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INTRODUCTION

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

2. Because of the unique nature of the LEA, the main inspection work was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, who tested the views of the Headteacher, governors and staff in the school maintained by the Corporation. The inspection was also partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information, documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and staff in other departments of the Corporation.

COMMENTARY

3. The Corporation of London is unique among English local authorities. A non-political body, it acts as the unitary authority for the Square Mile, while also exercising the duties of a port health and police authority, and maintaining the traditional rights, traditions and ceremonial functions of the City. Education constitutes a much smaller proportion of its activity than is true of any other local authority, and within the Education Department, support for schools occupies less time than the commitment to post-16 education and support for business in the City.

4. Nevertheless, the Corporation is determined that its one school, the Sir John Cass Foundation Primary School, should be an excellent one, and it expresses that determination through a very high level of resourcing and in the intensive support given by the Local Education Authority (LEA). The school serves a largely Bangladeshi community, and does so well. Many pupils enter with little or no English. They acquire rapidly developing language skills, so that by the end of Key Stage 2 their performance across the curriculum is well above national levels. They also have access to a range of cultural opportunities which few schools can equal.

5. The support given by the LEA is exemplary. The LEA fulfils its statutory duties and performs all of its functions at least adequately, and the great majority very well. It rightly makes no attempt to provide a full range of services itself, but buys in expertise as required, and does so wisely. Over the ten years since the Corporation accepted responsibility for education from the Inner London Education Authority, the persistence of the City Education Officer (CEO) and the Contracted Inspector particularly has helped raise the school's performance from mediocrity to a point where the school deserves the Beacon status it has.

6. Children who live in the City, because they are few in number and known to the relevant professionals, are particularly well-supported. The LEA achieves, through effective liaison with social services in particular, early identification and remediation both of difficulties that might affect pupils' access to education and of special educational needs. The support provided for behaviour and for attendance at school is good.

7. At the same time, one of the Corporation's aims is to be a good neighbour. In pursuit of this intention, the LEA has accepted a responsibility through its involvement in the Hackney Education Action Zone (EAZ) and in Excellence in Cities, to contribute to the raising of attainment outside the Square Mile. Whether this will succeed cannot yet be judged. All that can with certainty be said is that the Corporation has a great deal to offer.

8. This report makes few criticisms, and few recommendations. From the point of view of the school, this is a Rolls Royce service. One characteristic of Rolls Royces is that few people can afford them, and it must be concluded that the quality of service found here is dependent on a level of resourcing that is not replicable elsewhere. The Education Department is in no way wasteful, (indeed, the range of non-school activities supported is extraordinarily wide, given the small size of the department) but, by definition, it has no economies of scale of which to take advantage. The value for money equation is therefore a difficult one: equally good but less expensive schools exist elsewhere. However, one of the LEA's objectives is

to maintain and enhance the influence and good name of the Corporation. Through its work in school improvement, it achieves this.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

9. The Corporation of London is a unique LEA, in that it has only one Voluntary Aided school, though it also provides some services to the independent schools run by the Corporation. The Corporation covers a very small area, dominated by business and commercial property. It differs from all other local authorities in that it has the power to set its own business rate. The resident population is small, but highly diverse. It includes some very affluent groups, but also some disadvantaged communities, living on the boundaries of Hackney and Tower Hamlets. Three quarters of the dwellings within the Square Mile are owned by the Corporation. There is considerable movement of children across boundaries.

10. Ten per cent of residents are from minority ethnic groups, of which the largest is Bangladeshi: a group of which constitutes a large proportion of the school population. In January 1998, 89 per cent of the pupils at the Sir John Cass's Foundation School were of ethnic minority origin, and 63 per cent were Bangladeshi. Some three-quarters of the pupils have English as a second language. Two pupils had statements of special educational needs (SEN) in 1997/8, and 27 per cent of pupils at the school were regarded as having SEN. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals fell in 1998 to 38 per cent, having been over 50 per cent for several years. The provision of pre-school places exceeds the number of resident children needing such provision.

School Performance

11. Performance is good and generally improving:

In 1998, performance in English and Mathematics rose to close to the national average, while in 1997 and 1998 Key Stage 2 performance in both subjects was within the upper quartile of all schools nationally. Provisional figures for 1999 show that improvement strongly continuing. There have been no permanent exclusions in the last five years, and attendance in 1997/8 was well above the national average.

The school was inspected in 1995, and found to have sound standards in most subjects, good teaching and very strong leadership.

Funding

12. The funding available to the school has risen slightly in recent years. Expenditure per pupil for the last three years has been:

1997/8	1998/9	1999/2000
£2,976	£3,032	£3,048

These figures are the highest delegated by any LEA in the country to primary schools. The proportion of the Potential Schools Budget (PSB) delegated remained steady at 89 per cent from 1997/8 to 1998/9, although because the local schools budget (LSB) is calculated differently, the delegated budget is now reckoned to be only 44 per cent of the LSB. That reflects the very large element of non-school

expenditure in the budget. The budget is set with little reference to the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), and reflects an analysis of need in a context in which by definition few economies of scale are possible. The school is well-resourced and well-supported. Indeed, the financial data do not reveal the full story. The school has considerable power of purchase from its delegated budget, but also unrestricted access to the full range of services in the Chamberlain's Department and the Town Clerk's department. Because the education department is a relatively small aspect of a very large institution, it is generously treated (although also held closely to account). The Corporation overall retains much larger reserves than other local authorities, and is thus able to overcome fluctuations in financing. Nevertheless, it faces some pressures to live within its means. All departments are currently required to achieve 1 per cent efficiency savings for each of the next three years. Within that period Best Value reviews are expected to yield economies of £2.5 million per annum.

13. The LEA publishes and reviews a Local Management of Schools (LMS) formula. In this instance, the formula is by definition not a mechanism for apportioning finance between schools. It is, however, a useful framework for monitoring the budget and for indicating to the school the anticipated patterns of expenditure.

The Structure of the Corporation

14. The principal governing body for the Corporation of London is the Court of Common Council. The Education Committee is one of 24 committees of members who set Corporation policy and oversee the work of 31 departments. The Education Committee reports directly to the Court of Common Council, but also works within such policies as are laid down from time to time by the Policy and Resources, Finance and Establishment Committees.

15. The Education Committee comprises 12 members of the Court of Common Council, one voting representative of the London Diocesan Board for Schools, 5 non-voting co-opted members, representing teachers, parents, adult youth and community education interests.

16. The LEA differs from all other LEAs in a number of key ways. For example, its principal focus is not schools, but lifelong learning, with a particular emphasis on adult, youth and community education. Because the size of the resident population is small, the LEA is not the main, or one of the main, spending committees of the Corporation. However, it provides services for a working population of 300,000 as well as for residents. With a few exceptions, it endeavours to meet the same duties as other LEAs. Among the exceptions are that it is not an admissions authority and does not have a SACRE, because the one school is a voluntary aided primary school. The LEA benefits from no economies of scale, but on the other hand, because of its small size, it has close relations with other departments and with the community in general, including the school community. Its operations are not a matter for political controversy, but because of the prestige of the Corporation, the work of the LEA is in some respects broader than is usually the case. For example, the City Education Officer advises the Corporation on its higher education strategy, and the Department answers a wide range of enquiries, national and international,

from correspondents or callers who assume that it is responsible for education across London or, at times, the whole of the UK.

The Education Development Plan (EDP)

17. The EDP was approved by the Secretary of State for the full three year period, with only the general conditions applicable to all LEAs. Because the LEA has only one school, the priorities are identical with those in the school development plan, and the frequency of contact between the LEA and the school is such that issues of consultation hardly arise, although appropriate formal procedures exist. The utility of producing an EDP in such circumstances may arguably be questionable; nevertheless, it can be done well, or badly, and it is important to record that the Corporation has done it well.

18. The EDP priorities are:
support for literacy and numeracy
support for science
improving pupil attendance
development of the use of ICT in teaching and for administration
developing further the quality of early years education
supporting school self review
improving links with parents and developing further their ability to support their children's learning.

19. The reasons for establishing these priorities are clearly set out, referring to the school's own planning, its OFSTED report, performance data and, where relevant, demographic statistics. The school and the LEA are in the happy position that the priorities are, by and large, concerned with the improvement of what is already sound, or good. Nevertheless, they are relevant, and work on them is appropriately targeted to the needs of pupils.

20. Activities, and specific actions are clearly (and briefly) set out, and are relevant to the priorities and targets defined. Many of the actions proposed involve work by the Contracted Inspector who is a retired senior primary inspector, and an experienced Registered Inspector. Where further specialist advice is required it is purchased. The purchase of that support is discriminating, and although evaluation is informal, it is effective. Notwithstanding the clarity and relative paucity of the actions the LEA proposes to take, for an individual primary school it nevertheless amounts to a considerable package of support. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the school is extremely satisfied with what it receives.

21. The information used to set targets is adequate, and the targets themselves are more ambitious than those set by the majority of schools in comparable contexts. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that the LEA is already meeting its literacy target for 2002, it is clear that they may not be ambitious enough.

22. Recommendation

The LEA should: revise its targets for literacy and numeracy in the light of its success in hitting those set earlier.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications for other functions

23. The LEA's support for school improvement is much assisted by the clarity and focus of the EDP, which is an effective working document. The LEA also provides a highly effective range of management services, which enable the school to run well, and smoothly. The school is enviably resourced, and the LEA supports it well in creating a climate for learning through effective work on attendance and behaviour.

Monitoring, Challenge, Support, Intervention

24. The context for school improvement is therefore highly favourable. Moreover, it goes without saying that the relationship between the school and the LEA is close, and contact extremely frequent. The LEA is, by definition, not vexed with issues about where to target its resources. The school gets all the school-related resources, and uses them well. 'Monitoring' is not so much a specific activity as a by product of virtual symbiosis. To put it very mildly, the LEA knows its school well, but not in a cosy way. The determination to seek continuous improvement is palpable.

25. The LEA's monitoring function, and the provision of challenge and support, are exercised through the work of the contracted inspector. This is of very high quality, and has made a considerable contribution to the progress the school has made. The written reports seen by HMI were detailed, evaluative, precise and helpful. They make well-judged recommendations, arising out of the work seen. The regular visits are reported to be equally challenging, and helpful in combating any risk of isolation.

26. Particularly effective support has been given to the management of the school, partly through professional development of the headteacher, whom the contracted inspector appraises, with the CEO. That development has been partly through formal training, via the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) and OFSTED training, partly informal, through regular contact and coaching. Particular effort has gone into the development of a model of planning in the school, and into the raising of expectations.

27. The inspector herself reports directly to the CEO, who evaluates her work. In addition to the support she herself provides (which includes training for the governing body), she exercises a brokering function, engaging support from other sources as needed. This works well.

28. The main problem the LEA and the school face is that of potential isolation. The strategy for overcoming this and for promoting both the development of staff and the school's ability to compare itself with like schools consist of:

- the work of the contracted inspector
- benchmarking against the performance of schools in Tower Hamlets
- the purchase of external advisory support
- participation in national projects, for example for ICT.

This is resource-intensive, but highly successful. Development opportunities for staff are numerous and are, of course, enriched and increased by the prestige and cosmopolitanism of the Corporation itself. The school is among the most visited, for example, in the UK. With the LEA's support it makes good use of unrivalled opportunities.

Support for literacy

29. Support for literacy is a priority in the EDP, not because it is an area of weakness, but because the LEA and school wish to maintain and, if possible, build on the high standards that already exist. Standards at KS1 have improved rapidly in recent years, and at KS2 they are well above national figures. Indeed, the 1998 figures already exceeded the targets for 2001 and 2002.

30. The LEA supports the work of the school through four activities:

- (a) The work of the contracted inspector in monitoring standards in literacy and supporting improvements in teaching and learning, working closely with the school literacy coordinator.
- (b) The provision of specialist INSET, advice on books and resources, observation, individual advice and support for the coordinator, through the Tower Hamlets Professional Development Centre.
- (c) The provision of pupil performance data and analysis by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.
- (d) The Language and Achievement Project (LAP), which provides monitoring information on teaching and on standards achieved with feedback for teachers, bilingual staff and classroom support staff, and to support the headteacher and coordinator.

31. The effect of this is to provide very intensive support to a school that in other circumstances would not have been identified for support for such intensity. The work specifically on literacy is further supported by an Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) action plan of excellent quality, which sets out a clear, well-argued strategy.

32. All this is highly effective. The Bangladeshi pupils in the school, who are the large majority, start from a very low baseline. Their competence in English develops rapidly, so that they do well by any standards at the end of KS2. Their growing English as an Additional Language competence has a highly positive impact on standards across the curriculum.

33. The support provided for these pupils is of exemplary quality. Central to its effectiveness is that the LEA has resourced the school at a level sufficient to keep the LAP team together. Support for literacy and support for English as an Additional Language are, in this context rightly, seen as inextricably connected, and this is recognised in the management arrangements. The two coordinators are responsible for both, with different age ranges. Both have non-contact time for planning and

devising resources; both are well informed, and well supported by provision in the nursery and by a classroom assistant.

34. A notable feature is some highly imaginative work with parents, focused on the Parents' Room. Housed in the school, this is an adult education facility offering parents a range of courses taught by tutors from the City Lit. School staff make excellent use of the opportunities it offers to contact parents, for example by teaching demonstration lessons in the Parents Room so that parents can be better informed about provision and about how they can best support teaching. Parents' help is enlisted, not only in class (although some parents have graduated from offering occasional help to gaining posts as classroom assistants), but also in planning projects. For example, parental advice was enlisted on the acquisition of resources relevant to the home cultures of the growing number of African children entering the school.

35. Not all aspects of the school's success in language provision are replicable elsewhere because they are to some extent dependent on a high level of resources, but some are: detailed joint planning between EMAG and class teachers, integration of EAL work into mainstream, detailed linguistic assessment, precise objectives, careful choice of methodology and resources, and cultural sensitivity are key features, and not fundamentally dependent on a high level of resources.

36. The LEA gives this work high status. That is reflected in the level of resourcing, the support given to teachers' professional development, and the frequent personal attendance of the CEO at relevant public events.

Support for Numeracy

37. As with literacy, the picture is one of rapid improvement from a low baseline, so that by the end of KS2 the standards achieved are high. The activities set out in support of numeracy close match those for literacy. That is, numeracy is a focus of the work of the contracted inspector, reinforced by specialist advisory support (which also provides a link to good practice elsewhere) and the provision and analysis of performance data. The support is highly effective.

Support for Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

38. Development of the use of ICT in teaching and learning and in the support of administrative tasks is a priority of the EDP.

The strategy for supporting ICT has three prongs:

- support from the contracted inspector
- the provision of specialist advisory support
- developing access to the National Grid for Learning (NGfL).

The 1995 OFSTED report identified a few problems in ICT, and a number of steps were taken to improve both hardware and its use for teaching. A review by the Corporation in 1997 suggested a need for further improvements. In order to address that need, the LEA has arranged for the school to be part of the BECTA Project in Supporting KS1 literacy with low-cost portables. This has provided a vehicle for staff

training on the use of word processors to support the early stages of the curriculum. The project is being evaluated by the Open University.

39. These strategies have had considerable effect in raising the IT skills of staff. The LEA has also assisted the school in formulating a successful NGfL bid, and in installing a computer suite which it is intended to network to all classrooms. Staff IT skills are now said to be very good, though the full potential of ICT across the curriculum has yet to be exploited. (Nevertheless, progress has been considerable, and is not yet complete). The LEA's involvement in the Hackney EAZ will give the school access to the broadband intranet planned for all Hackney schools.

Support for the Use of Performance Data

40. The school has made use of baseline testing since 1996, and is fully versed in it. Thereafter, use is made of OFSTED and QCA data, benchmarked against schools with similar intakes in Tower Hamlets. The London Reading Test is used at the start of Year 6, and teachers provide annual assessments both of current performance and of potential progress. The attainment of children in the Reading Recovery Programme is carefully monitored, as is that of pupils with SEN and with EAL needs.

41. Senior and middle managers engage in a systematic sampling of lessons and of the achievement of pupils in each class.

42. The school therefore has ample information on performance, and uses it well, assisted by the contracted inspector to set and review targets. Its analysis of data against a wide range of contextual information is helpful to the process of self-review.

Support for Schools Causing Concern

43. The Corporation has no schools giving rise to concern.

Support for School Management

44. The management and governance of the school are both highly effective, and well-supported, both through the work of the contracted inspector and through the close links between the governing body and the CEO, who attends every Governors' meeting, as well as a number of sub-committee meetings, and elected members. The work of the school is subject to continuous discussion between the LEA on the one hand, and the head and staff of the school on the other, supplemented by the provision of a very broad range of training opportunities for staff at all levels.

45. The priority for the LEA is to support the school's capacity for self-review, appropriately interpreted as a dynamic process within which the school continuously assesses its progress towards its targets, reviews, and where necessary amends, its provision and links staff appraisal to the achievement of overall objectives. In this instance, the LEA is having considerable success. The school is reflective, self-critical, and developing rapidly. It is also, through its Beacon status, beginning to disseminate aspects of successful practice to schools in neighbouring LEAs. Lesson observation and sampling of pupils' achievement are, partly owing to the support of

the LEA, well established in the school and contributing to consistently high standards of teaching. The attainment of pupils for whom English is an additional language is also effectively supported, assessed and managed.

Support for the Hackney Education Action Zone

46. The Corporation maintains extensive links with other London LEAs, since its charitable, political and moral responsibilities extend well beyond the Square Mile. To secure “the appropriate measure of influence for the Corporation in local, regional, national and international bodies” is one of the LEA’s principal objectives. It has therefore accepted a measure of responsibility for supporting school improvement in the neighbouring LEAs. With its extensive assistance, Hackney LEA has developed an Education Action Zone, which commenced operation on January 1st 2000.

47. It is, of course, far too early to evaluate the success of the zone (which is at any rate outside the remit of this report). However, the Director of Education for Hackney LEA agreed to be interviewed in order to record the part played by the Corporation in the Zone’s establishment. The Corporation’s Policy and Resources Committee identified support to the Zone as a “key deliverable”, and it is clear that that decision unlocked a range and quality of support that were critical to the success of the bid, and are likely to continue to be critical to the success of its operation. That support has included:

- moral support. The involvement of the Corporation, as a charitable body, helped Hackney LEA to overcome some initial suspicion of the involvement of the private sector;
- financial backing, though the involvement, both of the Corporation and Sir John Cass’s Foundation;
- expert consultancy, provided by the City Education Officer, a proportion of whose time was made available to the Zone, and others;
- the brokerage of links with business;
- support for raising the aspirations of young people in Hackney by, for example, offering the use of the Guildhall for the “Hackney Graduation”.

Excellence in Cities

48. Through its links with institutions such as the London Guildhall University, the LEA has been able to contribute valuably to a range of activities in Hackney, Islington and Tower Hamlets. In particular, the Sir John Cass’ Foundation School, by virtue of its status as a Beacon School, is seeking to spread effective practice in leadership and management, parental and community involvement, literacy, numerance, RE and music, through a combination of:

- staff training, including contributions to conferences

- outreach work
- visits by the headteacher to other schools
- receiving visits from staff in other schools
- Governor training.

49. The LEA's activities in support of its neighbours should be seen as an exercise in enlightened self-interest. From its own point of view, this work has three potential benefits:

- (a) it ensures the teaching staff do not become isolated;
- (b) it provides an opportunity to influence developments in phases where the LEA makes no provision. For example, the LEA has no secondary school, but the Corporation has a clear interest in the quality of secondary education City children receive;
- (c) it reinforces internal developments. For example, the strong ICT element in the EAZ powerfully assists the developments the LEA is seeking to foster.

50. **Recommendation**

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

- (i) seek to ensure that the potential benefits of ICT are fully exploited across the curriculum;
- (ii) to develop its support for school self-review and involve the school in this process.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

51. The Corporation of London is unique among local authorities, not only in its structure, but in being non-party political and in combining ancient traditions and ceremonial functions with the powers and duties of a modern local authority (and also a port and police authority). There is a clear statement of principle for the management of the Corporation, called A Statement of Culture, which asserts the importance of striving for excellence through continuous improvement and team work, professional development and a commitment to equality of opportunity. The Policy and Resource Committee sets a framework of strategic aims, which are translated into “key deliverables” by the Chief Officers’ group. The corporate planning framework is, however, very broad, largely in recognition of the difficulties of achieving corporate coherence across so large a number of departments.

52. The principal source of initiatives is the Policy and Resources Committee, the involvement of which in the Hackney EAZ planning was a critical factor leading to urgency and effectiveness of detailed implementation.

53. More than any other local authority, the Corporation looks beyond itself to the wider world, partly because it seeks to enhance the influence of the City and partly because it seeks to serve those who work in the Square Mile, as well as those who live there. Education in schools is a much smaller proportion of its functions than is true of any other local authority, and the work of the education department is not solely concerned with the standard LEA functions.

54. The departmental mission statement is not in any way unusual:

- to provide a high quality, informed and responsive Education Service in and for the City of London, consistent with available resources.

However, serving the City of London is not readily comparable with serving other inner urban areas. The aims of the LEA, therefore, while covering the statutory functions of an LEA, set out other ambitions peculiar to the City:

- to act with relevant partners in ensuring that adequate facilities for further and higher education exist to support the needs of the Business City;
- to influence the provision of statutory careers services to City employees and City schools, and to continue to provide non-statutory guidance service to City residents and City workers, particularly where these support the economic development strategies of the Corporation;
- to secure the appropriate measure of influence for the Corporation in local, regional, national and international bodies by participation to ensure that the voice of the Corporation is taken into account in matters that affect the delivery of the Education Committee’s responsibilities.

56. The Education Committee's business plan fully reflects these aims, although not in unnecessary detail, and the internal management of the department reflects the principles set out by the Corporation. In particular, a close and essential link is made between appraisal and organisational objectives, and personal development is well supported. It is anomalous, in this context, that the City Education Officer is not himself appraised.

57. The advice provided to elected Members is timely and expert. Reports to committee are concise and informative, providing a clear steer on both national policy developments and local needs or initiatives. Scrutiny, particularly of the financial implications of proposals, is also effectively exercised, through the Chamberlain's Department.

58. The LEA benefits from its small size to achieve, through cooperation with other departments of the Corporation, highly effective coordinated action on behalf of the most vulnerable pupils and their parents. Links with the Social Services Department (SSD) are especially strong. A coordinated emphasis on the early years, through, for example, the Early Years Development Partnership and the joint LEA – SSD Nursery Centre at the Sir John Cass School, facilitates early identification of children and families with problems, accompanied by intervention to mitigate them. Transfer of information is, as it should be, given the small numbers of children involved, highly effective, and crisis interventions are prompt. Training for school staff on child protection is reportedly good.

59. Strategic planning is greatly facilitated by regular meetings between the two Directors. There are few signs of departmental boundaries, or professional jealousies, either at the highest level or elsewhere. Education has been fully involved in the formulation of the Children's services plan, and the cooperation of SSD in the drawing up of the Behaviour Support Plan was a further opportunity for joint working. There can be little doubt that where joint LEA/SSD action is needed it works better here than in most other Local Authorities. The danger is of doing too much.

60. Coordination with health is more variable, owing largely to the fact that, despite its small size, the Square Mile is covered by two health trusts. A greater difficulty for education, however, is that the majority of pupils at the school are not City children.

61. Action in support of those children must, therefore, be coordinated with other LEAs. Despite much goodwill, this sometimes causes difficulties.

62. The stress placed on exercising influence, together with the complexity of the Corporation itself, lead the LEA inevitably towards liaison with many bodies. The Corporation is, for example, the third largest patron of the arts in the country, and education outreach activities constitute a significant area of work as, over a range of issues, does cooperation with the City's independent schools. Outside the Corporation and neighbouring LEAs, there are links with many agencies. For example, the City Lit provides a contracted service to run Parents' Room activities at the Sir John Cass school, and the CEO is the adviser to the management committee of LOGVEC: the livery association for promoting education and training. A significant area of the CEO's work is strengthening the intellectual and academic

basis for aspects of the City's operations, in liaison with institutions, such as the London Guildhall University and the City University Business School. Outcomes of this include the setting up of the Centre for Mathematical Trading and Finance at City University.

Support for School Infrastructure

63. A full range of management services are provided to the school, either by the Chamberlain's department or the Town Clerk's department. All are assessed by the school as good or very good. Together, they facilitate school improvement by enabling school staff to concentrate fully on their main task of raising standards. The LEA fully meets its statutory duties in respect of the monitoring of school budgets, and has prepared an appropriate Asset Management Plan.

Finance

64. Financial support to the school is particularly good, as indeed are financial services to the LEA. The school receives an indicative budget early in the new year, in good time for its own planning to take place. The final budget rarely differs materially from the indicative statement. An LEA officer attends the school finance and general purposes committee once a term, and members of the team give helpful advice on request. Monthly budget statements are accurate and eminently clear. There are no formal service specifications or standards, or means of evaluation and, in this context, there has been perhaps no need for them. In the light of Fair Funding, they are now needed.

65. Recommendations

(i) In order to clarify the performance management of the education department, an appraisal scheme for the City Education Officer should be adopted;

(ii) In order to meet the requirements of Fair Funding, clear specifications, costs and standards should be set out for all management services provided to the school.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

66. The LEA has a clear policy in favour of the inclusion of pupils with SEN, so far as possible and desirable, in mainstream education, and it has supported this strategy through, for example, necessary adaptations to the premises of the school. The principles upon which the LEA's SEN provision is based are known to, and shared by, the school. The revision of the SEN policy which occurred in 1999 took full account of "Excellence for all Children" and "Meeting Special Educational Needs: a Programme of Action".

67. The LEA meets its statutory obligations with regard to SEN. Statements of special educational need are issued within the 18 week deadline, without exception; are of good quality, properly reviewed and appropriately implemented, in so far as that lies within its own power. For all of its special school provision and much of its support for pupils in mainstream, the LEA is unavoidably reliant on purchasing from other LEAs. Nevertheless, it has never been taken to a tribunal, and its target is to maintain that record.

68. The effective support provided for pupils with learning difficulties contributes valuably to the high standards attained in the school. Much emphasis is placed on early identification of problems and prompt intervention. The pattern of SEN in the school suggests that this is effective:

66	children are on stage 1 of the Code of Practice
16	children are on stage 2 of the Code of Practice
9	children are on stage 3 of the Code of Practice
0	children are on stage 4 of the Code of Practice
3	children are on stage 5 of the Code of Practice

A small number therefore proceed to statutory assessment. In the educational sense, the LEA's work is successful.

69. Diagnosis of and provision for SEN are very carefully planned, monitored and evaluated, through highly effective liaison between the Principal Officer, Children's Educational Services, who also acts as the Education Welfare Officer (EWO), and the Educational Psychologist (who attends all statement reviews and visits the school 10 days a year). The Early Years Development Partnership provides early diagnosis, and liaison with the Health trust assists early intervention, and prompt contact with the parents of very young children. Progress is subsequently very carefully monitored, for example at termly SEN highlighting meetings. For statemented pupils, weekly monitoring sheets are completed and analysed. The funding for statements is centrally held, but the school is given clear guidance on the SEN element in its budget, and the EWO works with the school to ensure that that expenditure is reported on in the governors' annual report. It is recognised that the role of the school SEN coordinator has broadened in response to recent policy developments. Further training in advising on and planning provision is intended, as is a review of the quality assurance arrangements for learning support assistants.

70. The LEA's work in this area is, therefore, well-conceived and of high quality, but it faces considerable difficulty both in ensuring the quality of support it buys in and in remaining within budget. Part of its difficulty, paradoxically, stems from the

small numbers of pupils involved. Where the costs of provision for a statemented child may range from £5,000 to £50,000, depending on the needs identified, small changes in numbers may lead to large fluctuations in the budget, both for provision and for transport – a major item, since many children are educated outside the city. Over five years, the number of pupils with statements has risen by 50 per cent, mainly as a result of boundary changes in April 1994, and costs have risen faster. In 1998/9 £92,000 more than originally intended needed to be provided for SEN.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

Admissions

71. The LEA's statutory duties in this category are somewhat different from those of other LEAs. For example, it is not an admissions authority. Furthermore, it makes no secondary provision, and it is most unlikely that pupil numbers will ever make this necessary, and it therefore exercises its statutory functions by ensuring the provision of places in other LEAs. It is meticulous in its performance, and meets the full range of its duties. Sound work in support of behaviour and attendance assists the school in maintaining high standards of attainment.

The Supply of School Places

72. In relation to the provision of school places, the LEA has a limited, but complex, task. The population of the city is highly mobile. Projections – or even accurate estimates of the current population – are difficult, and the school has a large proportion of casual entrants – generally children of professional parents in London for a limited period. Nevertheless, in the early years, the LEA is able to provide, or secure the provision of, places for all four and the majority of three year olds whose parents want them, and the provision is reported to be of good quality. In the primary phase, the LEA makes sufficient provision, of very good quality, and the objectives of its class size plan are already met. In relation to secondary places, the LEA's role is to support parents seeking places in other LEAs. It does this effectively. For example, although it is not an admissions authority, it publishes helpful information for parents seeking admission to secondary schools in neighbouring LEAs. The LEA also publishes a School Organisation Plan, which sets out principles appropriate to its particular circumstances.

Education otherwise

73. The provision of education otherwise than at school is more problematic. The LEA maintains a hospital tuition unit for sick children at St Bartholomew's Hospital. Numbers do not, however, justify maintaining a pupil referral unit (PRU). Liaison with other LEAs, which was conceded not to be satisfactory, has now improved.

Behaviour support

74. The strategy for supporting good behaviour and regular attendance is set out, as required, in the Behaviour Support Plan. The plan is adequate, but might be clearer in specifying intended outcomes. Fortunately, the support provided appears to be better than the plan. It is coordinated by the Education Welfare Officer, who meets with the Educational Psychologist and relevant school staff once a term to review provision. She also supports City children who are educated outside the LEA, although it is not at this stage clear in every case with what success, or what response from the LEAs in question. Support for individual pupils is provided by the Tower Hamlets Learning Support Service, and judged by the school to be good. The school's own understanding of behaviour management is excellent, partly thanks to LEA support. There have been no permanent exclusions from the school in recent years.

Support for attendance

75. Support for attendance is also very good, although truancy is, in any case, reported to be rare in the City. Parental involvement has been particularly effective. Nevertheless, improving attendance is a priority in the EDP, because the rate of unauthorised absence is relatively high. Indeed, of all the priorities this is the one which is planned in most detail, with the largest number of supporting activities and actions. The strategy has four areas of focus:

- review of the LEA attendance policy
- enhancing the school's analysis of attendance data
- advice and support for parents
- collection and analysis of attendance and performance data.

76. The only surprising aspect of these intended activities is that they still remain to be done. Attendance at the school is satisfactory, though there is a problem with extended holidays to Bangladesh. The school and the LEA have gone to some lengths to advise parents of the disadvantage of this, and to mitigate the effects by providing work to be done during the absence. Follow-up of absence is rapid and meticulous, though the extent of home visiting undertaken by the EWO has reduced, owing to the multiplication of tasks she has been obliged to undertake.

Health, safety and welfare

77. The LEA meets its statutory obligations on health and safety and the protection of children. An effective Children's Services Plan is in place, involving the coordination of an unusual number and range of bodies, as is a Quality Protects Management Action Plan. Once again, the LEA benefits from its small size to exercise monitoring of an intensity not usually possible. This is particularly true of looked-after children, whose progress is individually charted. Plans for discharging them from care are particularly well-concerned. Nevertheless, the LEA is again dependent on external agencies for fostering or residential care, which may create some problems of coordination with education.

78. Recommendations

- (i) In order to support good behaviour more effectively, the LEA should revise the behaviour support plan, setting out the intended outcomes for pupils.
- (ii) In order to support attendance more effectively, consideration should be given to purchasing some support for the EWO in her outreach role.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The LEA should: revise its targets for literacy and numeracy in the light of its success in hitting those set earlier (paragraphs 29 – 37).
2. In order to enhance its support for school improvement, the LEA should:
 - (i) seek to ensure that the potential benefits of ICT are fully exploited across the curriculum (paragraphs 38-39).
 - (ii) continue with the school, to develop its support for school self-review, and involve the school in the process (paragraph 45).
3.
 - (i) In order to clarify the performance management of the education department, an appraisal scheme for the City Education Officer should be adopted (paragraph 56).
 - (ii) In order to meet the requirements of Fair Funding, clear specifications, costs and standards should be set out for all management services provided to the school (paragraph 64).
4.
 - (i) In order to support good behaviour more effectively, the LEA should revise the behaviour support plan, setting out the intended outcomes for pupils (paragraph 74).
 - (ii) In order to support attendance more effectively, consideration should be given to purchasing some support for the EWO in her outreach role.

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