



Office for Standards  
in Education

**Halton**

**Local Education Authority**

**Inspection Report**

**Date of Inspection: January 2004**

**Reporting Inspector: Brian Sharples HMI**



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## **Basic information**

Name of LEA:	Halton Local Education Authority
LEA number:	876
Address of LEA:	Grosvenor House Halton LEA Runcorn Cheshire WA7 2WD
Reporting Inspector:	Brian Sharples HMI
Date of Inspection:	January 2004

## Summary

### Introduction

Halton is a borough in transition with complex problems to overcome, but with huge opportunities to turn its fortunes around. While there are some small areas of affluence, Halton is the 18<sup>th</sup> most deprived authority in England with high levels of disadvantage spread across the borough. Since the previous inspection the overall population has fallen by around 3% and the school age population by 14%. The borough council is small but ambitious and has a united approach to the regeneration and partnership work which are required to develop Halton further.

Standards of attainment in the schools provide a mixed picture year on year and across different Key Stages when compared with national averages. In 2003 performance in the three core subjects at Key Stage 1 and 2, in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 and for students achieving one or more A\* -G grade in the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE), were all broadly in line with national averages. The remaining aspects of attainment were below national averages. However, schools consistently perform at least in line and often better than schools in statistical neighbours<sup>1</sup>.

There have been some significant changes within both the council and the education and social inclusion directorate since the previous inspection. The council changed to a leader and cabinet model in January 2000, which in total comprises ten elected members. The scrutiny function is carried out by seven policy and performance boards, whose role is focused on policy development and performance management.

<sup>1</sup> Halton's statistical neighbours are: North East Lincolnshire, City of Kingston upon Hull, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Tameside, Salford, Stoke on Trent, City of Derby, Rochdale, and Southampton

## Main findings

### Summary

Halton LEA has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection during a time of major change and challenge for the authority. Almost half of the areas inspected show improvement since that time. The leadership and commitment to raising standards across the borough, from the elected members and all officers, are strong and are bringing results. Schools are more confident and trusting of the LEA and there is good capacity for further progress. The overall effectiveness of the LEA is highly satisfactory.

Areas of strength	Areas of weakness/for development
<b>Corporate leadership of education</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong partnership work within and across the borough</li> <li>Leadership by elected members and clear corporate planning making education and its funding a high priority</li> <li>Effective working structures and procedures within the LEA which complement leadership and decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeting of resources to meet special educational needs</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy for education and its implementation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coherent strategies for education and social inclusion linked to council priorities</li> <li>Ambitious targets that have raised achievement</li> <li>Purposeful and successful reduction in surplus school places</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differentiation of support for schools causing concern</li> <li>Data collection and analysis to inform the recruitment of teachers</li> <li>Insufficient information to governors on the outcomes of advisers visits to schools</li> </ul>
<b>Support to improve education in schools</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of support to raise standards at Key Stage 3 and for information and communication technology (ICT)</li> <li>The increased expertise of governors resulting from good, flexible training.</li> <li>Expertise of advisory service.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slow progress in enhancing aspects of support for school self management</li> </ul>
<b>Support for special educational needs</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic direction for SEN is well aligned to corporate and national priorities</li> <li>Collaborative work between LEA and SEN regional partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delayed response to establishing an effective strategy for special educational needs</li> <li>Recruitment and retention in the educational psychology service</li> <li>Fluctuation in rate of review and production of new statements</li> </ul>
<b>Support for social inclusion</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong commitment to social inclusion across the borough</li> <li>Pooling and integration of funding streams to maximise benefits to pupils</li> </ul>	

## Recommendations

### Key recommendations

- **Implementation of strategy for SEN:** in order to ensure the speedy implementation of the SEN strategy, complete an action plan which fully addresses strategic requirements as a matter of urgency.
- **Improve targeting of resources on special educational needs:** implement the recently agreed formula for SEN resource allocation, properly reflecting levels of need.
- **Increase schools' capacity for self-management:** implement fully the recommendation from the previous inspection and identify reductions in the type and level of support supplied routinely free of charge to schools.

### Other recommendations

#### Corporate leadership of education

#### Strategy for education

- **School self-management:** ensure governors routinely receive notes of visit directly from the LEA.
- **Schools causing concern:** ensure the categories for schools causing concern are sufficiently distinguishable; align the support generated through the EDP with that generated by a category of concern.
- **Informing recruitment strategies:** improve the LEA's knowledge of the current and future workforce needs in schools by establishing a database and analysing the information to predict needs and inform short and longer-term strategies.

#### Support to improve education in schools

- **Gifted and talented pupils:** establish a clear strategy to meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils in all schools.

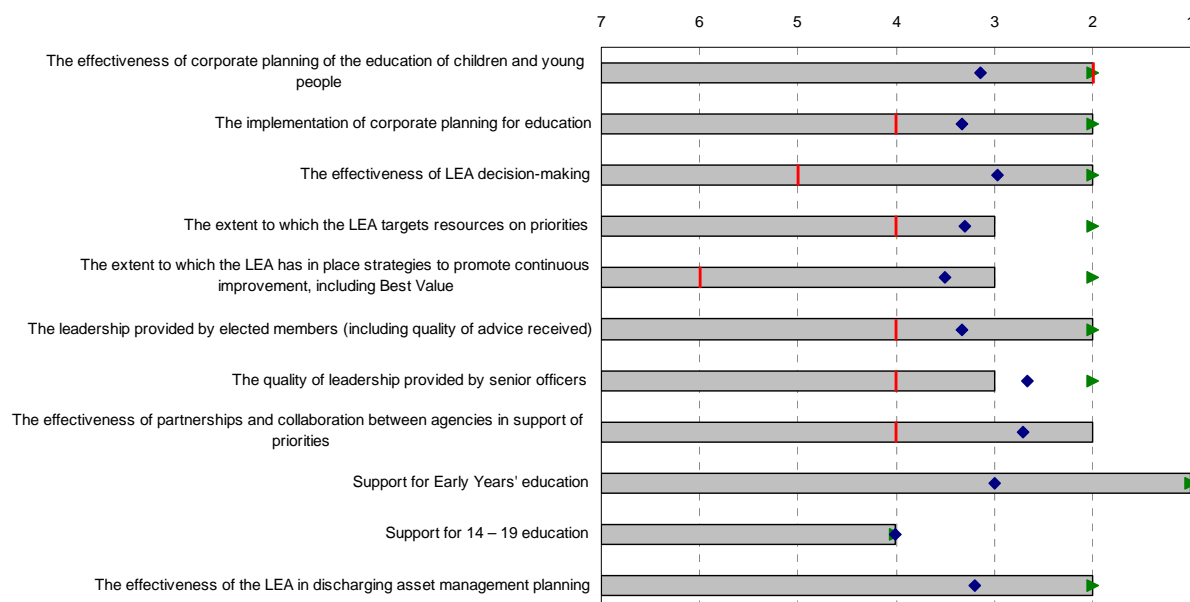
#### Support for special educational needs

- **Statutory obligations:** moderate the risk of deteriorating performance by ensuring that key knowledge and skills for issuing new statements are understood by a wider range of staff.
- **School improvement:** ensure continuity of provision to schools by the education psychology service.

#### Support for social inclusion

## 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 continues to be good. Since the previous inspection, there has been significant improvement in the implementation, which is now also good. Four years ago the council and the education and social inclusion directorate were still developing as a new authority. However, they have made good progress in developing working structures, strategies and partnerships. The leadership by elected members is good; they listen to officers and consult well with the local community. Senior officers and officers across the education and social inclusion directorate work well together and inform members effectively.

2. Good quality corporate and strategic plans portray a clear vision which has been agreed by key stakeholders through a thorough process of consultation. The priorities for the community strategy and corporate plan are well aligned and the plans are produced and monitored to an agreed planning cycle. These plans in turn inform the strategic and operational planning of the education and social inclusion directorate. This is well evidenced in the LEA's 'Education Strategic Framework' and Education Development Plan (EDP). Budget planning is timely and clearly aligned to corporate and education plans. The processes for targeting education resources to priorities and overall budgetary control are good and schools are positively helped with their forward financial projections.

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3. The implementation of corporate plans is good. This is mainly due to the effective monitoring systems and performance management structures which are well established across the council. For example, the council's 'Performance Plan' for financial year 2003-04 shows clearly how the council is performing against its stated aims and the improvements planned in services.

4. The leader and cabinet model of governance works well for Halton. Leadership by the elected members is good. They show a willingness to strive for improvement and avoid complacency. For example, the council has recently carried out a mid-term review of the corporate plan. As a result, corporate targets have been updated, the size of the executive board is being increased and the policy and performance boards are changing to reflect the five priorities in the corporate plan.

5. A major priority for the council is the regeneration of Halton. It rightly acknowledges the important role that education has to play in this process. Education has been and continues to be a high priority for the council and is demonstrated in the way funding is prioritised. Agendas in areas such as regeneration and social inclusion have provided the opportunity for cross-directorate, cross-departmental and wider partnership work and planning to take place. The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) and Excellence in Halton (EiH) plans are good examples of strategies developed in this way.

6. There exists an ethos of partnership which permeates all work across the borough council, to the extent that this is now a strength. People work well together and share information across different services and with external partners. Partnerships between schools and the LEA are maturing and confidence and trust are growing within the schools. Whereas, at the previous inspection, there existed an air of competition and reluctance to share, the new ethos in partnership work, has created a willingness to co-operate and work to common goals. A major benefit of this has been the improvement in corporate planning and its implementation.

### **Decision-making**

7. Decision-making has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Clear working structures, high quality strategic plans and the good working relations between members ensure decision-making is efficient and effective.

8. Members are well informed by officers. The seven area forums, established across the borough, provide an effective means of communication and consultation with the wider community. There are clear structures and timescales in place for decision-making, which is always transparent and takes place after thorough consultation with all stakeholders.

9. The reorganised council structure is a key contributor to the improved speed of decision-making. The council is able to make difficult decisions, exemplified in the recent exercise of amalgamating two high schools and in the reduction of school places.

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**Targeting of resources**

10. The allocation of resources to priorities is highly satisfactory. The recommendations from the previous report about improved budget processes, involvement of schools and school deficit and surplus removal have all been effectively addressed.

11. Historically, the council has historically funded education generously. Budgetary pressures mean that it will be unable to sustain this for 2004-05, but education expenditure will still be nearly £1.5 million above the education Formula Spending Share for the borough. The council has also been successful in bringing in a range of additional capital and revenue resources. Arrangements for integrating a range of funding streams through partnership work are particularly effective.

12. The processes for targeting education resources to priorities and overall budgetary control are good. A medium-term financial strategy has been in place for a number of years. This strategy, combined with good quality individual financial projections provided by the LEA, helps schools with their forward financial planning. The processes for consulting and informing schools on financial issues are effective. There is a clear rationale, agreed with schools, for centrally retained expenditure. No schools currently have deficit budgets and effective processes exist to challenge reasons for high balances.

13. The significant weakness in this otherwise positive picture is that the resources for special educational needs (SEN) are not targeted sufficiently to meet the needs of pupils with SEN or towards early intervention.

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

14. Strategies for continuous improvement are highly satisfactory. The performance management framework is well established, with clear links between corporate and educational plans and targets, service planning and individual performance management.

15. Service planning and LEA self-evaluation are used as part of continuous improvement processes. The self-evaluation for this inspection was accurate in most, but not in all areas. The LEA uses effective mechanisms to obtain the views of schools on the services they receive and to use this information to plan future services. Good processes are in place for members to scrutinise performance.

16. Best Value principles have been used effectively to review services, particularly in management services to schools, but also in many other services. A Best Value review led to a substantial restructuring of property services so that services more closely meet the needs of schools. Improvement has been slower, however, in some areas, particularly in restructuring services to meet the special educational needs of pupils.

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

17. The leadership provided by elected members is good as exemplified in the commissioning of a borough survey. From this survey the members identified their priorities for the corporate plan, which includes a strong priority for education.

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18. Good working relationships exist between members and officers across the council. Senior officers are given delegated powers to manage and make clear decisions, which are effective and well understood by members and officers.

19. Clear procedures are in place through the policy and performance boards for members to scrutinise policy and receive regular reports from officers. Through this members are kept well informed and are monitoring the work of the education directorate and reviewing progress towards targets. This monitoring of performance and progress is a key factor in enabling members to provide good leadership.

### **Leadership by senior officers**

20. Senior officers provide highly satisfactory leadership. They have shown some good leadership in developing new initiatives, for example the EiH strategy, and have ensured that many of the recommendations from the previous inspection have been addressed effectively. However, the speed of response to issues raised in the key area of support for SEN, for example the need for a strategic review, has been slow.

21. Since the previous inspection, there has been a maturing of relationships between the officers and schools. More recently the schools are acquiring respect and trust for senior officers and have confidence in their decision-making, as evidenced in the way officers managed the recent reorganisation of sixth form provision.

22. The chief executive meets weekly with all the executive directors for planning, monitoring and performance review purposes. These are effective and productive meetings. The executive director for education and social inclusion has provided clear and firm leadership since the previous inspection. This is demonstrated in the appointment of good officers, the setting of aspirational targets for Halton, the bringing together of schools on common agendas, and the building of secure partnerships across directorates.

23. Senior officers ensure that school improvement is high on the agenda and the LEA provides good challenge to schools. They have good working relationships with the members, officers in other services and personnel in other partnerships. Successful leadership is due, in part, to the good level of expertise among senior officers and also their well-informed knowledge of schools across the borough.

### **Strategic partnerships**

24. Partnership work has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now good. The council gives a high priority to promoting partnerships and education has a high profile in the majority of partnership projects and initiatives. In particular, the projects under single regeneration and neighbourhood renewal budgets have a major focus on improving lifelong learning and raising standards. The Halton strategic partnership is an effective working body which oversees strategic partnership policy and the implementation and monitoring of plans. Partnership work is now a strength across the council.

25. The LEA has ensured that the wide range of strategic and operational partnerships, within and outside the borough, are well aligned to the priorities of the education and social

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inclusion directorate. Partners have a good understanding of the key priorities and issues relating to raising standards, school improvement and social inclusion. The LEA has built some effective partnerships with external agencies, for example with the police in the drive to prevent truancy, and with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in the development of 14-19 education.

26. Partnerships are effective between different departments and services across the council. This has resulted in good collaboration on innovative projects to promote education and inclusion. For example, the Kingsway project brought together partners including adult community learning and early years to promote lifelong learning in the local community.

27. The partnerships between the LEA and schools have strengthened since the previous inspection. Good examples of collaborative working, between schools, and between the LEA and schools, can be found in the EiH and leadership incentive grant (LIG) initiatives.

### **Support for Early Years**

28. Provision and support for early years' education, including LEA support for the EYDCP, are very good. Pre-school education is available for all three year-olds whose parents desire it, with excellent distribution across the borough including in the most socially deprived neighbourhoods. This is well ahead of national targets for 2004. Much effort is focused upon improving the quality of education provision. The LEA is well placed to implement Department for Education and Skills (DfES) strategy on children's centres.

29. Through the EYDCP, multi-agency working is well established. The Halton Partnership has provided a framework for excellent links with all relevant partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The partnership also submitted a good children's centre strategy covering the 0-19 age range which builds upon existing and developing practice in Sure Start programmes, maintained nursery schools and new neighbourhood nurseries. Coherent operational planning is cross-referenced to the EDP, EiH plan and SEN policy. Settings have received guidance to improve planning for the transition to the foundation stage curriculum. The children's information service maintains a high profile, and the quality of its service has been recognised recently through a national award.

30. There is a wide range of good quality provision. For example, all four nursery schools have recently had their Beacon status renewed; Ofsted inspection reports for nursery units in schools indicate that the quality of teaching is highly satisfactory. The majority of other settings are being inspected against early learning goals, with 100% reporting satisfactory or better performance, which exceeds a national Best Value target.

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

31. Support for 14-19 education is satisfactory. The LEA has strong strategic partnerships with the local LSC, with both the further education and the sixth form colleges, and with the education and business partnership. Partners agree on the priorities for 14-19 education in Halton, which are well aligned with corporate priorities. There is also a determination to align the priorities of the LEA and the local LSC. However, the strategy is

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still in draft, some key decisions have yet to be taken, and the LEA has not yet communicated a clear vision to schools to set developments at Key Stage 4 into the wider context.

32. The development of 14-19 provision across the borough is complex, given its geography and the long-established pattern whereby a significant proportion of Runcorn students seek post-16 education out of the borough. The LEA has not been complacent. It can already demonstrate the benefits to students of its work with partners in the creation of a new college base in Runcorn, following the strategic decision to remove sixth form provision from all community schools. This is resulting in wider course provision and increased retention rates. Similarly, good partnership work has increased the provision of work-based learning, in response to the criticism made in the Ofsted area-wide inspection. However, despite these and other improvements, it is unlikely that the local public service agreement (LPSA) targets for the number of 16 and 17 year-olds in education and training will be met.

33. The LEA makes appropriate use of data to target its intervention, including support for the secondary school with fewer than 25% of students achieving at least 5 GCSE passes at grade C or above. The LEA also facilitates the sharing of data between all secondary schools, following their agreement. As yet, there is no formal exchange of data between the LEA and the colleges and other providers of post-16 education. The LEA intends to establish a protocol by which the progress of individual students through to the age of 19 can be tracked.

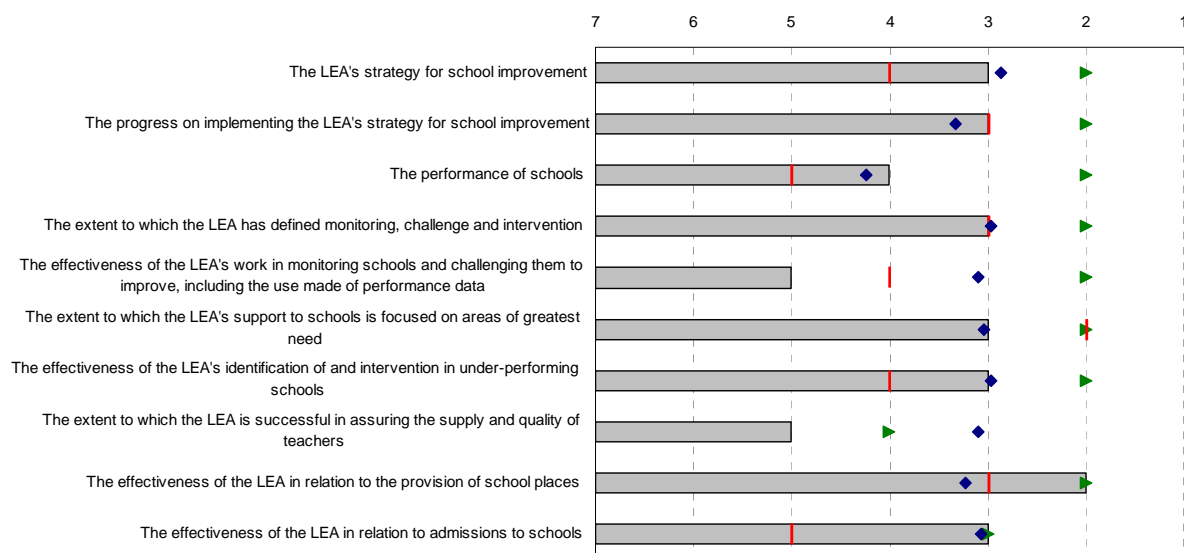
### **Asset management planning**

34. Asset management planning is good and is linked effectively with the range of other LEA planning processes, including school improvement, school places planning, early years and ICT development. The quality of information on the condition and suitability of schools has improved and this information is communicated effectively to schools. The LEA has good mechanisms for agreeing priorities for investment with schools.

35. The LEA has been successful in attracting capital resources to improve the condition of schools and, in comparison with many authorities, the school building stock is in reasonable condition. A particularly good feature is the liaison with schools to ensure that the combination of capital through the LEA, school-devolved formula capital and delegated maintenance money are used together effectively to maintain and improve the buildings. Schools submit annual returns on their expenditure on buildings and officers review plans and needs during an annual visit.

## 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

36. The strategy for school improvement and its implementation are highly satisfactory. Since the previous inspection effective partnership work has contributed to improvement in the strategy for education. In particular, the partnership with EiH complements the LEA's resources so that schools benefit from well-targeted activities and there are tangible outcomes for pupils. Given the strength of the LEA's commitment to school improvement, its progress to date, and the effectiveness of its partnership work, the capacity for further improvement is good.

37. The LEA has had significant success. No schools are currently declared by Ofsted as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses. The LEA has also been successful in raising standards through setting ambitious targets and in securing the active collaboration of schools in working to achieve them. Although most targets have not been met, the rate of improvement in several areas have been above the national rates and the LEA's performance is above that of statistical neighbours.

38. The strategy for school improvement clearly reflects local and national priorities and is well aligned with corporate priorities. With one exception, the priorities are based on a detailed audit which draws on a wide range of sources of data. There is a gap in the LEA's strategic management information about teacher recruitment and retention. The relationship between school improvement and social inclusion is well-articulated by elected members and officers, and is fundamental to the way the LEA operates. Thus there are clear links between

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the strategy for school improvement and that for social inclusion, including the strength of the LEA's support for early years' education and its commitment to lifelong learning. Links with the strategy for SEN are less well-established, but the LEA's work on school places planning and admissions supports the drive for school improvement.

39. The EDP defines links with other key plans, such as Excellence in Halton and Healthy Schools Standards, but with varying detail. The EDP priorities are matched to needs but, in some instances, the activities are not sufficiently coherent to constitute a strategy. Examples of this are Priority 2 'education with character' and the activities to support gifted and talented pupils. Each activity plan is meticulous in identifying funding sources and the criteria by which schools are targeted to deploy differentiated support, but the links between activities and success criteria are not consistently clear. Moreover, as the LEA has recently recognised, the support which a school attracts through the EDP is not sufficiently well-aligned to its criteria for intervention.

40. The LEA has established comprehensive structures for monitoring the implementation of the EDP, primarily through its school improvement programme action plan (SIPAP) system. However, the reporting of some activities focuses more on what has been undertaken than on the outcomes they produce, and thus does not fully support the evaluation of what is working and why.

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

41. These aspects of the LEA's support are highly satisfactory, with one key weakness. The LEA's commitment to raise standards has led to some intensive work, with significant improvements in pupils' attainment and in the outcomes of Ofsted inspections of schools. However, the LEA does not routinely provide written reports directly to governors on the outcomes of visits to schools, and because of this its overall effectiveness in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve is unsatisfactory.

42. The LEA is firmly committed to working in partnership with its schools. It has established a protocol to inform its relationships with schools and has used the protocol's reference groups effectively to ensure good, ongoing consultation on its procedures for monitoring, challenge and intervention. Similarly, it consults well with its partners, notably with Excellence in Halton.

43. The LEA's definitions of monitoring and challenge are clear. Monitoring is regular and schools are challenged well by the LEA. The procedures for target-setting, which were inconsistent at the time of the previous inspection, are now rigorous and well informed by the secure use of good data. The quality of the data provided to schools has improved significantly. Both schools and advisers are more proficient in interpreting data, and thus the target-setting process has a clear focus on how the needs of individual pupils can best be met. Challenge also goes beyond target setting, and its effectiveness is illustrated, for example, in schools' positive responses to new strategies, such as the leadership incentive grant (LIG) and workforce remodelling.

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44. The LEA has striven hard to provide support to schools in inverse proportion to success and to target its support through clear use of data and other management information. Hence, for example, each EDP activity specifies clearly the criteria that schools need to meet to obtain support. However, support is less well differentiated in practice, given that schools are targeted for this both through the EDP and according to the category of concern.

45. The work of the advisers and of all other school improvement teams is provided free of charge to schools. The LEA has established this way of working as a matter of policy and, partly because of the additional funding it has attracted, it has had the resources to do it. As a consequence, however, some schools do not fully understand their responsibility to purchase support. In the previous inspection, the LEA was recommended to identify reductions in the type and level of support required as schools become increasingly self-supporting. Given both its current policy and its practice, the LEA has not fully addressed this recommendation. Schools share with the LEA the responsibility to achieve this.

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**Recommendations**

- Implement fully the recommendation from the previous inspection and identify reductions in the type and level of support supplied routinely free of charge to schools.
- Ensure governors routinely receive notes of visit directly from the LEA.

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

46. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved and is now highly satisfactory. The LEA has no schools identified by Ofsted to be in need of special measures or with serious weakness. Schools identified as causing concern are kept under continual review by senior officers and, for the most part, make satisfactory progress. Their progress is scrutinised effectively by elected members.

47. However, the LEA's criteria for categorising schools causing concern are not consistently clear and its use of these criteria adds to the ambiguities. This renders opaque what should be transparent. In one significant case, the LEA delayed in formally classifying a school causing concern and informing the governors. Nevertheless a substantial amount of support, in a plan agreed by the governors and LEA, was already in place at the school. The relationship between the category of concern and the support which a school attracts through the EDP is currently subject to too much variation.

**Recommendations**

- Ensure the categories for schools causing concern are sufficiently distinguishable.
- Align the support generated through the EDP with that generated by a category of concern.

**Supply and quality of teachers**

48. The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers is unsatisfactory, despite strengths in promoting their retention. The LEA currently lacks key data to inform its strategy for recruitment. Links with higher education to promote recruitment are underdeveloped. The LEA has recognised the need to strengthen its work in this area and has purchased consultant support.

49. The strategy for continuous professional development is coherent and well-designed to promote retention. There are clear emphases on building the capacity of all adults working in schools and on career progression. Although not yet fully developed in practice, the LEA's strategy has attracted regional recognition. The LEA is taking good steps to draw together key initiatives, such as the LIG and workforce remodelling.

50. The LEA recognises the importance of tailoring new initiatives and its own provision to the needs of its schools. Examples of this are its training for workforce

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remodelling and the re-shaping of support for newly-qualified teachers and for the national strategies. Schools value this approach, participation has improved and the LEA has reduced the number of cancelled courses. The LEA has entered into productive partnerships with other LEAs to enhance aspects of training, but it does not formally broker support. Although informal networks are meeting most needs, there are no mechanisms by which schools can independently access quality assured alternative providers.

**Recommendation**

- Improve the LEA's knowledge of the current and future workforce needs in schools by establishing a database and analysing the information to predict needs and inform short-term and longer-term strategies.

**Providing school places**

51. The LEA's planning for school places has improved and is now good. Consultation with schools, the local community and other partner organisations such as diocesan authorities, colleges and the LSC is good.

52. Halton has shown considerable political and official resolve to tackle the issue of the high number of surplus places in the primary sector. A whole borough review was carried out efficiently and, through a combination of school reorganisation, early years provision, extended school and special needs development, surplus places have been reduced to 9%.

53. The LEA has taken appropriate action, through the amalgamation of two secondary schools, to ensure that the borough now has the right number of schools and school places for the secondary population. Sixth form provision in two community schools has been phased out with the development of a new sixth form college in Runcorn.

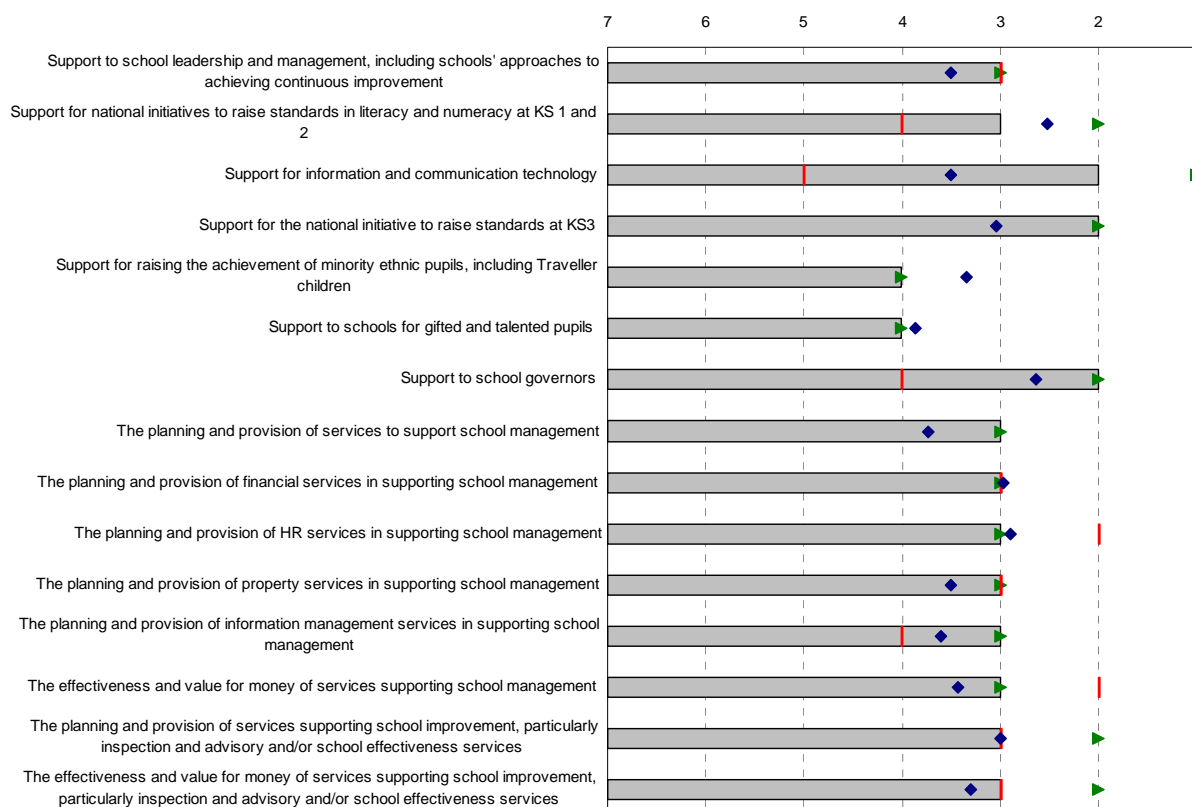
**Admissions to schools**

54. Admissions arrangements have improved and are now highly satisfactory. The LEA has revised and simplified its admissions criteria in line with the DfES Code of Practice. Top priority is given to looked after children and the distance criteria are now clear. The LEA met 91.2% of parents' first preferences on the initial allocation of places in academic year 2003/04. Appeals are managed effectively and in time for parents and schools to plan well in advance of the autumn term. Minor amendments to the transport policy bring this more in line with the admissions criteria.

55. Partnership with diocesan bodies, schools and neighbouring authorities is good on managing both school places and admissions. Co-ordinated arrangements are currently in place for secondary schools and for both community and voluntary-controlled primary schools. Effective liaison is taking place and should enable the 2005 statutory requirements for co-ordinated admissions to be met.

## 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

56. The LEA's support for school leadership and management continues to be highly satisfactory. There are some particular strengths, most notably in the support for raising attainment at Key Stage 3 and for information and communications technology, and the LEA's support for governors. However, some actions are recent and there remains an imbalance between what the LEA provides for schools and the support it gives them to be discriminating purchasers of services.

57. The LEA provides a range of support for school self-evaluation, including written guidance and training for managers and governors. Training is proving successful, with senior and middle managers increasingly skilled in analysing performance and with governors benefiting from well-targeted and flexible training. Guidance to support the self-evaluation of SEN provision has only just been received in schools, and is not, therefore, fully tested.

58. Some of the LEA's other activities in support of school leadership and management are also relatively recent. These include guidance on procurement and the planned brokerage of some services. Schools do not have systematic information on alternative providers of school improvement services.

59. The SIPAP system keeps the LEA well informed about schools and, in most cases, prompt action is taken when required. Governors routinely receive information about outcomes of advisers' visits only through the headteacher's report. The LEA is improving its dissemination of best practice through the records kept in the SIPAP system. There is an increasing a range of networks to promote collaboration through, for example, EiH and the work on national strategies.

### **Support for the implementation of national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2**

60. The LEA's support for literacy and numeracy at Key Stages 1 and 2 has improved and is now highly satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, attainment at Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics has risen at a rate above the national increase. In 2002, the results were in the ten most improved LEAs nationally. Performance dipped in 2003, but remained broadly in line with the national averages. However, attainment in English was 4% below target and 10% below target in mathematics. A significant proportion of schools, including some receiving intensive support, did not reach their targets. The LEA's targets for 2004 are unrealistic and unlikely to be met.

61. The LEA's targeting of schools for additional support is based on pupils' attainment and the evidence of school inspection reports, but there is a lack of clarity in the distinctions between categories of support. Contracts with individual schools for the work of consultants are clear and reflect the priorities negotiated by the school. The LEA has detailed systems to monitor and evaluate its work, but evaluation is not always sufficiently sharp to inform future action.

62. Schools receive considerable support for literacy and numeracy through the work of the link advisers and the LEA's assessment and achievement team. This additional support has, for example, improved teachers' ability to use data to track and analyse the pupils' progress.

63. The LEA has made a good start in integrating the work of the literacy and numeracy teams into a primary strategy. It is also making good use of the national consultative leadership programme, renamed the collaborative leadership programme by the LEA to reflect its relationship with schools.

### **Support for information and communication technology (ICT)**

64. The LEA provides good support for ICT. The concerns expressed in the previous inspection regarding the allocation of funding and speed of internet access have been addressed effectively. Good progress has been made, primarily because of the good level of support and guidance provided by a strong central team within the LEA.

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65. The LEA's strategic and operational plans for ICT are coherent with corporate planning and include local and national priorities. The ICT priorities are embedded well as overarching themes within the EDP.

66. The central team is employed effectively to support, advise and monitor schools across all phases. Support is appropriately targeted on the basis of a good range of data and other information, including school audits. The wide range of support offered by the consultants is highly valued by schools. For example, the LEA has been supporting and training teachers on assessment and recording in ICT across Key Stages 1 to 3, with a focus on enhancing transition work between schools. There has been much good work in this area, which the LEA continues to see as a priority.

67. The LEA has met all the national and local targets, for example in the ratio of computers to pupils and in broadband provision. It is well in line to meet the Key Stage 3 attainment target for 2004 and the full roll out of broadband.

68. Good practice is shared well through a variety of methods including network groups, newsletters and the Halton learning grid website. The LEA is making good progress in supporting schools to apply ICT across the curriculum, though at present more materials exist for primary schools than for secondary schools.

### **Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3**

69. Support for the Key Stage 3 initiative is good. This key priority in the EDP has clear targets and measurable success criteria and is aligned with the LEA's overall strategy for school improvement.

70. The central team, comprising a manager and six consultants covering each of the major strands, is highly regarded by schools, and is one of the key reasons why the strategy is developing well across the authority. They provide very good support and advice to schools. The performance of the team is monitored regularly.

71. The LEA makes good use of performance data from Key Stage 2 through to Key Stage 3 to track pupils' progress and to target support to schools. Both the LEA and schools track all vulnerable pupils and those at risk of low attainment. The rate of improvement in English, mathematics and science has been steady since the previous inspection and although performance is not yet consistently in line with national averages, there is every indication that the 2004 targets at Key Stage 3 will be met. The LEA received DfES recognition as one of the most improved LEAs at Key Stage 3 in 2003.

72. The LEA has several effective mechanisms for disseminating and sharing good practice including network meetings, newsletters and leading teachers. It employs a range of methods to ensure that effective transition arrangements exist between Key Stages 2 and 3.

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

73. Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Traveller children, is satisfactory. The focus of support for minority ethnic and Traveller children is clearly set out within the EDP as part of the LEA's support for vulnerable including low achieving pupils. Fewer than 1% of the school population are from a minority ethnic background, with Travellers forming a substantial part of the total. As very few pupils require support in English as an additional language, the focus of effort is well targeted at Traveller children, who are educated at two primary schools, and also into support for itinerant children. To support its work in this area, the LEA uses its vulnerable children grant to buy into a consortium of local LEAs.

74. The diversity and equal access group monitors performance of pupils, but comparisons are difficult given the small numbers in each age group. Attendance of Travellers in the primary phase is 80% and in line with statistical neighbours, whilst exclusion is negligible. Progression from Key Stage 2 to 3 is problematical, as it is in most LEAs. A new appointment has been made recently to further the LEA's work in this area.

**Support for gifted and talented pupils**

75. The LEA's support for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory and is enhanced through EiH. However, management changes in the LEA and EiH have hindered the progress of some developments and schools receive different levels of support.

76. All secondary schools are developing support for gifted and talented pupils and tracking their progress. The EiH attainment targets for these pupils have been met and the proportion of pupils obtaining A\* and A grades at GCSE increased in 2003. The LEA has supported summer schools, principally for gifted pupils, but has yet to develop its own systematic tracking of these pupils. Talented pupils have engaged in a number of projects in the arts, music and sport, some sponsored by additional funding which the LEA has been successful in attracting.

77. The range of activities has yet to be drawn together into a coherent strategy which encompasses all schools. The LEA's guidance for schools is still in draft and there is too much imprecision in both planning and reporting. The extent to which primary schools are engaged in supporting gifted and talented pupils currently owes too much to membership of Education Action Zones (EAZs). The decision to re-establish the EiH co-ordinator post and to link it with other initiatives in schools, notably the national strategies, has the potential to bring about greater coherence.

***Recommendation***

- Establish a clear strategy to meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils in all schools.

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**Support for school governors**

78. The LEA's support for governors has improved and is now good. The LEA has responded well to the recommendations in the previous report and has increased governors' participation in training through flexible provision. It has secured the confidence of governors and has worked hard to ensure that communications are good and support is readily accessible. Governors are increasingly well-informed and confident to carry out their responsibilities.

**The planning and provision of services to support school management**

79. The planning and provision of services to support school management are highly satisfactory.

80. Service agreements with schools have been revised for 2004. Effective consultation has resulted in tailoring the revised services to meet the needs of schools. Performance standards and targets for management services are sharper and the costs of services are clear. In some cases, for example property services, agreements offered to schools have improved substantially. Service providers have undertaken commercial awareness training and this has helped them to become more client-focused.

81. Considerable work has taken place to help schools to improve their procurement practices and to increase their choice of providers. This is, however, a relatively recent development and it is too early to judge the impact of this in practice. Headteachers, bursars and governors have been provided with satisfactory training on purchasing. A brokerage arrangement is being established with another LEA and a range of alternative providers are currently being accredited in four areas of service.

82. Property services continue to be highly satisfactory. A comprehensive review of corporate property services was carried out by external consultants. This has improved services to schools through a separation between operational and strategic areas of working, better systems for school buildings data and closer client links.

83. Schools are provided with good information on servicing arrangements and annual stewardship visits are carried out to advise on urgent tenants' items. Critical incident procedures are in place and proved to be very effective in several incidents in recent months. Major building projects are managed effectively.

84. Until recently, there was a building insurance scheme which pooled school expenditure on building maintenance. This arrangement became less popular with schools and so a new property services service agreement has been drawn up for 2004. It is too early to know whether this will deliver an effective service to schools.

85. Information management has improved and is now highly satisfactory with some particularly good features. In its management information strategy the LEA sets out clear protocols for essential data-sharing between and with schools and to reduce duplication in data collection. There is good communication with schools through an e-schools group and effective mechanisms exist to cascade information from the group to all schools.

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86. A good range of information and links is being developed on the council intranet, but currently secondary schools do not have access to this. Electronic communication with schools has been operational since 1998. Currently, 69% of schools have broadband connections and the LEA is on target to meet government requirements for connection of all schools by 2006. Technical support to schools on maintaining and developing management information software is good. Schools are assisted to develop a range of data packages and good links are being developed with central LEA databases. Training for use of these data packages is good.

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

87. The effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management are highly satisfactory. All the management support services inspected are at least highly satisfactory. There are good mechanisms to review the quality of these services through the well-established service planning and performance management processes. Reports are routinely made to the Education Policy and Performance Board. Schools' views on services are obtained through customer surveys, annual reviews and the resources and support functional group.

88. The costs of services to schools are clear. Where available, service costs are benchmarked. There are examples where services purchased through the local authority show good value for money. The development of the brokerage activities is substantially increasing the information available on the cost of alternative providers.

### **The planning and provision of services to support school improvement**

89. The planning and provision of services to support school improvement continue to be highly satisfactory. There are notable strengths, such as the performance management and induction of advisers and consultants. Weaknesses remain in the recruitment and retention of staff, notably educational psychologists.

90. There are strong links between service plans and corporate objectives. Performance management is systematic and rigorous. The LEA is making good use of the National Standards for School Improvement Professionals in ensuring advisers and consultants are well equipped to meet the demands of their work and have good opportunities for professional development. The emphasis on building the skills of the team as a whole and of collaborative professional development is a strength and results in a service which has credibility in schools.

91. In the advisory service, good planning and creative use of posts have secured the continuity of services. The LEA makes effective use of part-time staff and secondments to strengthen expertise, augment provision and provide flexibility in deployment. However, brokerage of additional support is ad hoc.

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

92. The effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement are highly satisfactory. The school improvement service has the capacity to provide the

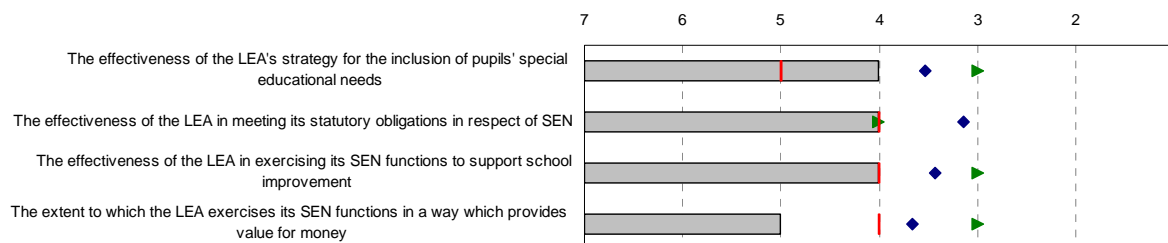
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challenge and support that schools need and has credibility in schools. Although schools also have confidence in the quality of other school improvement services, they experience too much variability in the availability of that support. This is because some key posts have remained vacant for long periods and the LEA has not secured alternative provision. The overall costs of services are broadly in line with other LEAs.

## 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

93. The LEA's strategy for SEN has improved and is now satisfactory. This position has been reached by the LEA only very recently. The LEA was slow to respond to the recommendation in the previous inspection report, to conduct a strategic review quickly and implement its findings. As a result, the LEA has only recently made progress in its policy direction on inclusion, although this policy is now widely understood by schools and other partners. An action plan which fully addresses strategic requirements is yet to be finalised. A consequence of the LEA's slow strategic development is that it does not yet provide satisfactory value for money in its support for SEN. Statutory obligations are met and the support for school improvement is generally sound.

94. The LEA's strategies relating to disability and promotion of inclusive education in SEN are appropriately reflected in a number of policy documents. The LEA's accessibility strategy has involved an audit of the built environment against key objectives relating to disability. Outcomes are reflected in the asset management plan and in individual school plans. Sound principles of inclusion are clearly described in the LEA's *Framework for Special Educational Needs*. The focus on vulnerable children in priority six of the EDP addresses the special needs of pupils. Clear links also exist in other plans such as the current draft school organisation plan.

95. The LEA's publication in the summer of 2003 of its consultation paper for the review of special education provision in the borough was late. Key and long-awaited proposals for the re-organisation of special schools seek to promote greater inclusion and address the financial and educational significance of a high number of out-of-borough placements. However, the proposals are incomplete, notably in relation to the progression of pupils from dedicated units in mainstream primary schools to a complementary range of suitable units in secondary schools. In addition, the LEA has not produced a strategy to address the high proportion of statutory spending on children with moderate learning difficulties.

96. Consultation with a wide range of partners, including mainstream and special schools, is good and is helping to move the strategy forward. Partnership work is well co-ordinated at both strategic and operational levels. Key partners include regional education groups, social services, health authority, child and adolescent mental health service, and the voluntary and private sectors. The work of the Halton partnership and the children and young people's strategic partnership have added to the strength of the partnership work.

***Recommendation***

- In order to ensure the speedy implementation of the SEN strategy, complete an action plan which fully addresses strategic requirements as a matter of urgency.

**Statutory obligations**

97. The LEA continues to meet satisfactorily its statutory obligations for SEN.

98. Halton has a high proportion of pupils with statements of SEN. The rate of referrals by schools is being reduced, but relatively few statements cease to be maintained. The percentage of new statements issued within 18 weeks has fluctuated since the previous inspection, mainly as a result of the turnover of key staff in this relatively small LEA. This has resulted in a variable response to the recommendation from the previous inspection to increase the percentage of statements produced on time. Having been as low as 15%, the projection for the current year of 79.5% approaches the performance of the top 25% of LEAs, but remains vulnerable to the effect of staff turnover.

99. The LEA's procedures for creating new and revised statements are sound, with appropriate targets and success criteria being set at pupils' annual reviews. The LEA is represented at annual reviews where transition between key stages or significant challenge on resource deployment is anticipated. Joint planning on the purchase of places and on the return of out-of-borough placements with social services and the healthcare trust is sound.

100. Criteria for the referral of pupils for assessment are clearly set out for schools, parents and voluntary organisations. The procedures and the associated guidance for parents comply with the revised Code of Practice. The very low percentage of cases being referred to mediation, including appeals to the SEN tribunal, is the result of the good communications that the LEA has established with parents and its willingness to resolve difficulties.

***Recommendation***

- Moderate the risk in loss of performance by ensuring that key knowledge and skills for issuing new statements is understood by a wider range of staff.

**SEN functions to support school improvement**

101. The LEA's SEN functions to support school improvement remain satisfactory.

102. The LEA has improved its support for schools in monitoring the progress of the lowest 20% of pupils through focused assessment training. This includes the use of performance indicator value-added target setting (PIVAT) in special schools and mainstream

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schools with attached units. The progress of pupils with SEN is a focus of link advisers' discussions with schools, but the LEA has only recently provided self-evaluation guidance to schools. This is relatively late and thus not fully tested.

103. Good training has been provided for schools, governors and central staff, including training on the SEN Code of Practice and on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act.

104. The learning support service is highly satisfactory. Although of good quality, the support and advice from the education psychology service (EPS) has been restricted over a sustained period because of vacancies caused by continual turnover of staff. Both services have responded positively to criticisms in the recent report by District Audit Office and provide effective support for whole-school strategies and for specific teaching skills.

***Recommendation***

- Ensure continuity of provision to schools by the education psychology service.

**Value for money**

105. The LEA's ability to secure value for money for SEN has declined and is now unsatisfactory. This is the result of weaknesses, recognised by the LEA, in the method used to distribute funding to schools and in the allocation of resources.

106. Overall expenditure on SEN is in line with other authorities, but the cost of statutory provision is relatively high. This is because maintained special schools and out-of-borough provision together account for a large share of the SEN budget. The LEA is developing a strategy to redress the historical position and to reconfigure support available to mainstream schools through a suitable range of unit provision, but it will be some time before strategy can be fully implemented.

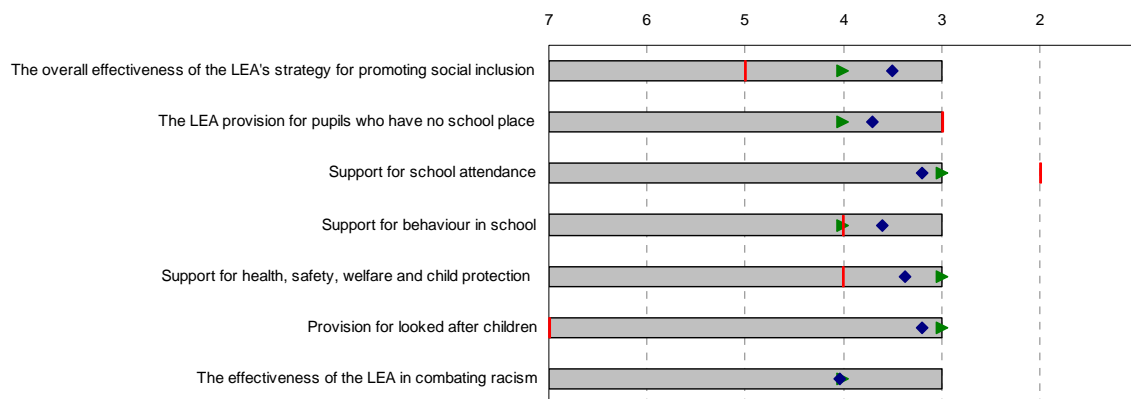
107. Resources are allocated to schools solely on the basis of free school meal criteria. This is inappropriate. The LEA has appropriate plans to address this. The processes for delegating funding to schools are transparent and the use of funding is monitored effectively, both by link advisers and through the statutory assessment monitoring panel. Sound mechanisms exist to monitor progress of pupils with a statement of SEN at annual review, especially in planning for transfer across key stages.

***Recommendation***

- Devise a model of formula allocation for SEN resources which properly reflects levels of need.

## 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 LEA strategy for social inclusion

108. The LEA's strategy for social inclusion has improved and is now highly satisfactory.

109. Elected members, officers, schools and all key stakeholders share a strong commitment to inclusion. The council's community strategy and corporate plan reflect the importance placed on social inclusion across the borough. This priority is in turn incorporated into the strategic and operational plans for the education and social inclusion directorate.

110. The council structure includes a policy and performance board for social inclusion. Members take their responsibilities to monitor social inclusion seriously. Their scrutiny procedures are good and include regular monitoring of targets for attendance, exclusions and the attainment of looked after children. The LEA has a set of LPSAs which provide some demanding targets in areas of truancy and retention rates post-16. The LEA will have difficulty in meeting these.

111. The LEA meets its statutory obligations and also seeks to be more efficient and effective in its work. As part of the local preventive strategy, an audit of need has been undertaken with all agencies with a view to ensuring a continuum of support which is both coherent and appropriately pitched. Good value added work is taking place through the pooling of funding streams and resources to maximise the efficiency of initiatives.

112. Corporate effort is being made through various forums to add value by the pooling of funding streams available to different agencies and by improving convergence of targets and delivery.

113. Policies and procedures make clear respective responsibilities of schools, services and agencies with the aim of avoiding inappropriate referral. Link advisers challenge schools effectively in relation to the performance of vulnerable pupils.

114. The contribution of partnership work has been effective and has had a positive effect on promoting social inclusion. The Halton strategic partnership has helped greatly in ensuring that social inclusion remains a high priority. A large number of the initiatives funded through the single regeneration and neighbourhood renewal budgets have a strong focus on inclusion and regeneration and integrate well with the work of the LEA. For example, there is effective co-ordination and support for behaviour through the EiH programme, the EPS, the Key Stage 3 pupil referral unit (PRU), the alternative education programmes at Key Stage 4 and the behaviour social support team.

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

115. The LEA's support for children who have no school place is highly satisfactory. There have been substantial improvements in the last 18 months with, for example, the creation of two PRUs and the appointment of new key staff. While some schools regret the comparatively recent emergence of some of these initiatives, they nonetheless acknowledge the considerable progress made more recently.

116. For the academic year 2003/04, the LEA has fully complied with its statutory duties to provide 25 hours of tuition for permanently excluded pupils and has secured the offer of that provision within 15 days of the exclusion. This was not the case in the previous academic year.

117. The LEA has good systems for identifying and tracking pupils who either have no school place, or are at risk of exclusion, and has secured a good range of alternative curriculum providers at Key Stage 4. Monitoring of these providers is good. Temporary places at a PRU are available for pupils at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and there are effective procedures for re-integrating these pupils into the mainstream.

118. The LEA's monitoring of pupils whose parents elect to educate them at home is effective. Elected members receive regular reports on progress made in providing for all children with no school place.

### **Support for attendance**

119. Support for improving school attendance has declined and is now highly satisfactory. While some schools have expressed reservations about the support they receive, the LEA has effectively helped schools to secure some clear successes in maintaining attendance rates. The LEA provides a coherent framework for support which effectively joins together a range of different initiatives. However, rates of attendance in some secondary schools remain stubbornly low.

120. The LEA already has a firm grasp of attendance data and the introduction of new computer systems will allow more detailed analysis for the year 2003/04. Data are effectively shared between the services in the LEA. Link advisers routinely discuss

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attendance issues in their visits to schools and elected members receive appropriate reports on attendance. The education welfare team is appropriately deployed to schools according to a clear formula, which allows the service to concentrate its help where it is most needed.

121. The LEA makes good use of its legal powers. The formal attendance planning meetings with school, pupil and family, with a clear strategy for prosecution if these do not succeed, are a strength of the provision. The LEA appropriately deals with child employment issues.

### **Support for behaviour**

122. Support for behaviour has improved and is highly satisfactory. The behaviour strategy concentrates on enhancing the capacity and capability of schools to accommodate challenging behaviour without having to consider exclusion except in the most serious cases. Different initiatives and funding streams have been brought together in a single, good behaviour support framework which fully involves other agencies and complements the LEA's SEN work. However, all this leaves the current behaviour support plan looking dated.

123. In the last eighteen months, the LEA has established: learning support units in all secondary schools; full-time learning mentors in all secondary schools and in clusters of primary schools; and two PRUs for the secondary sector offering temporary and part-time placements. A support teacher works with primary schools and part of an educational psychology post is dedicated to this area of work. Early indications are that these measures are having a positive impact.

124. The LEA has recently launched a behaviour co-ordinator scheme, which will see a named teacher in schools receiving targeted, and possibly accredited, training to support their colleagues in school in dealing with challenging behaviour. The great majority of schools have expressed a willingness to become involved with this initiative.

125. There are appropriate and efficient arrangements in place for parents to appeal against exclusion decisions. Numbers of permanent exclusion have fallen from 33 in 2000/01 to 24 in 2002/03 although both figures exceeded the targets for those years, of 16 and 14 respectively. Fixed-term exclusions show a slight upward trend and also exceed the LEA's targets, although the percentage of secondary-aged pupils excluded for more than five days has been lower than in comparable authorities. Data on exclusions are appropriately reported to elected members and headteachers.

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

126. The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to the health, safety, welfare and child protection is highly satisfactory.

127. The LEA meets its statutory obligations in child protection and contributes fully to the work of the area child protection committee. In response to the Victoria Climbié report, revised multi-agency policy and procedures in child protection have been circulated to all schools, early years' settings and to PRUs. Every school, education setting and service has a designated child protection co-ordinator and a directory of their contact and training details is

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maintained. LEA and school staff receive good multi-agency training and the LEA monitors attendance at training rigorously. An advice line, facilitated by social services, is available if designated teachers need support or guidance regarding referral.

128. Guidelines are being produced for schools and settings on safe recruitment procedures. A database is being established which will allow preventive measures to be taken in response to an emerging pattern of long-term abuse and which will improve the targeting of training.

129. The LEA regularly updates its clearly defined policies for health and safety and school security. Good procedures are in place for monitoring and dealing with areas of significant risk.. Schools are well supported in developing their own health and safety policies and highly satisfactory training programmes in risk assessment are available. Accident statistics are monitored centrally to inform the asset management plan and school planning. Dedicated staff from the risk management division and property services provide help and assistance to schools, share good practice and maintain a robust monitoring system to secure compliance. Good working relationships exist with the governing bodies of voluntary aided schools which carry the responsibilities of the employer for health and safety in law. Policy for education visits has been reviewed and each school has a nominated co-ordinator.

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

130. The provision for looked after children is highly satisfactory. The council carries out effectively its responsibility as corporate parent to promote the educational achievement and welfare of children in its care. The council's equal chances working group was formed in 2001 to develop policy to improve outcomes for looked after children. A comprehensive action plan has been produced, directing activity through a wide range of contributors. Regular reporting to the education policy and performance board has been established. The education and social inclusion directorate and the social services have agreed protocols for effective joint working and sharing of information.

131. The council has databases which permit monitoring of attainment, exclusion and attendance of looked after pupils, wherever they reside and are educated. A dedicated support service, managed by the behaviour social support team, offers direct support to young people, carers and professional staff. Every pupil has a personal education plan, including those educated outside the borough. Each school has a designated teacher and governor. The LEA has commenced a pilot training programme for teachers and makes training available to governors, although take-up has been disappointing.

132. The small number of looked after children across the age range 2–19 makes national comparisons difficult. Nevertheless, the LEA has shown that performance at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 in each of the past 4 years has been in line with national averages. While performance has remained steady at Key Stages 1 and 2, there has been discernible improvement in Key Stages 3 and 4. As attainment remains below the level of their peers in Halton, new Government targets for year-on-year improvement in the attainment of looked after children will be challenging.

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**Promoting racial equality**

133. The measures taken to combat racism and promote race equality are highly satisfactory. A model race equality policy and action plan were made available to schools nearly a year before the target date of 31 May 2002 in anticipation of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, along with procedures for collecting and analysing data on racist incidents. Procedures were reviewed effectively during 2003 and led to appropriate follow-up with individual schools. The education policy and performance board receive a good annual monitoring report at the beginning of each academic year.

134. Schools' participation on courses promoting good anti-racist practice and education for diversity has been encouraging. Religious pluralism is recognised and supported through the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). Records show that minority ethnic groups are appropriately represented in school governing bodies.

135. The council introduced an effective Halton Race Equality Scheme 2002-05 which aims to make tackling discrimination and promoting race equality, mainstream activities in the workforce and in partnerships with other agencies. The council aims to reflect minority ethnic representation in the community in the number and seniority of posts in its workforce. Monitoring of the former is in place.

## Appendix A: Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA :	Halton Local Education Authority
LEA number:	876
Reporting Inspector:	Brian Sharples HMI
Date of Inspection:	January 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	4	
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	2	
1.2	The implementation of corporate planning for education	2	
1.3	The effectiveness of LEA decision-making	2	
1.4	The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities	3	
1.5	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	3	
1.6	The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice)	2	
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	2	

1.9	Support for Early Years' education	1	
1.10	Support for 14 – 19 education	4	
1.11	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	2	
<b>Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation</b>			
2.1	The LEA's strategy for school improvement	3	
2.2	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement	3	
2.3	The performance of schools	4	
2.4	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention	3	
2.5	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	5	
2.6	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	3	
2.7	The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	3	
2.8	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	5	
2.9	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	
2.10	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	
<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	3	
3.3	Support for information and communication technology	2	

3.4	Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3	2	
3.5	Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children	4	
3.6	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	4	
3.7	Support for school governors	2	
3.8	The planning and provision of services to support school management	3	
3.8a	The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management	3	NF
3.8b	The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management	3	NF
3.8c	The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management	3	
3.8d	The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management	3	
3.9	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management	3	
3.10	The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	3	
3.11	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	3	
<b>Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)</b>			
4.1	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for Special Educational Needs (SEN)	4	
4.2	The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	4	
4.3	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	4	
4.4	The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money	5	

	<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	3	
5.3	Support for school attendance	3	
5.4	Support for behaviour in school	3	
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	3	

*\*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

## Appendix B

### Context of the inspection

This inspection of Halton local education authority (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 Halton;
- 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 planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management;</li><li>• the planning and provision of human resources services in supporting school management.</li></ul> |
|---|

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.

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**Context of the LEA**

Halton sits on either side of the River Mersey and is made up of the two towns of Runcorn and Widnes, and the villages of Hale, Moore, Daresbury and Preston Brook, and is situated between Liverpool and Manchester at the lowest bridging point across the River Mersey.

Halton's population of 118,200 is declining and shows a fall of approximately 4,000 since the previous inspection. The population is predominantly white, with 2% of the population from minority ethnic groups. Some 78% of the population are aged over 16, 5.6% of whom are aged between 16 and 19. The indices of multiple deprivation for Halton show that 10 of the 21 wards are ranked within the most deprived 10% of wards nationally. Halton ranks as the 18<sup>th</sup> most deprived authority in England with high levels of disadvantage spread across the entire borough.

The number of pupils of compulsory school age on roll in maintained schools is approximately 18,500 which has declined by 14% since the previous inspection. The minority ethnic population in schools is 0.7% in primary schools and 0.8% in secondary schools which is well below national averages and those of statistical neighbours. The number of mainstream pupils with a statement for special needs is 3.6% in primary schools and 5.5% in secondary schools, both of which are above national averages and those of statistical neighbours. The percentage of pupils attending special schools is broadly in line with national averages in the secondary sector but above in primary. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in maintained primary (32.1%) and secondary schools (24.1%) is higher than national averages and those of statistical neighbours.

Halton has 68 schools. These consist of four nursery, 52 primary, eight secondary and four special schools. In addition to the four special schools, 13 mainstream schools currently accommodate pupils with statements of special education needs in 'unit' provision. Additionally there are two PRU's.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment for education, published in December 2003, gave the education service two stars (lower) for current performance and rated its capacity to improve as secure.

### **The performance of schools**

The performance of schools in Halton is satisfactory overall. However, the rates of improvement and the performance at each key stage from year to year provide an unsteady and inconsistent picture.

At Key Stage 1 performance in all tests at level 2 and above is in line with the average found nationally and in statistical neighbours. A similar pattern exists at Key Stage 2 at level 4 and above with the exception of English and science, in which performance is above that of statistical neighbours.

At Key Stage 3 performance at level 5 and above in English and mathematics is in line with national averages but is below the national average in science. While English and mathematics have made some improvement against national averages, this is not the case for science.

At Key Stage 4 the performance at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) one or more A\*-G grades is in line with national averages and that of statistical neighbours. Performance at five or more GCSE A\*-G grades is in line with national averages and above those of statistical neighbours. However, both the average points score and performance at 5 or more GCSE A\*-C grades are below national averages and rates of improvement have declined slightly.

While the LEA can show good progress over the last four years, in particular at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, it started from a low baseline and progress has taken place at broadly similar rates to those nationally.

LEA targets for 2004 are challenging and fall within two or three percentage points of the aggregated targets from schools. The LEA has four additional stretch targets under a LPSA. However, the LEA did not meet any of its 2003 core subject performance targets in Key Stages 2 and 3, or those at Key Stage 4. It fell short by figures of between one and ten percentage points. The LEA has to recover between three and fifteen percentage points across the Key Stages to meet the targets for 2004. In some cases this is unrealistic and targets are unlikely to be achieved.

**Funding data for the LEA**

<b>Schools Budget</b>	<b>Halton</b>	<b>Statistical neighbours average</b>	<b>Unitary Average</b>	<b>England Average</b>
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
<b>Individual schools budget</b>	<b>2,722</b>	<b>2,622</b>	<b>2,613</b>	<b>2,708</b>
Standards fund delegated	31	57	58	61
Education for under fives	125	69	98	96
Strategic management	46	34	28	29
Special educational needs	161	108	109	120
Grants	114	77	41	53
Access	36	71	55	55
Capital expenditure from revenue	16	33	20	24
<b>TOTAL SCHOOLS BUDGET</b>	<b>3,250</b>	<b>3,069</b>	<b>3,024</b>	<b>3,145</b>
<b>Schools formula spending share</b>	<b>2,959</b>	<b>2,915</b>	<b>2,808</b>	<b>2,904</b>

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04

<b>LEA Budget</b>	<b>Halton</b>	<b>Statistical neighbours average</b>	<b>Unitary Average</b>	<b>England Average</b>
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Strategic management	124	109	86	95
Specific Grants	39	14	19	16
Special educational needs	45	29	32	32
School improvement	35	34	33	36
Access	88	96	128	133
Capital expenditure from revenue	0	1	2	2
Youth and Community	52	73	70	74
<b>TOTAL LEA BUDGET</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>388</b>

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04

Note: All figures are net