celebrating its diversity and prosperity. Alongside this, the draft corporate plan 2004-2007 brings together strategic planning under six corporate themes. However, the implementation and achievement of the council's priorities and ambitions for education are not always well supported by sufficiently rigorous business planning and performance improvement in all services of the council.

4. Although improving, weaknesses remain in the provision and use of management information to drive improvement across directorates. Education and culture has good quality performance data, which it uses well with schools. However, data and management information are less accessible elsewhere in the council. This hinders, for example, monitoring of the composition of the workforce and carrying out the council's human resources responsibilities. Performance management is strongest in the education and culture directorate but is developing from a low base in the rest of the council. Progress is reviewed regularly and the introduction of a range of performance indicators for the quarterly monitoring meeting is a positive step forward. Although the council's improvement plan links resources to priorities, other corporate and directorate plans are not yet as securely linked to the medium-term financial strategy. There is a strong tradition in Oldham of managing services within budgets, and the education budget is well controlled. Nevertheless, Best Value reviews have not driven efficiency savings and service improvement plans (SIPs), which have only high-level financial information, do not show clearly the link between necessary resources and improvement.

5. Recent appointments to the corporate management team have strengthened the council's capacity for further improvement. It is also developing, with a neighbouring authority, a strategic partnership to replace its information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and to provide efficient support services to underpin the front-line work of directorates, for example education and culture and social services.

### **Decision-making**

6. The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making remain highly satisfactory. Thorough consultation and communication with schools and other stakeholders are continued strengths of this LEA. Major proposals in education are communicated well to schools; their views are always sought, listened to, and influence decisions. Members and officers adopt a careful and considered approach to decision-making, as exemplified by the successful reorganisation of special school provision. However, some decisions, such as the registration of the pupil referral unit (PRU) and the review of the funding formula for schools, have not been made quickly enough.

7. The council has modernised its structure, with clear levels of delegation to the cabinet member for education and culture, and to senior officers. Transparency is ensured

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through the publication of the council's forward plan, which details when key decisions are to be taken. There is a strong political consensus among elected members about education matters and the part it has in improving community cohesion and supporting economic regeneration: this benefits decision-making. Elected members, including the opposition spokesperson for education, have ready access to senior officers and regular briefing sessions keep them well informed. Headteachers rightly appreciate the continuity and stability in the funding of education over the last three years.

### **Targeting of resources**

8. Targeting of resources to priorities is satisfactory overall. The council has prioritised funding for education and schools, and consistently allocated slightly above the Education Formula Spending Share to the education service. A broad medium-term financial plan is in place which confirms the council's intention to pass on annual increases in the government's grant to education and social services, and to maintain spending on school budgets and centrally provided pupil support services as the highest priority for education spending.

9. The annual process of challenging the basis of budgets in the education service ensures that the main areas of expenditure are scrutinised against council priorities for potential efficiency savings or budget growth. Allocation of the limited budget growth for 2004-05 broadly followed areas identified as priorities within education. However, a lack of comparative costs did not allow potential efficiency savings to be readily identified. As a result, Oldham is not fully aware of its costs at service level and, in particular, central charges from corporate support services.

10. Budgetary control within the LEA is generally sound, although processes are cumbersome and too time consuming. Service managers are not all sufficiently experienced at budget management; some rely too heavily on finance officers. Plans are rightly in place to address this. Very few schools have budget deficits; the expectation is that schools manage within the resources available. However, school balances are too high, with almost one in three schools holding balances in excess of 10%.

11. Good consultation on budgets takes place with schools. Since the previous inspection a new funding formula for special schools has been successfully implemented. The need for, and use of, out-of-borough placements has reduced as funding has been redirected to more cost-effective and good-quality local provision. Changes have also been made to protect activity previously funded by specific Standard Funds grants, and recently to better support schools with high levels of pupil mobility.

12. However, differences in the funding of primary and secondary schools remain significant, even though the overall level of school funding is in line with similar authorities. Primary schools receive less funding, and secondary more funding per pupil, than in similar authorities and other metropolitan councils. Although a funding formula review has very recently been commissioned by the Schools Forum, intended to take effect from April 2006, this has not been addressed quickly enough.

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**Recommendations**

- Review the allocation of central support charges to education and ensure that these provide value for money.
- Work with schools to reduce high surplus balances.
- Urgently review the formula for funding schools to ensure that resources are targeted appropriately.

**Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value**

13. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved and is now satisfactory. Following a corporate governance inspection in 2002, the council implemented an improvement plan in April 2003. As a result, a new approach to performance management is being implemented. There is now regular reporting of performance data and clearer reporting of performance.

14. The council's improvement plan and the EDP are the main focus for improvement within the education and culture directorate, pending the production of the new corporate plan. The education service uses the Excellence Model (EFQM) as a performance management framework. This has brought a sharper and shared focus, targeting areas for improvement, for example in the way the Ofsted action plan has been monitored and integrated into SIPs. These plans establish objectives, timescales, performance information and targets for the current year and broadly align with corporate objectives. While the plans underpin the work of education services, their quality varies from satisfactory to good, with some weaknesses in the identification of targets, the allocation of resources and in evaluation.

15. Best Value reviews have resulted in improvement in the education welfare service and SEN services. In both cases, the allocation of additional resources improved performance. However, the council has not used Best Value reviews in general to generate efficiency savings, relying too heavily on vacancies in staffing as a way of achieving short-term budget savings.

**Recommendation**

- Develop service improvement plans by ensuring greater consistency in the specification of the resources allocated to priorities and by strengthening the quality of evaluation.

**Leadership by elected members and advice given to them**

16. Elected members continue to provide satisfactory leadership. Schools have not always been convinced about the effectiveness of that leadership but this view has changed. Schools now report favourably about members' contributions as governors, on visits to schools by the scrutiny panel and, in particular, the increasingly prominent leadership of members in initiatives supporting community cohesion in Oldham.

17. Relationships between senior officers, the leader of the council and the cabinet member for education are strong. Regular briefings keep members informed and a quarterly

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performance review enables progress against targets to be monitored satisfactorily. The work of scrutiny is improving now that an officer support team assists with the management of the work programme. Members recognise that the level of challenge to officers has not always been sufficiently robust. Advice to members is usually timely and well focused on steps needed to bring about improvement, for example improving the level of attendance in Oldham schools. However, the quality of management information available to them, particularly from the social services directorate, has lacked reliability, although this is improving.

### **Leadership by senior officers**

18. The leadership by senior officers has improved and is now highly satisfactory. The education and culture directorate's senior management team was restructured temporarily late last year to enable the secondment of the executive director to the corporate officer team of the council in order to strengthen its capacity to implement the government's Green Paper 'Every Child Matters'. An additional assistant director post was created, and two existing and very experienced officers are filling the key posts of executive director and assistant director for school improvement.

19. Senior officers are very clear that the focus of their work with schools is to raise standards achieved by all pupils, as well as contributing to the council's priorities for improving community cohesion and regenerating the economy of the borough. These priorities are shared with, and supported fully, by headteachers, governors and other stakeholders. Schools appreciate and respect the open, honest and challenging dialogue with officers at all levels.

### **Strategic partnerships**

20. Partnership work and collaboration with other agencies is highly satisfactory. There are clear links between the council's strategic plans, such as the preventive strategy, and those of its partners, for example the Primary Care Trust. The council and its partners are beginning to use data effectively to monitor the quality and impact of partnership activities and to better co-ordinate and target resources. Collaborative work with agencies such as the police, the Primary Care Trust, the Connexions service and the Youth Offending Team is strong and successful.

21. Elected members, senior officers and headteachers are very active partners in Oldham's Community Strategy, which is overseen by the LSP. The LEA plays a full role in contributing to the vision for community cohesion in Oldham and gives enthusiastic support to the schools' linking projects which provide a good range of activities for young people from different communities to meet together. In addition, a range of crime and safety projects, the weekly reporting of racist incidents, and support to ethnically diverse parents groups by the early years services, all contribute to the LSP's aspiration to embed community cohesion. However, not all these activities and achievements are communicated well enough to community groups and parents. As a result, they perceive there to be limited and inconsistent activity, and slow progress.

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22. The integrated early years service and the recently established Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership also represent effective collaborative work with external agencies. Strategic planning with health, and social services, is much improved and the efficient completion of statutory statements of SEN and improvements in access to child and mental health services are a direct result. Nevertheless, schools still experience difficulties with access to some front-line services, in particular social workers and some specialist services such as speech and language support.

### **Support for Early Years**

23. Support for early years is good. This is a key priority in the council's corporate plans and the EDP. The strong support of elected members is reflected in a level of spending per child that is 50% higher than the average nationally and in similar authorities. The LEA provides strong leadership and effective support for the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. Its members have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are able to make clear links with the LEA's overall strategy for the Foundation Stage and with Oldham's community cohesion strategy.

24. A key feature and strength of the service is the integrated nature of, and local support for, both maintained and non-maintained settings. The range and quality of this support is good, as are close links between the early years service and the children's information service. As a result, the LEA is making good progress in raising achievement and Foundation Stage profiling is now used in all settings. Plans are in place to provide further training for the use of electronic profiles. The quality of early years teaching is improving and targets to increase the range of funded nursery education provision are being met. Providers feel well supported and value opportunities to share good practice.

25. Planning for the expansion of the number of Children's Centres is linked sensitively to the community cohesion strategy, and initially targets areas of greatest deprivation. This builds on the effective work of the early years service with ethnically diverse groups of parents and, in particular, the recruitment of staff fluent in the main minority ethnic Asian languages. Although there is more work to do to extend the impact of the service and share these achievements, in particular with minority ethnic parents in the community, the strong leadership has very good capacity to further develop this work.

### **Support for 14-19 education**

26. Support for 14-19 education is highly satisfactory. Standards of attainment and attendance levels are below national averages but in line with similar LEAs. Very marked progress has been made in broadening opportunities for 14- to 19-year-olds, with a significant increase in the number of 14- to 16-year-olds studying a wide range of vocational courses. This has not yet resulted in an improvement in staying-on rates into education and training but participation rates (81%) including work-based training are higher. The LEA works closely with the Connexions service to deliver good quality advice and guidance to pupils.

27. A large number of plans relate to 14-19 provision. The need for an overarching strategy has been recognised and is currently being prepared, with a useful start made on establishing a statement of principles for an entitlement curriculum. A major driving force

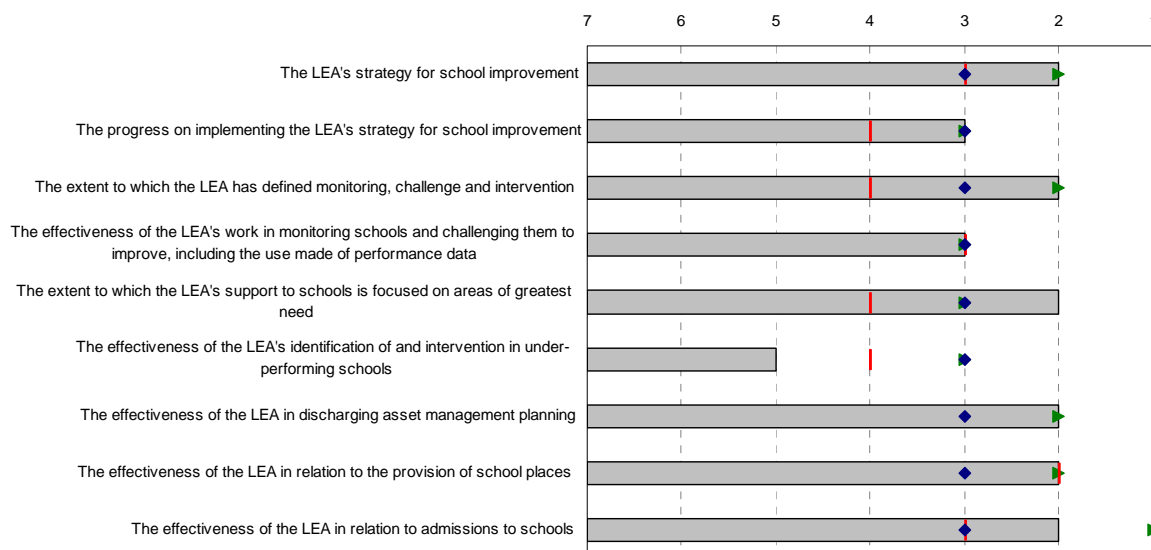
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for improvement has been the strength of the 14-19 partnership and further improvements are planned. For instance, in September 2004, nine schools, two colleges and four training providers plan to deliver 52 cross-borough courses for Year 10 pupils. These initiatives are valued by teachers and are securely underpinned by e-learning resources, a 13-19 website and on-line materials for use in careers guidance.



## Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

### Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor

### The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

28. The quality of the school improvement strategy has improved and is now good. In particular, the links with strategies for SEN and social exclusion are now clear, are explicit in the respective strategic planning, and are based on a thorough audit of the performance and needs of schools and children and young people in the borough. Strong partnerships ensure very good links between the EDP, plans for Excellence in Oldham, and other initiatives. The EDP itself is highly satisfactory and sets a clear direction for improvement, although some success criteria are too imprecise. The school improvement service has been successfully reorganised in full consultation with schools. Good teamwork across services underpins the successful implementation of national initiatives, including the primary strategy. The combined effect is strategic and coherent, and demonstrates that there is good capacity for further improvement.

29. The implementation of the strategy is highly satisfactory and standards have risen. The recommendations from the previous inspection by Ofsted have been tackled successfully. Good progress has been made in improving provision for SEN and social inclusion, and in improving the attainment and standards of behaviour of looked after children and other vulnerable groups. There has, however, been only mixed success in meeting targets set within the EDP. The LEA exceeded its targets for looked after children and met its targets for attendance. The targets set for pupils' attainment at Key Stage 2 were unrealistic and have not been achieved. However, the more achievable targets set for attainment at GCSE have also been missed. Appropriate action has been taken, including establishing targets

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which are now more firmly based on pupils' prior attainment. Monitoring is very thorough, appropriate action is taken in response to any slippage in the progress of the strategy, and evaluation is satisfactory.

### **The LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support**

30. The LEA's definition of, and its procedures for, monitoring, challenge and, where necessary, intervening in schools are good. There are real strengths in the implementation of these procedures and in the targeting of its support to schools with the greatest need. Despite the very recent increase in the number of schools requiring special measures, on balance, the LEA's targeting of resources to areas of greatest need is good.

31. Procedures have been strengthened since the previous inspection and further improvements are in train. The LEA has addressed the recommendation in the previous inspection report by introducing an effective and differentiated programme of challenge and support. Schools are placed into one of four categories based on the annual review conducted with link advisers which results in an agreed performance statement (APS). Schools identified as needing additional or intensive challenge are allocated more time and this is built into a school support plan. The LEA works closely with its partners to ensure that resources allocated to secondary schools through Excellence in Cities (EiC), the Leadership Incentive Grant and other initiatives, are targeted to need. This includes using expertise from successful schools, disseminating good practice, brokering secondments and use of the consultants supporting the national strategies to improve teaching and learning.

32. All services now contribute to the challenge process and identify sources and levels of support to be offered to schools causing concern. This is highly satisfactory and underpinned by very good-quality data. The LEA provides schools with good software to track individual pupils' progress. This is leading to improved target-setting and more accurate identification of schools' strengths and weaknesses.

### **Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools**

33. Up until very recently, there had been a decline in the number of schools causing concern since the previous inspection. When schools have been placed in special measures the LEA has provided extensive and effective support and schools have been removed from the category within the recommended timescales. Consequently, for a period in 2003 there were no schools in special measures or having serious weaknesses. In contrast, three schools have fallen into special measures in 2004; reflecting an increase nationally in the proportion of schools judged to require special measures in this period. In each case the schools' weaknesses had been identified by the LEA and support was in place. Despite the LEA's efforts, in two schools, a reluctance to accept the LEA's diagnosis of their weaknesses had adversely affected progress. In the case of the other school there had, however, been insufficient challenge by the LEA.

34. The LEA has diagnosed the reasons for recent unsatisfactory performance and has, for instance, strengthened the challenge offered by link advisers. The supporting framework

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is robust and the capacity for further improvement is good. Nevertheless, this number of schools is above the trend nationally and the LEA's current performance is unsatisfactory.

***Recommendation***

- Ensure consistent challenge and monitoring of schools to improve the early identification of those causing concern.

**Admissions to schools**

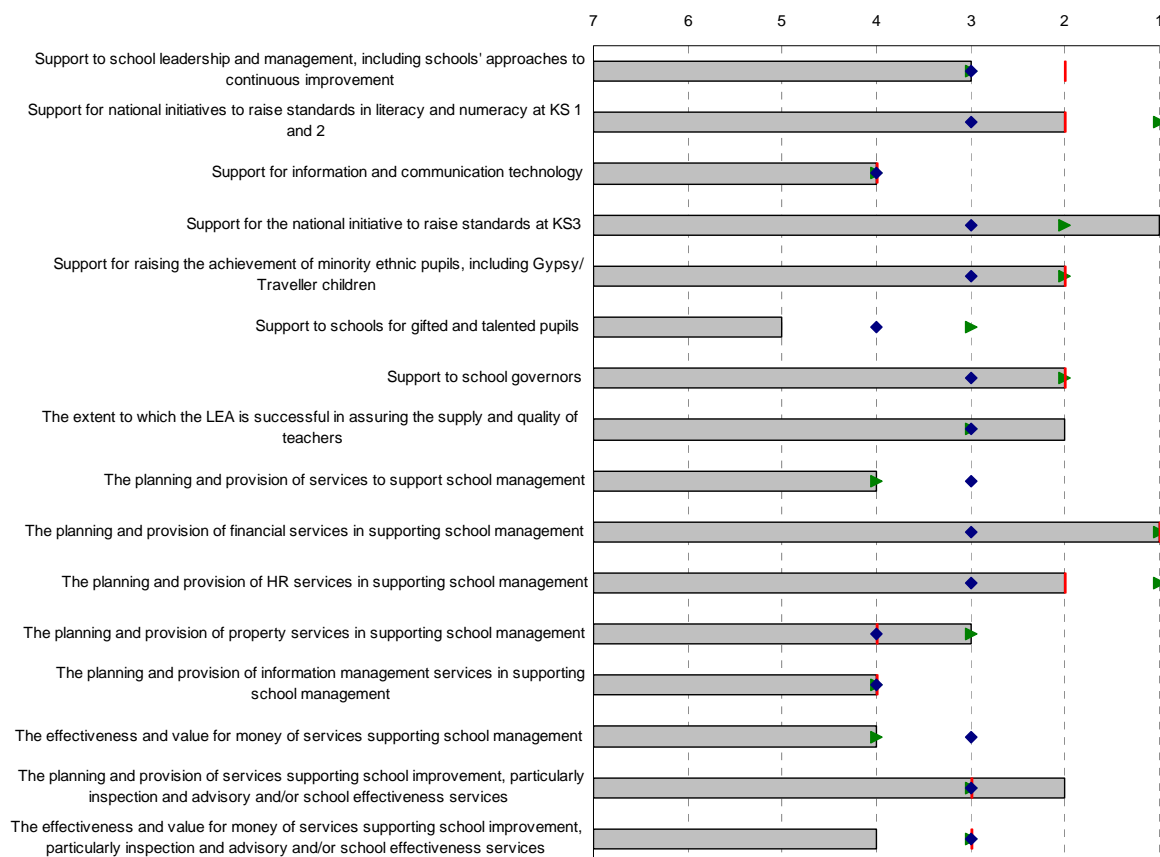
35. The LEA has made significant improvements in this aspect of its work, which is now good. In 2003, 96% of pupils were allocated to their parents' first choice of school. Good information booklets for parents, and the help provided by officers to parents and schools to interpret and understand the admissions policy, contribute significantly to the success of Oldham's procedures. Translation of information on admissions is available for minority ethnic families. The practice of inviting parents to open meetings at the school they choose as second preference is particularly good. Formal feedback from parents and schools is taken very seriously in evaluating the service and has led to year-on-year improvement.

36. The LEA pays particular attention to the council's community cohesion policy and does all that can be reasonably expected through its well-run administration of the admissions process. Although the LEA and the diocesan authorities have very good working relationships and are working with faith schools to improve community cohesion, the location of these schools, and in particular their admission criteria, represents a significant barrier to overcoming the increased concentration of minority ethnic pupils in other secondary schools.

37. Co-ordinated admissions arrangements operate now for pupils with SEN, vulnerable pupils, looked after children and for the reintegration of excluded pupils. For example, the admission criteria give top priority to looked after children. A designated officer is taking steps to further improve arrangements for the admission and transfer of pupils outside the normal admission cycle to ensure that school places are found quickly. Preparations are at an advanced stage for the implementation of co-ordinated admissions arrangements across all schools from September 2004. Although not inspected through detailed fieldwork, the LEA's associated work in the planning of school places is good. Plans are in place to ensure the effective management of school places through the School Organisation Committee, the partnership with the diocesan authorities and a programme of removing surplus places in schools.

### Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

#### Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

#### Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

38. This area of the LEA's work is highly satisfactory. In several respects it is good, particularly in the quality of advice, support and training for school self-evaluation. This culminates in an agreed annual performance statement which is underpinned by comprehensive procedures for co-ordinating information on each school together with high quality pupil performance data. Services to support school management are satisfactory overall. Finance support is very good and the human resources service is good. However, brokerage arrangements are still at an early stage and traded services are not sufficiently co-ordinated, and what is offered continues to be piecemeal.

39. A comprehensive range of information from all the services in education is used to prioritise LEA support and challenge the schools. The LEA knows the vast majority of its schools well and is effective in bringing relevant partners and agencies together to determine

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support strategies for individual schools. Officers actively encourage networking between schools and the sharing of good practice. This is a particular strength in the secondary phase mainly because of the work of EiC. The school development service has used the strengths identified through the APS process well to build up a register of good practice in and across schools.

40. The APS is a crucial element in the LEA's strategy for improving schools and is used well to allocate consultant support for leadership and management through the primary and Key Stage 3 strategies or the Leadership Improvement Grant incentive. This is further supplemented by comprehensive training programmes for governors, teachers and support staff.

### **Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3**

41. The LEA continues to give good support to primary schools through a well co-ordinated primary strategy, although results at Key Stage 2 have plateaued. The Key Stage 3 strategy has been launched since the previous inspection and is very good; it is well implemented and is helping to raise standards. Results at Key Stage 3 remain below national averages but the gap between standards nationally and in the LEA has narrowed in all three core subjects in the last two years.

42. Data are used rigorously to target resources for all the national initiatives and effective support is provided by well-qualified consultants. The strategies are well resourced and schools report that relationships with their consultants are excellent. Strong teamwork between primary and secondary consultants ensures consistent messages to schools regarding teaching and learning and assessment for learning across the key stages. Links to minority ethnic support workers and with the Education Action Zone are effective.

43. All strands of the Key Stage 3 strategy are now in place, although the introduction of the behaviour and attendance theme was initially slowed by difficulties with recruitment. Some innovative practice has been recognised by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES); particularly the pioneering work of a link consultant in co-ordinating support within schools. Subject consultants offer support for teaching and learning which is well matched to schools' identified needs and this flexibility is highly valued by the schools.

### **Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children**

44. This aspect of the LEA's work remains good. Levels of attainment and attendance are improving at a rate above the national trend for Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage pupils, although they remain below national averages. The targets set are very challenging and, while work remains to be done, the effective and well co-ordinated support provided by the LEA is leading to improvements that are rated highly by schools.

45. Provision for minority ethnic groups has a high corporate profile and is a priority in the EDP. Since the previous inspection, the ethnic minorities support service has been integrated into the school development service. This has strengthened the rigour of annual

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school reviews, and minority ethnic achievement consultants contribute to the resulting differentiated support to schools. Grant funding is well targeted and effectively administered.

46. The Traveller Education Service provides good support for Traveller children; as acknowledged by monitoring visits from HMI. There are approximately 110 children of asylum seekers in schools across the borough and in each case the LEA has been able to arrange for appropriate staff to supply effective support.

### **Support for gifted and talented pupils**

47. The LEA provides good support for gifted and talented pupils in secondary schools through the EiC initiative. However, there is no coherent strategy for primary schools and support is unsatisfactory overall. Higher-level attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2 is below national averages, but well below for writing at Key Stage 1, and improvement rates do not always match national trends. There is inadequate reference in the EDP or in monitoring reports to provision for gifted and talented pupils in primary schools. Too much reliance has been placed on the extension of EiC to the primary phase in September 2004 but this will not involve all primary schools. Currently, primary co-ordinators have few links with their secondary colleagues.

48. All secondary schools have gifted and talented co-ordinators and take-up for co-ordinator training is high. Training for staff and activities for pupils are recorded electronically and monitored effectively. Evaluation is sound and the LEA produces a Year 11 analysis which shows some improvement in the number of pupils attaining higher GCSE grades. The EiC strategy is well integrated into the EDP and there is effective co-ordination of specialist and leading-edge schools in delivering programmes for gifted and talented pupils across school clusters. There is an extensive programme for sport and music and schools value the support for talented pupils. Cluster-based summer schools cater for nearly 300 Year 6 and 7 pupils.

### *Recommendation*

- Devise and implement a strategy to support gifted and talented pupils in all primary schools.

### **Support for school governors**

49. Support for school governors remains good. Since the previous inspection, notes of adviser visits to schools are copied to governing bodies and are more evaluative. Link advisers attend governing body meetings to present the agreed performance statements. This enables governors to acknowledge achievements and to identify areas for further improvement. Chairs of governors are now members of the monitoring group established when a school is identified as having serious weaknesses or is placed into special measures.

50. Schools rate the quality of governor training programmes, support for clerking governing body meetings and advice on a range of issues as very good. This is accomplished by a small but effective governor support unit. Mechanisms for consulting governors as a

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whole are being improved and the LEA is funding the establishment of an independent governors' forum.

### **The supply and quality of teachers**

51. This aspect of the LEA's work is good. Teaching vacancies rose sharply following the civil disturbances, placing Oldham third highest nationally for the percentage of vacancies. Successful strategies have subsequently achieved a vacancy level that is in line with that nationally and schools report the position is greatly improved.

52. Since 2001, and in consultation with schools, the LEA has improved its strategy for recruitment and retention, and significantly enhanced its analysis of data. This has led to the remodelling of the supply teaching service, the recruitment of a consultant in 2003, and the introduction of a graduate teacher programme. The LEA has used a good range of recruitment strategies with a particular focus on a 'Grow Your Own' workforce development initiative comprising accredited career progression. These initiatives have meant that the LEA is having some success in encouraging more applicants from minority ethnic groups. The continuing professional development programme is well regarded and well attended by teachers and support staff. The retention of newly-qualified teachers into their second year is well above the rate nationally.

### **Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management**

53. The effectiveness, and planning and provision, of services to support school management are satisfactory, but developments are behind the pace of other LEAs. Until very recently there has continued to be a concentration on the LEA itself providing quality services to schools, rather than supporting schools in becoming more competent and discriminating procurers and purchasers of services. The council is now working with seven other LEAs and a private company to develop a brokerage service. This development is still at an early stage but there have already been benefits in the production of criteria to measure the effectiveness of individual services. All of the council services across the seven LEAs currently involved in this project have been scored and moderated by the brokerage panel as at least satisfactory. Schools can access information about each service using the secure brokerage website.

54. Only human resources and information management services were inspected through fieldwork. Nevertheless, evidence provided as part of the LEA's self-assessment confirmed that the quality of individual management services offered to schools is at least satisfactory; financial services continue to be very good and property services are highly satisfactory. However, the approach to offering services to schools is often unco-ordinated, piecemeal and informal. This is partly as a result of the consistently high levels of buyback by schools, but the information on actual provision can be weak, resulting in potential new purchasers not knowing clearly which aspects they are purchasing and which are provided as an entitlement.

55. The planning and provision of **human resource services** to support school management is good. Schools rightly value the service provided. Good communication and joint work supports schools causing concern effectively, and schools with budget difficulties

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are given good guidance to manage reductions in staff. Systems and support for monitoring sickness are helping to reduce absence, bringing the LEA closer to the national average. Links with payroll are effective and contracts of employment are issued efficiently. Good progress has been made in supporting schools with work force remodelling.

56. Services supporting **information management** continue to be satisfactory. Sufficient progress since the previous inspection has been made in most areas, including electronic communication, ICT infrastructure, the development of a central pupil database, and the appointment of expert management information staff. Roles, responsibilities and service expectations are now clearly documented and understood by schools. Specific initiatives have improved the service received by schools. A good example is the LEA's management, control and monitoring of email communications sent to schools. This is done well and it is valued by schools. However, the LEA lacks a comprehensive and up-to-date ICT strategy. Strategy documentation and ICT strategy group meetings have lost momentum and direction.

57. Value for money is satisfactory. The LEA makes extensive use of the Audit Commission school survey to evaluate and improve the performance of management services, for example the introduction of the financial bursary service. The cost to schools of management services provided by the LEA is broadly in line with the cost of provision, although the lack of transparency of certain central recharges is a weakness. Good detail is provided to schools each year on the amount of funding delegated for individual management services. The brokerage project is providing a good opportunity to benchmark costs with other LEAs and potentially the private sector on a consistent like-for-like basis.

#### ***Recommendation***

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|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve the coherence and co-ordination of the arrangements for offering management services to schools.</li></ul> |
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#### **Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement**

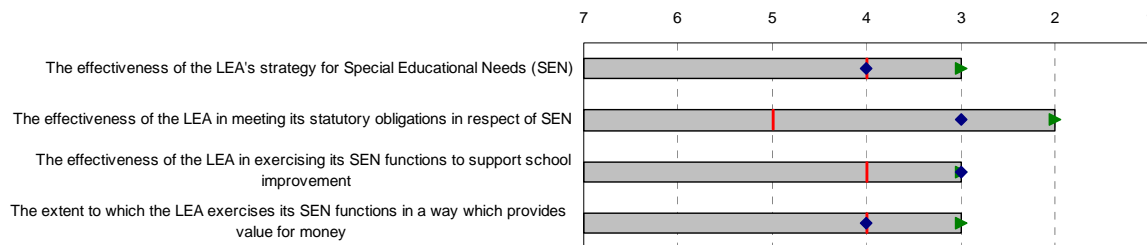
58. The planning and provision of services was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. There have been significant improvements and both aspects are now good. There is good linkage between corporate priorities, the EDP and other school improvement plans. In particular, the restructuring of the school improvement service has led to more coherent working and improved use of expertise. Additional expertise is regularly available through consultants or headteacher secondments.

59. Value for money is satisfactory. The costs of the school development service are in line with those of similar authorities, although supplemented by a range of other funding. As a result, the service and the additional resources are having some success in raising attainment and promoting a higher quality of education. All services provided are at least satisfactory. The number of schools recently placed into special measures is a notable exception to this improving trend.



## Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

### Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

### The strategy for SEN

60. The strategy for SEN is highly satisfactory. It reflects the LEA's strong commitment to inclusion and meets the Government's agenda for action. A constructive partnership with mainstream and special schools has secured the widespread support of schools for the implementation of policy. Since the previous inspection all weaknesses have been addressed, including a review of special school provision, and the restructuring of the SEN support services. There has been a marked improvement in meeting the LEA's statutory responsibilities. However, many developments, policies and ways of working are recent and require consolidation. The LEA has further work to do with schools to assess the impact of its inclusive practice on the achievement of pupils with the full range of SEN, but the capacity for further improvement is highly satisfactory.

61. The SEN strategy has involved a major review of special school provision. This has secured the support of mainstream and special school headteachers to the changing role of special schools. Special schools are very clear about their future role and some innovative outreach work has begun in supporting pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Schools report new working arrangements are now beginning to lead to much-improved services. Largely, this is the result of effective consultation, improved transparency in the allocation of resources to schools, and the recruitment of additional and well-qualified staff to the SEN support service. An annual 'provision map' agreed with each school focuses the work of the SEN support team and provides a useful tool for identifying school improvement issues related to SEN.

62. The 'invest to save' policy ensures that support and resources are targeted at younger pupils in order to reduce the need for action as they get older. Good links are developing with the health service, and agreed protocols are leading to speedier responses for medical assessment. The Disability Access strategy supports the implementation of the SEN strategy well. Thirty seven of the borough's schools are now described as 'barrier free'

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allowing full access to pupils with physical difficulties. There is a phased programme for further adaptations to schools.

### **Statutory obligations**

63. The LEA has made significant improvements in this aspect of its work which is now good. Formal assessment, leading to a statement of SEN, is now completed within the recommended timescale in almost all cases. The health authority is involved prior to a formal assessment and there is a strong commitment across all agencies to ensure that the needs of pupils are identified early and met, wherever possible, within their neighbourhood school. Schools have ready access to a paediatrician, and an increase in the number of educational psychologists has improved the LEA's capacity for earlier identification and assessment. The restructuring of the SEN support service gives schools access to specialist expertise and timely advice. As a result, many pupils have their needs met without placement on the SEN register. Moderation is well understood, and the criteria for the allocation of additional funds, and recommendations for formal assessment, are well known. The support service's role in monitoring the quality of individual education plans, and their involvement in the annual review process, ensures that pupils who need formal assessment are appropriately identified and known to the LEA.

64. At the time of the previous inspection the LEA offered limited support for parents. An active parents' focus group has now been established. Parents receive comprehensive written information, supported by a home visit. The parent partnership service is well publicised and provides good support, including publishing information using the Oldham council website. The LEA has appropriate plans in place to extend this. The number of referrals to tribunals has reduced, but the LEA has been unable to recruit any independent parent supporters to work with parents. This is a lost opportunity to engage with the minority ethnic communities.

### **SEN functions to support school improvement**

65. This aspect of the LEA's work is highly satisfactory. Following widespread consultation with schools, the SEN support service has been recently restructured to improve its capacity to support schools in raising achievement levels for all pupils. The SEN specialist teacher team and school improvement advisers have recently introduced sensible procedures for monitoring pupils' achievement and evaluating the impact of the provision. All schools are now clear about their responsibility in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN. Special schools provide effective provision for pupils with complex needs. As a result, the number of pupils needing to travel outside the borough is reducing. Innovative outreach work is developing to support mainstream schools, for example for primary-aged pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. However, this is at an early stage and the impact of a special school recently being subject to special measures has temporarily reduced the level of support available to primary schools.

66. The specialist teacher team provides valued support in advising on approaches to teaching and learning. An increase in the number and expertise of staff has improved the process of target setting for pupils with more complex needs, as well as the LEA's systems for auditing and monitoring the needs of pupils. The recruitment of additional educational

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psychologists is enabling early intervention and developing the capacity of schools to meet and provide for pupils with SEN. The majority of schools report improvement in the service but there are continued concerns about access to the speech therapy service.

67. The annual review of each school's performance is being used more effectively to examine the progress of the lowest-achieving pupils. Where concerns arise, schools are challenged to identify actions for improvement. An effectiveness framework is being piloted to support schools to self-evaluate how well they provide for SEN.

### **Value for money**

68. The LEA provides highly satisfactory value for money in this area of its work. There are significantly fewer statements of SEN in Oldham than the national average or in similar authorities. This reflects the increasing level of inclusion of pupils in mainstream schools. Central SEN budgets are well monitored and timely action is taken to manage spending variations. Elected members monitor SEN spending effectively, in particular the budget for SEN transport.

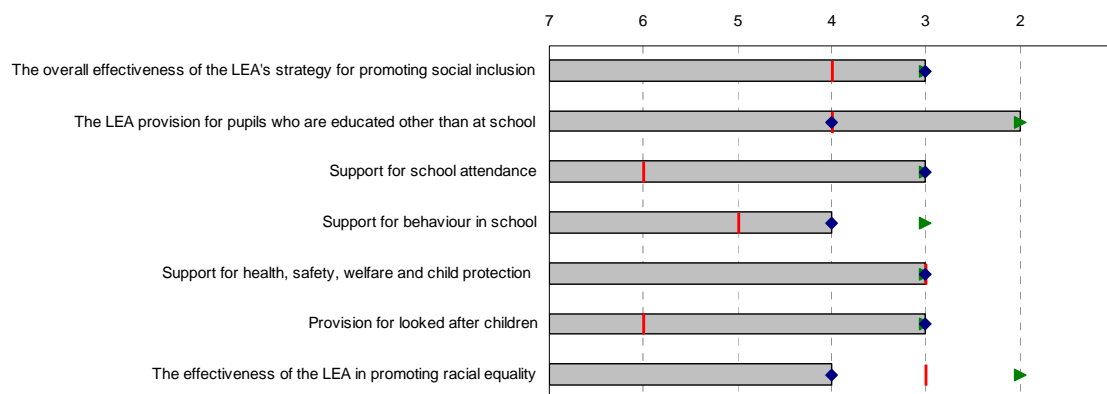
69. A high proportion of SEN funding is devolved rather than delegated to schools adding unnecessary complexity to the funding for mainstream schools. Although secondary schools are positive about the current arrangements, the formula disadvantages primary schools and some consider there is insufficient funding to meet the needs of pupils with more complex needs. Nevertheless, the audit and moderation system to identify SEN and allocate additional funds is based on clear criteria. The system for funding special schools is overly complex. The planned review of funding for all schools offers a suitable opportunity to consider simplifying this system, while recognising the level of resource needed to maintain good special school provision and their developing outreach role.

### ***Recommendation***

- Put in place arrangements to further delegate SEN resources to schools as part of the wider review of the funding formula.

## Section 5: Support for social inclusion

### Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

### The strategy for social inclusion

70. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved and is now highly satisfactory. The recommendations in the previous report have all been tackled. As a result, there have been significant improvements in most services supporting social inclusion, in particular in those supporting the education of pupils other than at school, attendance, behaviour and looked after children. The education and culture directorate has made good progress in promoting racial equality.

71. Elected members and officers ensure that social inclusion is afforded a high priority. They regularly scrutinise the effectiveness of plans and the performance of schools and services, and take regular feedback from vulnerable young people and parents on the quality of services. The education and culture directorate is looking forward and planning for the future through its active support for the Children's and Young People's Strategic Partnership and its engagement with the council's response to 'Every Child Matters'.

72. The LEA makes an important contribution to joint work with statutory agencies and other partners. Following consultation and a good audit of need, services for attendance, behaviour, and looked after children have been reconfigured and extended using external funding such as the Standards Fund or Vulnerable Children's grant. Funding from EiC and the Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) is used imaginatively to improve attendance and behaviour in clusters of schools in challenging circumstances. Teams from statutory agencies such as the children in public care team also carry out effective joint work to support vulnerable young people and schools. Nevertheless, the LEA's capacity is challenged when meeting unexpected needs, for example the recent increase in exclusions from one school and the secondary special school being placed in special measures, although its response is appropriate.

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### **The strategy for community cohesion**

73. The corporate governance inspection in November 2002 found the council weak at defining what its priority for community cohesion meant, and in promoting racial equality. This reflected a slow corporate response to issues raised in the Oldham Independent Review. The council has now responded by producing a coherent strategy to promote community cohesion. The Audit Commission corporate governance report drew attention to the large number of unevaluated initiatives and the council has again responded by commissioning studies into practice in both primary and secondary schools. The council is very active in creating opportunities for community representatives to express their views, but less successful in engaging them fully in initiatives.

74. The community cohesion strategy comprises six strands of support and challenge. The council is being particularly successful in two of these. As a result, the attainment of minority ethnic pupils is rising and the LEA has developed very good curriculum materials that have gained national recognition. Progress on achieving a more balanced workforce is slow, although there has been a recent improvement, and the council does not meet fully the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. While much good work and effort goes into connecting communities, the concentration of minority ethnic pupils in some schools is greater now than at the time of the previous inspection. Limited progress has been made on the recommendation made by the Independent Review that faith schools should admit pupils from non-Christian backgrounds. However, the council and the diocesan authorities do not have responsibility for the admissions criteria for these schools. There is a rising minority ethnic pupil population and their concentration in a few areas is a barrier to progress to the council's priority to improve community cohesion. The authority is fully aware of this: it is working constructively with the diocesan authorities and developing its own related housing initiatives as part of its longer-term strategy.

#### *Recommendation*

- Strengthen engagement with partners and communities to further improve community cohesion.

### **Provision for pupils educated other than at school**

75. The LEA's provision has improved significantly and is now good. A coherent strategy has ensured a suitable range of provision is now available, and has improved the scope and quality of the home tuition programme. A clear policy outlines for schools and parents the range of provision and how it can be accessed. Good quality support is available for the very few pupils permanently excluded from primary schools. The LEA is successful in reintegrating pupils back into mainstream schools; usually within one or two terms. The recently reorganised service also offers a PRU for secondary-aged pupils and a well-planned programme of alternative provision. This is made for older pupils using colleges, the youth service and work-based learning providers. These arrangements are based on clear service level agreements that specify how the provision will be monitored and quality assured.

76. Improvements in the quality of provision, and the active involvement of young people and their parents in planning and reviewing their progress, have led to pupils educated

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in places other than at school making better progress and attaining well. Individually planned programmes for young people who are ill or pregnant and educated at home enable them to continue with work begun at school and to take tests and examinations. Innovative use of ICT enables pupils who are school-phobic to re-engage with learning through access to individually planned web-based learning programmes and some move on to further education. Good collaboration between education, social services, health and the Connexions service in planning and providing services to support pupils educated out of school ensures that they have good access to advice, guidance and support. Useful advice is also made available to parents who decide to educate their children at home, and arrangements for monitoring their welfare and the quality of home education are secure.

### **Support for attendance**

77. Support for attendance was weak, it has improved significantly and is now highly satisfactory; the capacity for further improvement is good. The LEA has successfully addressed the recommendations of the previous report; by strengthening the education welfare service and, in consultation with schools, devising an effective strategy for improving attendance.

78. The strategy ensures that patterns of attendance are monitored carefully and resources are targeted to the areas of greatest need; it is well understood by schools and officers. Following a Best Value review, a service improvement plan was implemented. Additional funding has been provided through EiC and the BIP for education welfare officers to support schools with identified attendance problems. The reorganised and enlarged service is well led and provides good value for money. It provides effective training for school-based attendance officers and learning mentors on procedures for monitoring and improving attendance. Secure systems are in place for schools to record, monitor and report patterns of attendance as well as concerns about individual or missing pupils.

79. Close work between the education welfare service, the school improvement service, and other agencies, for example the police in conducting truancy sweeps, has contributed to improvements in attendance. School improvement advisers and headteachers regularly review attendance patterns and set attendance targets. Support is targeted to schools falling below the LEA average as well as to schools causing concern. In 2002/03 attendance rates compared favourably with similar authorities and the gap with national rates narrowed.

### **Support for behaviour**

80. Support to schools in managing behaviour has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. The LEA has acted on the recommendation of the previous report to develop a strategy for primary-aged pupils and has put in place good provision for them. Following consultation with secondary schools, the range and quality of provision for pupils and support for schools has improved. In 2002/03 the rate of permanent exclusions from primary schools was in line with the national average, but above average in secondary schools. However, a recent and unpredicted rise in permanently excluded pupils at Key Stage 4 has placed a strain on the capacity of the service to provide for pupils at risk of exclusion. The quality of support for primary schools is good but the capacity of the outreach

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service has been stretched because of the redirection of staff to support the special school recently placed in special measures.

81. The behaviour strategy is based on a good audit of need and emphasises the prevention of poor behaviour and support for schools to manage difficult behaviour in order to improve teaching and learning. An annual review of schools' performance by headteachers and advisers enables support for behaviour and exclusions to be targeted effectively. A range of strategies provides support to schools, including training for learning mentors, sharing good practice and outreach work from the primary special school for pupils with emotional and behaviour difficulties. An EiC cluster, with additional funding from the BIP, has established a specialist support team for primary and secondary schools with the most acute needs. Results are very encouraging, with a 50% decrease in the number of permanent exclusions, together with a significant decrease in the number of fixed-term exclusions. The PRU provides good support for pupils in secondary schools at risk of exclusion to stay in education and work-related training. They remain in contact with their schools and can complete some courses in the school setting.

82. Advice and guidance for headteachers and governors on procedures for exclusion is good and officers attend governors' disciplinary meetings. Rigorous procedures are in place for notifying the LEA of fixed-term and permanent exclusions and pupils' whereabouts are tracked to ensure that they are not lost to the education system. A good range of data is collected and monitored effectively to identify trends in the exclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils.

### **Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection**

83. Overall support for these aspects of the LEA's work remains highly satisfactory. The safety and welfare of pupils is given a high priority by the LEA and four new posts overseeing child protection, pupil identification and tracking, and licensing child employment have been established. There is good joint work between education and social services. Guidance on child protection matters is clear and up to date; regular child protection training takes place for teachers and governors, and the LEA maintains an up-to-date list of designated teachers and monitors attendance at training. However, a recent inspection identified weaknesses in the operation of the Area Child Protection Committee. A recovery plan is being implemented but has yet to be tested. An immediate outcome has been to strengthen the education and culture directorate's representation on the committee.

84. Support for health and safety is also highly satisfactory. The local authority health and safety management committee oversees arrangements and headteachers and trade unions are represented. Sensible procedures for reporting health and safety matters are in place and understood by schools. The local authority monitors trends in accident reports and updates its guidance appropriately. There is a well-established programme of health and safety audits and good advice is available to schools about risk management.

### **Provision for looked after children**

85. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved since the previous inspection and is now highly satisfactory; the capacity to improve further is good. High priority is given by

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elected members to improving the education, welfare and attainment of looked after children. Elected members have received training in their role of corporate parent and take this role seriously; monitoring the arrangements for looked after children, visiting children's homes and attending celebrations of achievement. A joint policy document clearly describes the respective responsibilities of elected members, the LEA, teachers and social workers.

86. The education and culture directorate has strong partnerships with social services, health and the Connexions service at both strategic and operational levels. The looked after children joint education and social services team provide suitable training for designated teachers and governors, and monitor the database of information each month. Looked after children have high priority in admissions to schools and steps are taken to limit movement between schools that would disrupt their education. Fixed-term exclusions are monitored to ensure that these children receive prioritised support. Learning mentors and Connexions advisers offer informed support to looked after children during transition to education, training or employment post-16.

87. Effective strategies are in place to help raise the attainment of looked after children. Every looked after child from Oldham attending school, or living in another LEA, has an allocated social worker to monitor their welfare and educational progress. Looked after children attain well compared with similar authorities and the national averages, and a high proportion enter education or work-based learning post 16. Headteachers and school improvement advisers review the progress of individuals during the autumn term and agree individual targets as part of the school's agreed performance statement. In addition, in the year leading up to national tests and examinations more detailed processes for setting individual targets for these children are in place. Personal education plans clearly identify targets, show the involvement of the young person and their carer, and indicate the level of additional support and resources required. However, properly reviewed and up-to-date PEPs are in place for only 61% of looked after children. New quality assurance procedures have been introduced to alert senior social services staff to key dates for monitoring and review meetings and to ensure that all looked after children have completed PEPs.

#### *Recommendation*

- Ensure that all looked after children have personal education plans that are regularly reviewed and updated.

#### **Promoting racial equality**

88. This aspect of the LEA's work is satisfactory. Promoting racial equality has gained extra significance following the civil disturbances in 2001. Good progress has been made by the education and culture directorate, but progress has been too slow across the council.

89. The promotion of race equality is given high corporate priority and is embedded in council, education and service level planning. The LEA has gained national recognition for several initiatives. For instance, a successful twinning project brings together pupils in schools with very high and low proportions of minority ethnic pupils for a range of activities. Schools have received good guidance and training on developing policies for monitoring equality issues and on raising cultural awareness. Ofsted inspections carried out since



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September 2002 have judged a higher proportion of Oldham schools as good or very good in their attention to pupils' cultural development than is found in LEAs nationally. This is a positive picture. However, schools' involvement in community cohesion activities is only satisfactory. For instance, only two-thirds of schools participate in at least one LEA-led community cohesion initiative. In the context of Oldham, and following the civil disturbances, it is difficult to understand why all the schools are not involved.

90. The LEA has strong local partnerships, in particular the collaboration between different agencies to establish very robust procedures for schools' reporting of racist incidents. A multi-agency group meets weekly and liaises regularly with the council. These procedures have been recommended as good practice to other LEAs and police authorities nationally.

91. The *Report of the Select Committee on Social Inclusion*, published in May 2004, indicated concerns that many of the underlying problems in Oldham were not being tackled quickly enough. Although the number of reported racist incidents remains high, they are reducing. However, the concentration of pupils of minority ethnic heritage in a number of schools is greater now than in 2001. The council has achieved Level 1 of the Equality Standard for local government, but this represents progress that is too slow. In 2002/03, the council was not able to fully comply with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, because the inadequacy of information technology systems precluded comprehensive monitoring of the minority ethnic composition of the workforce. Although there has been some recent improvement, minority ethnic groups remain under-represented in managerial level positions and modest targets set by the council imply that this situation is likely to continue for some time.

***Recommendation***

- Ensure that the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 are met, by monitoring and reporting on the composition of the workforce.

## Appendix A

### Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA :	Oldham Local Education Authority
LEA number:	353
Reporting Inspector:	Malcolm Wall
Date of Inspection:	May 2004

No	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	Fieldwork*
<b>Context of the LEA</b>			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	6	
<b>Overall judgements</b>			
0.1	The progress made by the LEA overall	3	
0.2	Overall effectiveness of the LEA	3	
0.3	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	3	
<b>Section 1: Corporate strategy and LEA leadership</b>			
1.1	The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people	4	
1.2	The implementation of corporate planning for education	4	
1.3	The effectiveness of LEA decision-making	3	
1.4	The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities	4	
1.5	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	4	
1.6	The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice)	4	
1.7	The quality of leadership provided by senior officers	3	

1.8	The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities	3	
1.9	Support for Early Years education	2	
1.10	Support for 14 – 19 education	3	
<b>Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation</b>			
2.1	The LEA's strategy for school improvement	2	
2.2	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement	3	
2.3	The performance of schools	4	NF
2.4	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention	2	NF
2.5	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	3	
2.6	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	2	
2.7	The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools	5	
2.8	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	2	NF
2.9	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	NF
2.10	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	2	
<b>Section 3: Support to school leadership and management, including schools' efforts to support continuous improvement</b>			
3.1	Support to school leadership and management, including support for schools' approaches to continuous improvement	3	
3.2	Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2	2	

3.3	Support for information and communication technology	4	NF
3.4	Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3	1	
3.5	Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children	2	
3.6	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	5	
3.7	Support for school governors	2	
3.8	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	2	
3.9	The planning and provision of services to support school management	4	
3.9a	The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management	1	NF
3.9b	The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management	2	
3.9c	The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management	3	NF
3.9d	The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management	4	
3.10	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management	4	
3.11	The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	2	
3.12	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	4	
<b>Section 4: Support for special educational needs</b>			
4.1	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs	3	
4.2	The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	2	

4.3	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	3	
4.4	The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money	3	
<b>Section 5: Support for social inclusion</b>			
5.1	The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion	3	
5.2	The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place	2	
5.3	Support for school attendance	3	
5.4	Support for behaviour in schools	4	
5.5	Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	3	
5.6	Provision for looked after children	3	
5.7	The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality	4	

*\*NF' under fieldwork means that no fieldwork was conducted on this function during this inspection.*

***JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 7-point scale:***

Grade 1: Very good; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Highly satisfactory; Grade 4: Satisfactory;  
Grade 5: Unsatisfactory; Grade 6: Poor; Grade 7: Very poor

[**Note:** in the case of JRS 1: socio-economic context of the LEA and JRS 2.3: performance of schools, grades relate to comparisons against national averages: Grades 1-2: Well above; Grade 3: Above; Grade 4: In line; Grade 5: Below; Grades 6-7: Well below]

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## Appendix B

### Context of the inspection

This inspection of Oldham LEA was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

This report provides a commentary on the inspection findings, including:

- the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in 2000;
- the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;
- the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;
- recommendations on areas for improvement.

The summary is followed by more detailed judgements on the LEA's performance of its individual functions, which sets the recommendations for improvement into context.

All functions of the LEA have been inspected and judgements reached on how effectively they are performed. Not all functions were subject to detailed fieldwork, but in all cases inspectors reached their judgements through an evaluation of a range of material. This included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, data (some of which were provided by the LEA), school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports, and audit reports. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA and a questionnaire seeking the views of all schools on aspects of the work of the LEA. In those areas subject to fieldwork, discussions were held with LEA officers and members, headteachers and governors, staff in other departments of the local authority, diocesan representatives, and other agencies and LEA partners.

The functions that were not subject to detailed fieldwork in this inspection were:

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention;</li><li>• the effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning;</li><li>• the effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places;</li><li>• support for information and communication technology;</li><li>• the planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management;</li><li>• the planning and provision of property services in supporting school management.</li></ul> |
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Inspection judgements are made against criteria that can be found on the Ofsted website. For each inspected function of the LEA an inspection team agrees a numerical grade. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are to be found in Appendix A. These numerical grades must be considered in the light of the full report. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment profile for the education service.

### **Context of the LEA**

Oldham is one of 10 metropolitan councils in Greater Manchester. It is mainly an urban borough, with outlying rural areas and villages. As at the time of the previous inspection, there are significant areas of severe deprivation. Eighteen of the council's 20 wards are in the top half of the most deprived in England and Wales and Oldham is in the 10% of most deprived districts in England. Regeneration and investment are bringing improvements and new facilities to the borough, including the Business Management School and the new Gallery Oldham. Additionally, the council has secured, in partnership with a neighbouring authority, resources amounting to just over £600 million to undertake a major housing renewal project. Oldham is also beginning to benefit from new strategic road links to surrounding areas and the centre of Manchester.

The overall population has remained stable since the previous inspection at around 219,200 but is projected to rise to 220,500 by 2011. The minority ethnic proportion of the population is currently 13.9% but expected to rise to 19% by 2011. Oldham's Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage communities are the most geographically concentrated in Britain. Since the previous inspection, the concentration of minority ethnic pupils in a small number of schools has also increased. In May 2001, civil disturbances resulted from underlying problems and tensions between the communities in the town. The council requested the Government to commission an independent review to examine the causes.

The number of pupils on roll in maintained schools has declined by 2% from 39,223 in January 2000, to 38,439 in January 2004. The percentage of the school population of minority ethnic heritage (22.8%) is well above the national figure. The number of pupils from families who are asylum seekers and refugees has increased by 70% since the previous inspection.

The percentage of pupils eligible for free schools meals in maintained primary (28.6%) and secondary schools (22.5%), is higher than the national figure, but broadly in line with that of similar authorities. The percentage of pupils in primary schools (1.5%) and secondary schools (2.4%) with a statement of special educational needs is well below the national average.

Education provision is available for all three- and four-year-olds whose parents seek it, in a variety of settings. There are 95 primary schools and 2 primary special schools. Of the 15 secondary schools, 11 are for pupils aged 11-16 and 4 are for pupils aged 11-18 and there are 4 faith schools all of which have voluntary-aided status. There are 4 secondary special schools and 1 pupil referral unit. Three primary and 4 secondary schools have Beacon or Leading-Edge status and 7 schools have specialist status.

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## The performance of schools

Pupils' attainment is generally in line with statistical neighbours and below national averages. There are some exceptions; in 2003, the percentage of pupils at Key Stage 2 gaining Level 4 or above was higher than the national average for both mathematics and science. However, standards of writing at Key Stage 1 dipped in 2003, and were well below the national average.

Improvement rates from 1999 to 2003 are broadly in line with national trends for the percentage of pupils gaining five or more higher grades at GCSE level. However, improvement is above the national rates for all three core subjects at Key Stage 3, and for mathematics and science at Key Stage 2. Improvement rates at the higher levels are more erratic for Key Stages 1 to 3. Pupils' progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 was still below the national average in 2003, but significantly better than the previous year.

There are improvements in the performance of some underachieving groups. In 2002, the proportion of looked after children gaining five or more higher grades at GCSE level was well above the national average. In 2003, at all key stages, Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage pupils were progressing faster than the LEA average and consequently are "narrowing the gap".

In secondary schools, Ofsted data shows that the percentage of good and very good schools (46.6%) is below statistical neighbours (57.5%) and the national figure (68.9%). These gaps were narrower for primary schools. The number of schools below the Government's expected minimum achievement levels at Key Stage 2 and at GCSE is reducing, but 11 primary schools were below the 65% target in 2003.

Attendance levels are in line with the national average in primary schools but below average in the secondary phase. In 2002/03, unauthorised absence and permanent exclusion rates were in line in primary schools, but above the national average in secondary schools.

In 2002, the LEA missed its targets at Key Stage 2 and at GCSE. There have been significant gaps between LEA and schools' aggregated targets. The target-setting process has been improved and is now more securely based on pupils' prior attainment. Key Stage 2 targets have been revised downwards, but targets for 2005 remain very challenging.

Staying-on rates into full-time education and training are below the national average and are not rising. However, when work-based training is taken into account, participation rates rose to 88.9% in 2003.



**Funding data for the LEA**

<b>SCHOOLS BUDGET</b>	<b>Oldham</b>	<b>Statistical neighbours average</b>	<b>Metropolitan Average</b>	<b>ENGLAND AVERAGE</b>
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
<b>Individual schools budget</b>	<b>2,602</b>	<b>2,602</b>	<b>2,623</b>	<b>2,708</b>
Standards fund delegated	80	68	59	61
Education for under fives	66	78	62	96
Strategic management	47	38	33	29
Special educational needs	86	102	109	120
Grants	71	63	76	53
Access	98	58	53	55
Capital expenditure from revenue	27	14	18	24
<b>TOTAL SCHOOLS BUDGET</b>	<b>3,077</b>	<b>3,023</b>	<b>3,031</b>	<b>3,145</b>
<b>Schools formula spending share</b>	<b>2,858</b>	<b>2,849</b>	<b>2,812</b>	<b>2,904</b>

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04

<b>LEA BUDGET</b>	<b>Oldham</b>	<b>Statistical neighbours average</b>	<b>Metropolitan Average</b>	<b>ENGLAND AVERAGE</b>
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Strategic management	85	107	115	95
Specific Grants	14	9	12	16
Special educational needs	21	27	25	32
School improvement	30	33	34	36
Access	73	93	102	133
Capital expenditure from revenue	6	2	3	2
Youth and Community	76	70	70	74
<b>TOTAL LEA BUDGET</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>388</b>

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04

**Note:**

**All figures are net**

**Averages quoted are mean averages; the original DfES Comparative Tables quote median average figures, not the mean average.**

**Notes**