



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
CALDERDALE LEA
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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in conjunction with the
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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection of Calderdale local education authority (LEA) 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 (December 2001)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on best value.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports and audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and members; focus groups of headteachers and governors; staff in other departments at that local authority; and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and LEA partners submitted evidence of participation and joint working. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier OFSTED/Audit Commission reports on this LEA (published in 1997, 1998 and 1999). A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to 106 schools, and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 62 per cent.

COMMENTARY

3. The borough of Calderdale contains great contrasts: the densely populated town of Halifax, surrounded by rural areas and smaller towns. Some parts of the borough are very disadvantaged whilst others are prosperous. The overall proportion of the population that are from minority ethnic groups is similar to the national picture, but many families of Pakistani origin live in one part of Halifax and this is reflected in schools' rolls. There is a large number of foundation and voluntary aided schools in Calderdale, and there are two grammar schools amongst the fifteen secondary schools. The overall standards of attainment of Calderdale pupils are broadly in line with the national average and the rates of improvement in recent years have been at least in line with the national trend.

4. Calderdale was inspected three times during the first round of LEA inspections. Its first inspection, in 1997, was suggested by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and conducted with the LEA's agreement, after concern had arisen about one school. That inspection found the LEA to be very poor and major recommendations were made for improving the LEA's strategy and the role taken by elected members. By the time of the third inspection, in 1999, there had been some improvement, but the LEA's provision was still unsatisfactory. That report, however, expressed cautious optimism for the LEA's future.

5. The LEA has now improved significantly and performs nearly all of its functions at least satisfactorily. It has made some improvement in every aspect criticised in previous inspections, and aspects that were good then continue to be good or have improved further. The role of elected members has been transformed, to advantage, and the LEA now has a much clearer strategy for supporting school improvement. The relationship between the council and the schools is much better than at any time in recent years. The LEA now has only a very few key weaknesses. It is a self-critical authority, committed to further improvement.

6. The LEA exercises the following functions well or very well:

- the overall effectiveness and value for money of school improvement work;
- the approach to monitoring, challenging and intervening in schools;
- focusing support to the schools in greatest need;
- identification of and intervention in under-performing schools;
- support for standards in literacy;
- support for standards in numeracy;
- support for standards in and the curriculum use of information and communication technology;
- support for raising standards at Key Stage 3;
- support to school governors;
- the leadership and performance management of school improvement work, together with the deployment and expertise of those involved;
- the management of admissions to schools;
- the education of children in public care;
- leadership by senior officers, their advice to elected members, and decision-making; and

- collaboration with partners.

7. The LEA exercises the following functions unsatisfactorily:

- support for gifted and talented pupils;
- human resources support;
- effectiveness in combating racism;
- the strategy for special educational needs; and
- provision for pupils who have no school place.

8. The improvement of the LEA has been conceived and carried out by a very effective group director and her senior management team. It has been made possible by the changed attitude of elected members since the 1997 inspection. The improvements have been actively supported by the chief executive who has been vigilant in overseeing the work of the schools' and children's services directorate and ensuring beneficial changes in other directorates. This has all led to vastly improved relations with schools and a new, shared view of targeted school improvement work. Decision-making is transparent where once it was very opaque. Performance management of education service delivery is generally thorough. As a result of these improvements, this is now a competent and increasingly effective LEA.

9. The next task, now that almost all the groundwork has been done, is to continue forward movement and become a good LEA. The LEA needs to improve its strategic grasp, and in discussion with schools and other partners, clarify its overall vision for long-term school improvement. Directorate planning should be tightened and better use made of the newly achieved fund of data and other management information. Now that the LEA has earned schools' trust it can afford to be slightly more proactive in supporting those, such as some small primaries, that find autonomy difficult to handle. It is likely that all this can be achieved within the next few years and the LEA can move from effective management to good leadership.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

10. Whilst overall most socio-economic indicators for Calderdale differ little from the national average, three wards in Halifax are amongst the ten per cent most deprived nationally, whereas others in the more rural areas are markedly more affluent and have much lower rates of unemployment.

11. There are about 17,000 children of statutory school age in the primary schools, about 13,000 on roll in the secondaries, and about 180 in the special schools. The very gradual decline in population noted in the 1997 inspection report has continued and further decline is projected up to 2006 affecting the primary age group and creating a need to remove surplus primary places in the future. However, the number of secondary school pupils will continue to rise until 2006.

12. The proportion of minority ethnic pupils remains broadly in line with the national average across the borough but there is significant variation across the wards from, for example, about two per cent to about sixty per cent. This variation is reflected in schools. The Pakistani-origin group is by far the largest ethnic minority group, well above the average both nationally and for similar LEAs. There are about 600 asylum-seekers or refugees in Calderdale, of whom about 70 are of school age.

13. Since the last inspection the percentage of primary age pupils who are eligible for free school meals has fallen slightly. The percentage of secondary pupils is very similar and both figures are broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need (SEN) is broadly average.

14. Ninety-seven per cent of four year-olds are in early years provision; about two thirds of these are in schools. Eighty-seven per cent of three year-olds are in early years provision.

15. Calderdale LEA maintains 88 primary schools, 15 secondary schools and three special schools. It has a multi-centre pupil referral unit. Thirteen of the secondary schools and one special school provide post-16 education. Two of the foundation secondary schools are grammar schools; both have recently entered into partnerships with comprehensive schools. Other secondary schools include one Roman Catholic comprehensive and one Church of England comprehensive.

16. There were previously sixteen grant maintained schools. In 1999 seven secondaries and four primaries became foundation schools, and two secondary and three primary schools became voluntary aided. This has added to the already high proportion of the LEA's maintained schools which is voluntary aided, now totalling 35 out of the total of 106 schools. Twenty-eight schools are within the Halifax Learning Zone (an Education Action Zone).

17. Four schools have Beacon status. There is one technology specialist school and one sports specialist school. The LEA is currently embarking on a Private Finance Initiative scheme involving major improvements to the facilities of five

schools. There are three Sure Start partnerships in place or impending. The DfES has identified three Halifax secondary schools as facing challenging circumstances, of which one is facing exceptionally challenging circumstances.

Performance

18. OFSTED inspection evidence indicates that, overall, pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is broadly in line with national averages.

19. The overall performance of schools in Calderdale is broadly in line with the national average at all key stages. The rates of improvement since the 1997 inspection have been at least in line with the national trend and generally above the trend for similar LEAs.

20. The percentage of Key Stage 1 pupils gaining Level 2 or above in reading, writing and mathematics in 2001 was broadly in line with the national figure and with that of similar LEAs. The rate of improvement has been in line with the national rate but well below that of similar LEAs. The proportions achieving Level 3 in 2001 were above the national figures in writing and mathematics. At the end of Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils gaining Level 4 and above was broadly in line with the national figure and with similar LEAs. The proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 in mathematics was above the national figure. The rates of improvement at Key Stage 2 at Level 4 have been above the national rates of improvement in English and science, and in line with the trend in mathematics. Improvement has been faster than in similar LEAs in all these subjects. Even so, the LEA did not meet its 2001 targets for English and mathematics.

21. The percentages of Key Stage 3 pupils gaining Level 5 and above in mathematics and science in 2001 were broadly in line with the national average and that in similar LEAs. The level of attainment in English was similar to that nationally, and above that of similar LEAs. The rates of improvement in all three subjects have been above or well above both the national rate and that of similar LEAs. In 2001, 48.8 per cent of pupils gained five or more A*-C grades in GCSE, broadly in line with the national average but above that for similar LEAs. The rate of improvement was above the national trend and that of similar LEAs, as was the rate of improvement in average points score. The percentage of pupils gaining at least one A*-G was below the national figure but in line with that for similar LEAs. The average points score at GCE AS/A level is broadly in line with that nationally and in similar LEAs.

22. The progress of pupils between Key Stages varies. It is broadly in line with the average progress nationally between Key Stages 1 and 2, better than average from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, but worse than average from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4.

23. The performance of boys in English throughout the age range, and overall at GCSE, is behind that of girls, to a similar extent to the national picture. Overall, minority ethnic pupils perform below the LEA average. The gap in performance is narrowing in mathematics in primary schools, but not in English. The gap is narrowing in secondary schools, but there is still a significant shortfall in the

proportion of Pakistani-origin pupils achieving five or more higher GCSE grades, compared with Calderdale pupils overall.

24. OFSTED inspection reports show that the proportions of schools which are good or very good are broadly in line with those in similar LEAs and nationally, although only one secondary school is very good. There are no schools requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses.

25. In 2000/01, the proportion of pupils permanently excluded from school was below the national average for primary schools and well below that for secondary schools.

26. Attendance in primary schools last year was above the national average, whereas attendance in secondary schools was broadly in line. Levels of unauthorised absence were also below average for primary schools and broadly in line for secondary schools.

Funding

27. Calderdale is allocated a standard spending assessment (SSA) for education that is close to metropolitan district averages. It was £2480 per primary pupil in 2001-01, compared with a metropolitan district average of £2532 and an England average of £2653; the SSA per secondary pupil was £3194, compared with £3207 and £3413. The LEA received an increase in SSA for 2002-03 slightly above the national average. In recent years it has consistently passed on all increases in SSA funding to schools. For 2002-03 while the overall council budget has grown by 5.7 per cent, that for the education service has grown by 9.3 per cent and the budget delegated to schools by 10.2 per cent.

28. The LEA has consistently taken up its Standards Fund allocation in full and in 2002-03 devolved 80.8 per cent to schools, which is a higher proportion than average. The education service has benefited from additional resources from a variety of sources including: Halifax Learning Zone (EAZ), the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), and the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) for information and communication technology training and to develop school sports facilities. The authority was recently granted £36.4 million in Private Finance Initiative (PFI) credits to finance a major programme of school refurbishment and development.

Council structure

29. The council had already revised its structure at the time of the 1999 inspection in anticipation of legislative requirements. This structure remains broadly in place, and was confirmed by a new constitution in May 2002. The executive body is a cabinet, comprising a Leader, a deputy Leader, and five members with portfolio responsibilities. One portfolio comprises schools' and children's services. The schools' and children's services scrutiny committee (since May a scrutiny panel) meets frequently, both to review progress and to advise the cabinet in advance on policy development. The scrutiny panel includes, in a voting capacity, parent governors, and representatives of the Anglican and Roman Catholic dioceses. It has non-voting co-opted representatives of other faith communities, higher education,

and professional associations. At the time of the inspection the Conservative Party held a small majority over other parties, but since the May 2002 local election no single party has had overall control.

30. The officer structure consists of a chief executive, a deputy chief executive, and five group directors, of whom one leads schools' and children's services. The schools' and children's services directorate comprises three services: education effectiveness, resources and information, and students and communities.

The LEA strategy for school improvement

31. The 1997 inspection found that the LEA had no convincing strategy for school improvement. By the time of the 1998 inspection much work had been done but it was uncoordinated. The 1999 inspection found that the first Education Development Plan (1999-2002) was comprehensive, but inadequate because it was too broad and insufficiently differentiated. Since then, significant further progress has been made in this aspect of strategic planning and it is now better focused.

32. The Education Development Plan (EDP) was revised after the criticisms of the 1999 report and a new version was introduced for the period 2000-2002. The revised version focused better on the key priorities facing the authority and included some more challenging targets.

33. The LEA exceeded most of its GCSE targets in 2001 but did not achieve its ambitious Key Stage 2 targets. It met its exclusions target and the primary target for unauthorised absence, but did not meet its secondary unauthorised absence target. In general it made good progress on its revised EDP priorities.

34. Standards in literacy and numeracy have risen steadily, especially at the higher levels. Good quality, customised training in literacy has been provided for schools and the work of consultants is monitored well. Similarly, differentiated training in numeracy has been provided which is rated highly by schools. Particular attention has been given to standards in three Halifax secondary schools, in conjunction with the Halifax Learning Zone, and their GCSE results have improved faster than the national rate. There are no longer any schools requiring special measures and the systems for providing support to schools have been improved. The attainment of minority ethnic pupils, although below the LEA average, is catching up with it at GCSE, and support is now targeted as needed. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls overall, though, has not been reduced. Support for ICT has been enhanced to good effect. Significant improvements have been made in behaviour support, but provision for pupils without a school place has not fully met the EDP milestones.

35. Action has been taken to improve the implementation of the EDP in response to circumstances, although staffing difficulties have sometimes impeded progress. The LEA's monitoring of EDP activity has been conscientious, fair and detailed. It has, however, departed from the original format of the plan, making precise measurement of progress complex. Nevertheless, overall evaluation has been thorough.

36. The consultation process for the new EDP for 2002-2007 was successful and the overall EDP strategy is widely supported by schools. This plan, which has been approved without qualification by the DfES, responds appropriately to national priorities. It is based on a thorough audit of schools' needs, and use was made of a broad range of data. The LEA's targets are very challenging, particularly those for minority ethnic pupils. The plan gives attention to local issues such as the achievement of boys, but is too unspecific about how further inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) will be promoted.

37. The EDP, although a satisfactory document in itself, does not entirely do justice to the LEA's school improvement strategy. Other documentation, and discussion with elected members, officers, headteachers and governors, reveal that the LEA in fact has a rather larger-scale and very appropriate strategy. This is based on helping each school to identify and meet its local community's needs, developing greater collaboration between schools, and making more extensive use of partner organisations. Confident that its schools are now generally safe from failure, the LEA is turning its attention to helping them to be good or very good.

38. These are indications that, although the vision is not yet well expressed in its plans, the LEA is moving towards a more strategic approach to provision. Discussions with headteachers, particularly of secondary schools, showed that many are confident that the LEA is now competent and can move on to giving more inspirational leadership.

Recommendation

In order to clarify its strategy for school improvement:

- produce a simple, written strategic statement of the directorate's vision and share this with schools.

39. The Halifax Learning Zone, independently of the LEA, supports 28 schools in the more disadvantaged parts of Halifax. The authority has worked to improve its relationship with the zone after initial difficulties, and joint working is now good. This has enabled the LEA to support zone initiatives, such as school self-evaluation, and primary-secondary transition, which should in due course spread to the remainder of Calderdale schools. There are some key links between the LEA's EDP and the zone's activities.

The allocation of resources to priorities

40. The 1999 report noted that the education department had consistently overspent its budget. It lacked financial discipline and budget planning was slow to change in response to circumstances. Schools were suspicious about budget allocations to central departments, there was little effective consultation and budget allocations to schools were notified late. The allocation of resources to priorities was judged to be poor.

41. The allocation of resources to priorities is now satisfactory, with strengths. Education is a high priority for Calderdale and the council ensures that it is funded accordingly. In recent years, the education budget has consistently been set just above SSA with all funding increases passed on to schools and the LEA meeting government targets on levels of delegation. Budget making is accurate.

42. Budgetary control within the schools' and children's services directorate is very good. The quarterly reports to cabinet and scrutiny committees show that expenditure is contained within budget, and is carefully monitored. Centrally retained costs are modest compared with similar LEAs. Significant funds were retained in 2001-02 to meet the cost of SEN statements, but this was delegated for the first time in 2002-03. There have been significant changes from year to year, and within a year, in the allocations for behaviour support, and for children educated out of school; these reflect changes in provision.

43. Consultation with schools is now regular, timely and extensive. In-depth discussions about budget matters take place in the fair funding consultative group that includes representative head teachers, governors and unions. In each of the past three years this group has undertaken a great deal of work with the intention of revising the funding formula for schools. Each time it has been impossible to reach a consensus, so no major changes were made. On these occasions schools were content to retain the status quo. This was appropriate at the time but in future the LEA will need to be more assertive in order to avoid stagnation. Overall, schools warmly welcome the commitment that the LEA shows to consultation even if at times they feel that they are suffering from consultation overload.

Recommendation

In order to align schools' budgets more effectively to their needs:

- ensure that the process of revising the funding formula in consultation with schools, in the light of national policy development, does lead to the necessary revisions.

44. A higher than average proportion of schools' delegated funding is allocated on the basis of age-weighted pupil numbers with relatively less being allocated on the characteristics of a school or its buildings. Within the formula there is a greater weighting to Key Stages 3 and 4 and a lower weighting to sixth forms. This means that Calderdale has had to make greater adjustments to its budget following the transfer of responsibility for sixth form funding to the Learning and Skills Council.

45. School budget balances, particularly in primary schools, have risen in recent years and are now too large. The average of primary school balances at the end of 2000-2001 was 8 per cent with three-quarters of schools having budget balances over the Audit Commission recommendation of 5 per cent. Thirty-eight schools had balances over 10 per cent and nine had over 20 per cent. The LEA has now rightly challenged schools on this issue.

Promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value

46. At the time of the 1999 inspection the LEA was making progress on implementing the action plan which followed the first two inspections and an evaluation panel evaluated progress rigorously. The 1999 inspection judged these improvement strategies to be satisfactory; the process has developed further and it now has strengths.

47. The 2001-02 Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) is clear and comprehensive. The external auditor gave an unqualified opinion and noted that the council was making good progress in implementing his recommendations following the audit of the previous year's BVPP, particularly in implementing a revised performance management system, developing a procurement strategy, and rationalising the programme of Best Value reviews.

48. The improvement strategy within the schools' and children's services directorate is driven very appropriately by the action plan arising from the 1999 inspection. This strategy has been monitored fully by the evaluation panel and has been highly successful as most sections of this report testify. Best Value reviews within the directorate have until recently focused on functions outside the scope of this inspection: the Youth Service, Adult Education and Children's Services (out-of-school play and early years provision). The most recent review is of SEN services, a draft report of which was prepared in time for this inspection and is the subject of more detailed comment below. Early Best Value reviews shared many of the weaknesses of early reviews across the country. They lacked fundamental challenge, and did not fully evaluate procurement options. There are also weaknesses in their action plans that are similar to weaknesses in other plans of this LEA, including service plans and the directorate development plan. The source of resources needed to meet objectives is identified but not the quantity. Objectives are not always sharply defined and time lines are imprecise.

49. An example of good practice in the application of Best Value principles is the response of the regeneration and development directorate to the recommendations of the 1999 OFSTED inspection in restructuring the building consultancy section. Although there has not been a Best Value review of this service the council has drawn on the reviews of similar services in other authorities to plan its future. It has established a partnership with a private company to provide additional staffing and expertise to support the service and its clients when needed.

50. Performance management within the directorate is developing and is already rigorous and effective in some areas. There is a system for annual individual staff appraisal. Progress with service plans is monitored regularly by heads of service and the directorate management team, and, when necessary, effective remedial action is taken. The directorate is working toward achieving Investors in People status and is on target to achieve this later this year. Performance information is used well. Progress toward targets is reported regularly to cabinet and scrutiny panel.

SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

51. Previous inspection reports criticised the LEA's planning for school improvement. The education effectiveness service, although acknowledged to be making better provision, was found still to have significant weaknesses in 1999. Relationships with schools were still fragile. Since that inspection the LEA has responded with great determination and has made substantial and significant improvements. It now carries out the majority of its school improvement functions well. School improvement and the raising of pupils' standards are the council's key priorities, and are the basis for all the work of the education effectiveness service and associated services such as education welfare and behaviour support. The current strategy is rightly focused on enabling schools to be self-critical and autonomous. The group director and the head of the education effectiveness service have inspired the team of school improvement officers and consultants to pursue these goals with single-minded commitment. This has resulted in better relationships with schools, and the LEA's focus on school improvement is now contributing to raising standards. Costs are comparable with similar services in other LEAs and hence the LEA gives good value for money.

52. The school improvement services, and in particular the education effectiveness service, are well led. There is a clear vision of school improvement, fully understood by schools. The LEA has made sound strategic decisions, such as restructuring the education effectiveness service, to match its priorities. However, the quality of service plans is variable, with insufficient attention in some to measurable outcomes and quantifiable resource allocation.

53. Most school improvement strategies are good and are effectively implemented although some, such as cross-service reviews, are still being refined. Service leaders have good knowledge of their services, and under-performance within a service is challenged. Services have made good use of recruitment and training to build capacity and this is having a positive impact on the quality of support to schools, and in at least some cases on pupils' standards.

54. The LEA has made good progress on the 1999 report's recommendation that officers' work should be better targeted. The authority is now much better informed about its schools and has clear criteria to deploy service support, paying scrupulous regard to the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations. Workloads are matched to expertise and are well managed. This is having a beneficial effect on schools.

55. The performance management of the education effectiveness service is good and the head of the service has rightly given a high priority to this in building the team since the last inspection. The induction of new staff is comprehensive and highly valued by new school improvement officers. The corporate appraisal system is effectively complemented by more frequent service reviews providing pastoral support to individuals as well as quality assurance of the work of the team. Schools' considerable confidence in the education effectiveness service is a significant measure of the appropriateness of staff expertise and the progress made by this

service. This is also evident with some other services, such as in the support for children in public care.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

56. The 1997 and 1998 inspections judged this aspect of the LEA's work to be very poor. It had insufficient data about schools, often provided advice on an ad hoc basis, and lacked a strategy for challenging and supporting the schools that most needed to improve. The systems of challenge and support were still inadequate in 1999. The situation has been transformed and the LEA now has a good approach to this crucial aspect of its work.

57. The LEA's definition of monitoring and intervention has now been set out succinctly in a service level agreement. A useful brochure includes helpful details of roles and responsibilities within the LEA for monitoring and support. The triggers for the different levels of intervention and support are made clear to schools. The range and extent of challenge and the means by which additional support may be purchased are less sharply defined. Some useful preliminary work has been done to represent these functions and their interrelationships diagrammatically, but this has yet to be shared with schools. Nevertheless, it was clear from documentary evidence and from headteachers interviewed during the inspection that schools not only expect but receive an appropriate degree of challenge across a range of their functions. Schools have been challenged, for instance, about minority ethnic improvement plans, and staff development. The LEA has considered the full range of powers of intervention available to it and acts accordingly, in line with its view of schools' needs.

The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need

58. The LEA has established a good strategy, in line with the demands of the Code of Practice. It puts a major emphasis on gathering reliable data about all schools, and promoting their improvement while respecting their autonomy. This is well judged. The approach is appropriately based on providing a basic, minimum level of support for all schools, with the potential of four increasingly comprehensive levels of additional support or intervention according to the degree of concern. The final two levels are for schools with serious weaknesses and schools in special measures. Schools know that they are all entitled to the equivalent of one day's support per year, normally as two monitoring visits, mainly focusing on target-setting. In schools where OFSTED reports are favourable, results are improving in line with or faster than nationally, and targets have been met, the second visit is not always used. Those schools so identified are given the option of inviting a visit specifically with the purpose of sharing good practice. The LEA is wise to discriminate in this fashion.

59. The LEA has good strategies for the early identification of major problems or weaknesses through its monitoring and review procedures. Accurate information about schools' weaknesses is used to focus support directly on areas of greatest need. No school has been moved into special measures from serious weaknesses since the last inspection. It is now in a position to give greater attention to schools with less serious problems.

60. Where weaknesses have been identified, the degree of challenge and support given has been appropriately matched to the particular needs of the schools within the overall support framework. Inspectors saw good evidence of the various support programmes that had been used successfully. School improvement officers, consultants and, when necessary, mentor headteachers and senior staff on secondment from successful schools have been used productively. External providers have been usefully recommended to schools. Time has been allocated in direct relationship to the seriousness of the problem. Where the difficulties are greatest, senior officers also become involved. This remedial support is not only deployed to overcome the immediate problem but is carefully planned on a gradually decreasing basis to help the school in question embed the improvement and become more confident and autonomous.

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

61. The education effectiveness service now challenges schools effectively. Officers have worked successfully to change the culture from one of dissatisfaction and mistrust to one of respect and confidence. A major factor is the recruitment of high quality officers, many with headship experience, who have credibility with senior managers in schools. This is a great improvement on the situation at the last inspection and has enabled the team to be more open with schools and to establish a climate of robust and increasingly challenging discussion.

62. In most respects the LEA now knows its schools well. In annual cross-service reviews officers from across the directorate use a range of intelligence in order to frame key questions for each school. The outcomes are shared with the headteachers and challenge the school to make further improvements. The evidence is also used in the design of the LEA's programme for professional development of teachers and managers. Headteachers recognised the value of the evidence-based approach, but had mixed views about the comprehensiveness of the evidence used in these cross-service reviews, and the LEA is sensibly piloting the involvement of headteachers and governors in the review itself.

63. Notes of the cross-service review and of monitoring visits are not routinely copied to governors although headteachers are invited to share the judgements with the chair of governors. This is a weakness, as it could deny the governors important information that would help them make strategic decisions with greater confidence and independence.

Recommendation

In order to give greater strategic support to governing bodies:

- ensure that all notes of monitoring and review visits are sent to chairs of governing bodies.

64. The LEA's approach to target setting is sound and this represents significant improvement. The central information team now provides an increasing range of data particularly at individual school and pupil level, and the education effectiveness

service provides helpful guidance to schools on using data. Schools are thus able to compare their own performance with that of other schools in Calderdale as well as with statistical neighbours and with national results. The school improvement officers themselves receive comprehensive training. Consequently they have been able to challenge schools to raise their aspirations so that this year, aggregated school targets came close to the LEA's projected targets without any major disagreement. The relative weakness of the LEA's monitoring of progress by ethnic groups is addressed later in this report. The directorate acknowledges that there is more to do on pupil transfer and on building up information on pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with special educational needs.

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

65. This aspect of the LEA's work was good at the time of the 1999 inspection. There are currently no schools in special measures or that have serious weaknesses. Schools that had been in difficulty were removed from these categories on average within eighteen months. This aspect was therefore not investigated in detail during this inspection. However, further evidence demonstrates that LEA support has improved and is now very good. The LEA has effective strategies for gradually reducing levels of support as weak schools improve. It monitors carefully the progress of schools receiving additional support, with regular reports being made to the head of the education effectiveness service, the group director and to the portfolio-holder. Feedback from governors of some of those schools confirmed the very good support they had received.

Support for literacy

66. In the 1999 inspection, support for literacy was judged to be a strength. The LEA's own evaluation confirms this. As a result, this aspect of the LEA's work was not inspected in detail. The school survey reveals a high degree of satisfaction (in the top 25 per cent of LEAs inspected) and significant improvement since the last inspection. The latest assessment results also show that progress has been made towards ambitious targets and the improvements in results at Key Stage 2 are above the national trend. The inspection team therefore judges support for literacy now to be very good.

Support for numeracy

67. Support for numeracy was identified as a strength in the 1999 inspection. The LEA's evaluation confirms this and is supported by the views of schools surveyed, which indicate that there has been a significant improvement. This aspect was therefore not inspected in detail. However, assessment results have improved in line with the national trend. The inspection team therefore judges that support for numeracy is still good.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

68. This aspect was heavily criticised in the 1999 inspection, but telling progress has been made and it is now good. Schools confirmed this improvement emphatically in their survey responses. Nevertheless, rightly, the LEA acknowledges

that there is still more to do to raise standards of pupils' ICT capability. It has embarked on a range of apposite and ambitious strategies, which promise well.

69. The most recent audit of school inspection reports identified that attainment in ICT was still unsatisfactory in 40 per cent of primary schools and in 20 per cent of secondary schools. However, the gap between standards in Calderdale primary schools and those nationally is closing and standards in secondary schools have caught up by the end of Key Stage 4. In 2001 in primary schools, progress in ICT was made at a faster rate than nationally.

70. The quality of external New Opportunities Fund (NOF) providers caused a shaky start to the NOF training. The LEA acted decisively to introduce a new partnership, and training is now well in hand. All schools are signed up for training, in line with the national target, and it is planned that all will complete it by April 2003. The LEA's programme of support has been well received by schools and has gained recognition nationally and internationally. It concentrates well on improving teachers' expertise in order to enable them to develop pupils' capability in ICT across the whole curriculum.

71. The LEA has managed the use of National Grid for Learning resources well. The ratios of computers to pupils in all types of schools have already passed the baseline targets. All schools have ISDN access to the Internet and email. All secondary schools are on target to have broadband connectivity by August 2002 and the LEA aims to have all schools so connected by 2006. The post-16 broad band project and the developing post-16 database show vision and innovation. These are to the LEA's credit.

72. The authority has established very useful networks for school ICT co-ordinators, created a valuable website to provide support, and gives appropriately differentiated support to schools. Completing the pupil-level database and using it, along with profiles of actual pupils' work to develop a system for assessment are particularly noteworthy developments.

73. The school improvement officer (ICT) and the consultants provide excellent, knowledgeable and well-targeted support. They have credibility with schools and are in high demand because of it. Improvement in ICT capability has still a way to go but current measures are likely to have the desired effect.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

74. The LEA's support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is good. Its strategy is comprehensive and links the national strategy with local priorities based on audit of need. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is broadly line with national averages, and the LEA's rate of improvement is above that achieved both nationally and by statistical neighbours. However, there is notable variation between the attainment of different schools and cohorts of pupils over time. The LEA has recognised this in its criteria for targeting support whilst ensuring that all the secondary schools get at least some support. Its plan takes good account of underachieving groups, notably boys and minority ethnic pupils. The criteria for support are clear, well articulated by the team and endorsed by the regional director.

75. The implementation of the national strategy has been managed effectively by enthusiastic officers and is well received by schools. The LEA has sensibly made early appointments of a strategy manager and strand leaders for ICT and teaching and learning in the foundation subjects. The deployment of literacy and numeracy team leaders who work cross-phase ensures continuity between Key Stages 2 and 3, and builds on work that preceded the national strategy. There is an appropriate emphasis on cross-curricular work. The consultants are providing high standards of training and school support, and schools are beginning to note the impact of the strategy. However, planned outcomes need to be expressed more precisely. The induction and performance management of the team are good.

76. The data available to evaluate the strategy is improving and the LEA has sensibly promoted the use of interim tests to monitor pupils' progress in Years 7 and 8. Attendance data is not yet available by key stage, but the impact of the strategy on attendance is being monitored.

Support for ethnic minority groups including Travellers

77. The 1999 report expressed cautious optimism about the LEA's strategy for supporting the attainment of minority ethnic pupils, but indicated that improvement was needed. The authority has moved forwards since then and consolidated its work. Overall, it now gives satisfactory support to minority ethnic pupils.

78. In 2001 pupils of Pakistani-origin achieved results on average below those of White British backgrounds at each key stage on almost every indicator, with boys achieving consistently lower than girls. The numbers of pupils from other ethnic groups were too few to allow reliable analysis. However, the standards attained by minority ethnic pupils overall have been generally rising in recent years, and the gap between their performance and that of others has narrowed in primary mathematics and at GCSE overall, though not in primary English. Proportionate numbers of pupils of Pakistani-origin and White British origin received fixed term exclusions from school last year.

79. The LEA's overall strategy is sound. A specialist school improvement officer monitors schools' action plans, and has provided useful advice and challenge on targets. The new EDP includes relevant activities such as providing further guidance to schools on assessment and target setting, and the dissemination of good practice. The directorate's plans for future development are intended to strengthen the attention given to equalities and diversity work. However, the analysis of pupils' attainment was unsatisfactory until the introduction of the national data collection system this year and the authority has not yet begun to track pupils' progress or attendance across the school system.

Recommendation

In order to give greater support to minority ethnic attainment:

- make more detailed analyses of minority ethnic pupils' progress and attendance by school and age group, in order to plan the support and challenge to schools more effectively.

80. The LEA distributes ethnic minority achievement grant (EMAG) funding to schools with significant number of minority ethnic pupils on the basis of the attainment of these pupils, with additional funding given where pupils have arrived in this country recently. Pupils in other schools receive support from a peripatetic teacher provided by the LEA. This is, in broad terms, a sensible system aligned to the needs of pupils.

81. The LEA has two consultants who give specific support on literacy and numeracy to primary schools receiving EMAG funds. The support they provide is increasingly focused on key issues, such as the learning needs of Pakistani-origin boys, and is being extended appropriately to Key Stage 3. The consultants also provide some training for other members of the literacy and numeracy teams. This is a good scheme, likely to bear fruit.

82. A part-time teacher/co-ordinator provides support for the few Traveller pupils in Calderdale under a very useful arrangement with a neighbouring LEA. The strategy for this work is appropriately focused on liaison with families and supporting very mobile children in attending school. In addition, work is undertaken to raise schools' and other pupils' awareness about this group of pupils. Overall, this is a sound strategy and good plans exist for further development, but there is a lack of liaison with other council services.

83. A member of the EMAG team supports about 45 children who are asylum seekers or refugees or who have been evacuated from other countries by advising their school and families, and by liaising and collaborating with their teachers. The work is co-ordinated with other agencies such as the primary care trust through the council's asylum-seeker support group. However, there is not yet an overall LEA policy for work with asylum-seekers and refugees, nor a secure system for evaluating the effectiveness of the support. Written guidance to schools is insufficiently comprehensive.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

84. The LEA's support for gifted and talented pupils is currently unsatisfactory. To date, it has not been a priority for the LEA and development work has been seriously constrained by limited resources, notably officer time. Consequently the LEA's policy for supporting gifted and talented pupils is only in draft, the LEA has only very limited knowledge of provision in its schools and there has been little guidance and support for schools. The limited initial training brokered by the LEA was well received by schools, but its plan to involve teachers in the development of the LEA's policy has been thwarted by other pressures. A definition of more able pupils has recently been agreed by the education effectiveness service and

circulated to schools. This recognises pupils' actual and potential achievement in a range of areas, but does not make clear to schools how the LEA's definition relates to current national guidance and terminology.

85. Enrichment opportunities for gifted and talented pupils have been limited to summer schools. In partnership with Halifax Learning Zone, the LEA has supported summer schools for pupils transferring to Key Stage 3. The evaluations from pupils and parents have been positive, but the LEA's own evaluation of the summer schools and its tracking of pupils' progress is underdeveloped. There is also some evidence that recruitment has been adversely affected because it was not encouraged strongly by some primary schools and that uptake did not reflect the composition of the whole cohort. The LEA has identified the potential for further partnership work with Halifax Learning Zone in the 'raising aspirations' summer schools for Y10 pupils which will enhance provision.

86. In its new EDP the LEA has recognised the need to develop its support for gifted and talented pupils and has identified appropriate activities, such as auditing schools' provision and developing guidance to schools. However, the work is currently under-resourced.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for gifted and talented pupils:

- ensure that adequate resources, notably officer time, are allocated in order to provide leadership and guidance for schools.

Support for school management

87. LEA support for management was judged as satisfactory in the 1999 inspection. It was, however, criticised for the lack of structured networking for headteachers and for not capitalising on the experiences of managers in former grant maintained schools. The support has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now satisfactory with some notable strengths.

88. Officers have a realistic grasp of the quality of leaders and managers in schools, a sound knowledge of the improvements needed and suitable ways of creating improvement. The LEA's strategy is rightly characterised by an increasing emphasis on school self-evaluation. Schools are encouraged to consider a range of approaches and a joint project with the Halifax Learning Zone on school self evaluation promises to develop practice further. Also, wisely, the LEA has identified middle management as a priority area in its new EDP.

89. The increased expertise of the education effectiveness team means that school improvement officers are better able to challenge and support headteachers. In partnership with governing bodies, the LEA has built up a list of experienced managers, including some from former grant maintained schools, whom they can use as mentors, temporary appointments or secondments. These have been employed very effectively to support schools in difficulty.

90. The range of support to managers has increased since the last inspection. It now includes a number of networking groups, which are bearing fruit. Induction programmes have been improved and good guidance papers are produced. A satisfactory menu of management courses is offered and attendance on national training programmes for school leaders is encouraged. Training on school self-evaluation, using the Business Excellence model, was well attended by managers at all levels and governors. Overall, however, take up for all management training is below average, particularly in secondary schools. The LEA recognises that there is more to do to encourage deputy headteachers to complete the course for aspirant headteachers.

91. The LEA has provided schools with sound support for their approach to Best Value through good training and guidance. It has asked schools for their Best Value statements. It supports procurement, as explained elsewhere in this report. However, not enough is done to provide them with support on how to determine Best Value from the various options open to them. The LEA has encouraged schools to use the Audit Commission benchmarking website. However, because none of the Calderdale schools' data is on the website, it is currently only being used in a general way.

Support for governors

92. This aspect of the LEA's work was satisfactory at the time of the 1997 inspection. It has since improved and is now good.

93. Governors are well consulted and recognise that the LEA is now working to promote school autonomy. Extremely good relationships exist between governors and the support officer, who is very highly rated by all parties. The quality of communications about policy and provision is high, both in terms of prompt and informed advice from the helpdesk and helpful information and guidance in the termly newsletters and on the website. A detailed database of governors is maintained.

94. The LEA monitors the quality of governance appropriately. Information from governors' minutes, from clerks and from governors', headteachers' and OFSTED reports is used to help the LEA keep up to date with schools' performance. Where any weaknesses or issues emerge, the education effectiveness service provides support according to need. The LEA uses its bank of experienced governors effectively.

95. There is a good range of strategies in place to recruit new governors. Gradual progress is being made overall and sensible targets have been set. A useful partnership has been formed with the West Yorkshire Black Governor Support Service and minority ethnic representation is good in those schools where there is a large proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. In other schools, such representation is more modest. There is now an arrangement that schools may nominate potential LEA governors, but progress in recruiting to this category is slow.

96. The LEA's training programme is good. It is well managed and delivered. It provides well for new governors and also covers areas that are topical and relevant for all governors such as using data for target setting and approaches to Best Value.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

97. The 1999 inspection did not comment on the provision of management services except for technical services and ICT, which were poor. Technical services were criticised for the opacity of information given to schools about service entitlement and the criteria used to define priorities. There were concerns about the extent and justification of central recharges to the education service from corporate departments. A working party of the evaluation panel examined corporate recharges and reported in February 2001. It concluded that most of the recharges were reasonable but that transparency would be improved by the introduction of service level agreements for inter-departmental transactions. The council has an appropriate plan to phase in such arrangements with budgets for central services being held by customer departments from April 2003.

98. The LEA has made great strides forwards in the way that it provides information to schools and supports service procurement. These arrangements are now satisfactory. It has produced a comprehensive set of clear service specifications for all of the services that the council offers to schools. This covers both the centrally funded services and the traded services offered by the LEA that schools may purchase from delegated budgets. Service specifications are posted on the council's web site and circulated to schools on a CD-ROM. At present, however, some of these service specifications do not include prices. Schools have commented favourably on the increased clarity in what is available to them as core and traded services. The specifications use a standard and clear format, although some minor revisions are necessary.

Recommendation

In order to improve arrangements to support service procurement:

- integrate information about Calderdale council provision with that of external providers including appropriate arrangements about service costs.

99. The LEA has been very careful to respect the principle that autonomous schools should decide for themselves where to purchase services with delegated budgets. The unintended consequence is that well informed, independent client support for service procurement is not always available to schools that do not have the capacity or expertise to act confidently without it. This is particularly illustrated by difficulties some schools have experienced with cleaning and catering support. Recently, the LEA has entered an arrangement with an independent brokerage consultancy. This supports schools in obtaining services from alternative suppliers outside the LEA. This arrangement is also intended to provide support to schools in exercising their client responsibilities.

Recommendation

In order to strengthen schools' abilities to procure appropriate service provision:

- monitor the arrangements to provide client support to schools and ensure that that it does effectively meet their requirements.

100. The quality of **financial services** to schools is satisfactory overall. Guidance on budget setting is available to schools as part of their entitlement to core services. Internal systems work reliably, as do arrangements to make transactions. The payroll service is good. Progress has been made with electronic transactions and Consistent Financial Reporting. All schools now have a school bank account. The approach to the audit of school finances is sound.

101. The local financial management team within the corporate finance service is making sound progress, recovering from a low point in the summer of 2001. A combination of staff changes, the loss of key accounting staff to schools and the impact of new school bank accounts led to significant problems. This period was characterised by poor quality service and dissatisfaction among schools. Following consultation with schools, and an indication that they would like the service to continue, it has improved. The service level agreements (SLA) were redrafted, new staff recruited and changes to working practices introduced. Insurance provision is now good, demand from schools has resulted in a package of 20 different options being made available, ranging from policies for short and long term absence to group insurance for travel out of school. Almost all schools buy some form of insurance from this package.

102. The last inspection made no specific judgement about **personnel services**, but schools have indicated that the service they now receive is significantly worse than before. Although some fragile signs of improvement are emerging, the service is unsatisfactory.

103. Despite the overall position, there are a number of positive aspects to the work of the service. Contract particulars are issued in a timely manner, with a six month survey indicating an average of five days. Relationships with the teaching unions are good.

104. However, the general quality of service on offer to schools has been adversely influenced by a lack of resources, the pressure of a high workload due to other structural changes arising from the previous inspection, and the need to concentrate on financial matters in the short term. The LEA has used external consultancy to undertake a number of improvements. Guidelines are being updated and redrafted and this is on course for completion by June 2002. A revised staffing structure is being put into place. The LEA plans to appoint a new human resources manager in the near future.

105. The use of **ICT in school administration** has improved significantly since the last inspection, when it was unsatisfactory. It is now satisfactory, with strengths, and likely to improve further.

106. The information and technology team has expanded to meet demand. It has two functions: information management and technical support. It provides a core service, together with a customer-focussed structure of traded services. Feedback is regularly sought from customers, and is positive. The EDP contains a number of sound targets for the next five years covering all ICT matters. However, the service plan overlaps with other plans and is insufficiently robust. The schools' and children's directorate does not yet have an ICT strategy that links administration and curriculum and outlines the means by which this will be achieved. It took the view initially that the services should be developed separately, given the low point of both. The reason was sound, but now that ground has been recovered, the lack of an overall strategy is a key omission. The LEA intends to develop a detailed strategic plan in the coming year.

107. Under skilled and enthusiastic leadership, the information and technology team has made a number of significant developments, for example, all schools are connected to the Internet and 85 per cent receive a weekly electronic package of documents and letters. The team has also worked very successfully with schools to provide the training and support necessary in relation to the national pupil-level annual school census return. An education intranet has been established, but is at an early stage of development, with schools not yet having access. However, the education pages on the council web-site are up to date and contain relevant information for parents and the public. Greater interactive use of both Internet and intranet is under active development. Nearly all schools use the agreed common software platform.

108. Information management now has a clear structure and the LEA is making significant progress. Much more systematic use is made of all school-related information available. This allows school monitoring visits to be more precisely targeted and contributes to cross-service reviews.

109. A training needs analysis and subsequent programme has been developed in conjunction with schools. This addresses the administrative requirements of schools, largely related to provision of new software, with approximately two-thirds of training provided in conjunction with a private sector partner.

110. The 1999 report highlighted some major problems with the provision of **property services** by the then technical services department. Services were rated as poor. More recent surveys have continued to indicate concerns by a number of schools, but there are clear and encouraging signs of improvement in the quality of services. They are currently satisfactory.

111. A number of structural changes have taken place to improve this function. Internally, small project teams now work within the building and consultancy section, offering a service to schools for ongoing maintenance and project design and management. External contractors carry out all maintenance work. The end result is a better focus on the needs of schools. From a low point of 40 per cent in 2000-01, an increasing number of schools are buying the new service, with 76 per cent of schools doing so during the current year, 2002-03. The service has also developed a number of local performance indicators that clearly indicate improvements.

112. The position is less satisfactory with some larger projects and a number of schools have highlighted problems with the continuity of project management. Overall, only 37 per cent of projects were completed within the programmed date in 2001-02, and only 55 per cent completed within the contract sum. However, these do represent improvements on the previous year because of better customer focus, and systems are in place to ensure that this improvement is sustained.

113. The majority of schools make their own arrangements for the provision of **cleaning** services. Only 36% of schools buy this service from the council's in-house provider. Schools judge this service to be satisfactory overall. It has responded to the need to be flexible in meeting schools' operational needs by becoming more customer focused. The arrangements made for client support are not sufficiently clear, with schools often relying on the traded service itself for advice on choosing alternative providers.

114. The overall provision of services for **catering** is satisfactory. All special schools and 81 per cent of primary schools buy this service, but only 26 per cent of secondary schools do so. The responses to the survey indicate that schools using the service regard it as satisfactory. The catering service, provided by another council department, is increasingly customer focussed. It collaborates with schools on a range of valuable initiatives.

115. The bulk of concerns raised by schools were about the impact of the ending of the DSO contract, rather than the quality of the day to day service to schools. The service responded to the concerns through the creation of a group contract involving 42 primary schools. This has had the effect of allowing some form of cross-subsidisation between schools and has kept meal prices lower than they would otherwise be at smaller schools. Schools have expressed concern about the initial level of client support they received from the LEA.

116. The provision of services for **grounds maintenance** is satisfactory, with strengths. Ninety-two per cent of schools buy the service provided from another council department, and the survey placed this in the top quartile of LEAs for quality. The service works closely with schools; it has worked collaboratively with them to create memorial gardens, nursery play areas and environmental areas that have a strong curriculum link.

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

117. The LEA's role in securing the supply and quality of teachers is satisfactory. Calderdale does not currently experience significant problems in the recruitment of teaching staff. There are very low numbers of vacancies and of posts not filled by specialist teachers. It is therefore not eligible for any national funding. The LEA does not view recruitment as a priority and has not included it as such in the new EDP, electing instead to identify possible action in the latter part of the plan.

118. Nevertheless, the LEA has engaged in some programmes to recruit teachers, notably those from ethnic minorities through a Single Regeneration Budget-funded (SRB) project, as well as working in partnership with another LEA to provide courses for returners to the profession. It is too early to evaluate the overall impact, but early

indicators show a high proportion of SRB project trainees have secured teaching posts.

119. The LEA has taken the view that recruitment is not core business for a small LEA with other pressing priorities and hence has neither the promotional materials nor the rigorous analysis of recruitment patterns which other LEAs have developed. Whilst the LEA is aware of the age profile of staff, there is no monitoring by phase, subject and seniority to provide the LEA with detailed intelligence about the teaching force. Whilst the current local recruitment situation appears healthy, a more precise knowledge of current issues and developing patterns can only be of value to the LEA and to governing bodies in the medium and long term.

Recommendation

In order to assure the supply of teachers:

- in collaboration with schools, collect and analyse data on teaching posts to identify emerging issues and thereby inform future decisions.

120. The LEA's strategy for continuing professional development is inevitably dominated by the dissemination of national strategies. The LEA is very clear about the training priorities for its small team of school improvement officers and consultants, and has made some appropriate brokering arrangements with other providers, for instance for Early Years courses. There are effective systems in place to assure the quality of the training provided, and course evaluations are consistently positive. However, the LEA has yet to relate the continuing professional development of teachers, including senior and middle managers, to promoting retention as well as improving the quality of staff.

121. The LEA's support for newly qualified teachers has many strengths. Schools consider it has improved significantly since the last inspection and primary schools now rate it as good. The LEA is clearly committed to effective induction and support. The programme is well structured and the quality of the support provided in schools is systematically assured. The LEA has a good retention rate of 88 per cent of newly qualified teachers and it monitors the destinations of those leaving the authority after one year.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Summary of effectiveness of LEA's Special Educational Needs provision

122. The LEA is making reasonable progress towards the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), and gives much good, practical support to mainstream schools. It is sensibly delegating more funding to schools. It works well with parents, and its procedures for supporting pupils with SEN statements are generally sound. It now needs to make its strategy for future inclusion work clearer, and must ensure that the requirements of all SEN statements are fully met.

The LEA's strategy for Special Educational Needs

123. The 1997 inspection judged the strategy for SEN as poor. There has been some improvement since then, but it is not yet satisfactory.

124. The LEA has a recent, clear policy on SEN that demonstrates its commitment to inclusion, in line with the Government's programme of action. For some years the LEA has had a high proportion of its pupils with SEN placed in mainstream schools. The proportion of pupils with new statements of SEN placed in the mainstream is high and rising. The LEA has rightly developed a number of high quality services that support mainstream schools in meeting needs which in other circumstances might require special school placements. These services have also been effective in reducing the need to place pupils outside Calderdale, thus ensuring that they remain within their own communities and that the resources that support them are invested in the LEA's own schools. The LEA in partnership with its schools has therefore ensured that its inclusion policy is effective in these key areas.

125. There is no written SEN strategy setting out the LEA's plans for further development, although there is an intention to produce one within a year. The council has very recently made a Best Value review of arrangements for children with special educational needs. This provides both a good analysis of the current position and a plan for some action. Nevertheless, at the time of the inspection, whilst most key officers had a common view of the LEA's key objectives for the medium term, not all did so. Moreover, despite the existence of a cross-LEA strategy planning group, schools did not have a clear view of the LEA's intentions and the implications for them.

Recommendation

In order to improve the strategy for SEN:

- produce a written strategy document setting out how the LEA proposes to implement its policy for inclusion and identifying the implications for schools, council services and for the deployment of resources.

Statutory obligations

126. The 1997 inspection of the LEA judged this area to be unsatisfactory; improvements have been made and it is now satisfactory.

127. In nearly all respects the LEA's arrangements for identifying and assessing special educational needs are now satisfactory. Procedures generally comply with the new Code of Practice and are implemented in a satisfactory manner, and the quality of statements is sound. The rate at which assessments of pupils' needs are carried out is good, and this represents good improvement since the last inspection. However, there is one area of weakness, although it affects few pupils: there are some pupils with SEN statements who are not in full-time provision, generally because they have been excluded from school. The LEA is not meeting its obligations regarding these pupils.

Recommendation

In order to meet statutory requirements:

- ensure that provision for pupils with statements of special educational needs who are educated other than at school is appropriate and is regularly monitored.

128. Officers are keen to ensure that parents are fully informed of their rights in the process of identifying and meeting pupils' special educational needs. There is an effective parent partnership scheme in place, which has trained a number of voluntary workers, and the LEA is part of an independent regional consortium that seeks to resolve disagreements between parents and authorities. However, the quality of information provided to professionals by the LEA is unsatisfactory as its SEN handbook is seriously out of date, although there are plans in place to update it.

129. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is lower than the national average. The proportion rose up to 2000, but fell back in 2001. Some schools are unduly dependent on resources associated with statements in meeting their pupils' needs. The LEA is rightly concerned to discourage this, and the steps it is currently taking to delegate funding are likely to have a beneficial effect.

School improvement

130. The 1997 inspection judged this area to be unsatisfactory: there has since been improvement and it is now satisfactory.

131. The LEA has clear and robust criteria for statutory assessments that are consistent with the new Code of Practice. Procedures for involving stakeholders in the moderation of decisions on assessment are being put into place and will be fully operational in the new academic year. Arrangements for the review of statements are satisfactory. The allocation of funding to support statements is also based on clear criteria which are well understood.

132. Some support services are good, and well regarded by schools, for example, the services to support children with sensory impairments and those with autistic

spectrum disorders (ASD). These services are making a real contribution to improving provision for pupils with SEN in schools. The educational psychology service, on the other hand, has been through a very difficult period. A number of staff resigned almost simultaneously, and their posts remained vacant for too long. Those educational psychologists who remained were deployed on statutory assessment work (enabling the LEA to continue to meet its statutory duties) but the result of this was unsatisfactory: a severely diminished service to schools in advising them how to meet pupils' needs without recourse to statements. Remedial action has now been taken and the service will be fully staffed in two months.

133. The Education Effectiveness Service provides a comprehensive range of training for schools on writing individual education plans for pupils, and on managing SEN support within a mainstream school. However, the LEA has made changes in the way that other services support schools in implementing individual education plans and, whilst these changes are appropriate in themselves, schools are not yet clear about how to access advice on and support for the needs of individual pupils when they need it. The LEA is also working productively with a specialist organisation to promote a better understanding in schools of specific learning disorders.

Value for money

134. The 1997 inspection judged this area to be unsatisfactory, with significant unplanned over-spending. There has been improvement, and overall it is now satisfactory. There are sound prospects for further improvement in this area.

135. The LEA began to delegate resources for statements of SEN to mainstream schools from April 2002, and the new formula includes provision for needs that would previously have been made through statements for high incidence needs. Whilst this change has been controversial, the move to formula funding is likely to reduce schools' reliance on statements to secure the funding they need to meet SEN, and should empower schools to respond flexibly and imaginatively to the needs of their pupils. Some schools and parents support the proposed change, and the LEA can build on this support.

136. The overall level of spending on SEN is slightly below that in similar LEAs. Budgetary control is satisfactory: the budget is planned and monitored effectively, and has not been overspent in the last two years. The LEA's special schools offer at least satisfactory value for money, and there are satisfactory arrangements in place for monitoring the achievement of the pupils in them. Progress of children in mainstream schools is also appropriately monitored and the LEA has plans to begin monitoring delegated expenditure in mainstream schools once this has been instituted, though this planning is not yet robust.

137. However, the funding formula for schools does not sufficiently resource outreach work undertaken by special schools into the mainstream. This is a missed opportunity to encourage special schools to change their role in line with the LEA's inclusion policy. The authority is not yet able to judge the overall value added by its SEN provision, although work has begun that will measure its outcomes more effectively.

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

138. The council has come a long way since the 1997 inspection when this was a very poor aspect of its work. The work of schools' and children's services officers, supported by elected members and the corporate centre, has brought this work to the point where it is now satisfactory.

139. The council has a clear view of the significance of education to regeneration, and has supported a range of projects such as the Sure Start partnerships. However, the schools' and children's services directorate has not made a clear statement of strategy on social inclusion. Despite this, it is alert in identifying most potentially disadvantaged groups within the school population and taking appropriate action to meet their needs, often in partnership with other agencies. It has embedded this within the routine work of the school improvement officers and the cross-service review, but also gives specific attention through specialist teams within the students and communities service. This system is effective, with the major exception of the provision of education for pupils without a school place, which is still unsatisfactory. The council is using the Private Finance Initiative to focus new resources where social need is great. Its intended EDP activities are relevant and well focused.

140. Much of the improvement work has been very recent, and despite the corporate centre's commitment to empowering local communities and considerable personal commitment by senior officers, the use of management information is sometimes weak, for instance in monitoring the progress and well-being of particular groups. Moreover, the authority has more to do in demonstrating how it will further increase inclusion of SEN pupils.

141. The LEA manages the separate processes of ensuring the supply of places, administering admissions and asset management planning competently. The next step will be to develop a strategic plan, in collaboration with schools, communities and other partners, for the future of secondary provision that ensures these processes are effected in harmony.

The supply of school places

142. The 1999 inspection noted that the LEA had a similar proportion of surplus places in primary schools to that nationally and that progress was being made on implementing the action plan arising from a report by the external auditor. The first school organisation plan (SOP) had just been prepared and was subject to consultation, and an initial PFI bid was on the DfEE reserve list.

143. The overall situation continues to be satisfactory, and now has strengths, as a result of positive action taken by the LEA, as is confirmed in a further report by the external auditor in September 2001. The SOP is clear and shows that demand for primary school places is likely to decline, though the pressure on secondary school places will continue to grow over the coming five years. The plan considers each

area in turn and indicates that some places may need to be removed or added in due course. However, it proposes only to monitor the situation and work with schools to achieve a solution, when in some cases more definite action to add or remove places will be needed. The LEA has already taken relevant action in relation to surplus places in primary schools through closures, combining separate infant and junior schools into an all-through primary school and rationalising accommodation. It has also taken some action to increase the number of secondary places and has relevant and ambitious plans to take this further through PFI and other capital programmes.

144. The school organisation committee meets regularly and considers issues independently of the LEA. It has approved the SOP and agreed to complex proposals to merge a voluntary aided school with a community school to form a voluntary controlled primary school. So far it has not had to call upon the services of the adjudicator. The LEA met the infant class size pledge from September 2000. Forecasting of demand is now very good.

145. Thirteen of 15 secondary schools in Calderdale have sixth forms; seven of these have fewer than 160 students. Given the governance arrangements for secondary schools, the LEA has not been able to facilitate change. The Calderdale Learning Partnership has now agreed, as a result of work facilitated by the LEA, a basis to extend collaboration between providers in order to offer a more coherent programme. This is a sound start to a difficult process in what have been very uncertain circumstances, largely outside the control of the LEA.

Admissions

146. The previous inspection report described the difficulty of secondary admissions arrangements that arose from the relative unpopularity of some Halifax secondary schools. However no judgement was made on the performance of the LEA.

147. The LEA's administration of admissions is good. It produces attractive brochures explaining to parents how to apply for a place in the school of their choice. An Urdu language version of these is also available. The brochures include a feedback form for parents to complete; a good proportion of these are returned and indicate that 97 per cent of parents are satisfied with the service. The LEA has facilitated good relationships between the 36 admissions authorities in Calderdale. The admissions forum meets regularly and works well. All secondary schools have agreed to use a common preference form and common admission timetables; the grammar schools have agreed that in future years they will hold admission tests after the submission of preference forms rather than before as at present.

148. There is growing pressure across the LEA on secondary school places. Some Halifax parents continue to seek places for their children in the oversubscribed comprehensive schools outside the town. This inevitably leads to admission appeals. But the tendency to seek secondary places outside rather than within Halifax, mentioned in previous reports, has steadied. The number of first preference applications for two of the Halifax community secondaries remains steady while for the third they have increased. The overall proportion of admissions appeals for

community secondary schools is below the national average and all are completed within the recommended timescales. Appeals to foundation and voluntary aided schools are administered independently with support from the LEA.

149. Admission criteria for community secondary schools are based on place of residence, while those for foundation schools are largely based on 'feeder' primary schools. This leads to some parents transferring children into a particular 'feeder' primary in order to enhance the chance to secure a place at popular secondaries. This in turn leads to planning and budgeting difficulties for some of the primary schools that lose pupils.

150. Casual admissions are administered smoothly; the education welfare service manages the re-admission or transfer of excluded pupils, with vacancy information supplied by the admissions team.

Asset management

151. The 1999 inspection took place in the very early days of national asset management planning and good progress was reported, but significant investment in information technology was identified as a need. Arrangements for asset management planning are now satisfactory as result of recent improvement.

152. The local policy statement is clear and was assessed by the DfES as satisfactory. However the original condition surveys done by the council's technical services department were not to the required standard and were rejected by the DfES. The LEA then made several further attempts successfully to commission satisfactory condition surveys. These have now been completed. Schools that have received the reports appreciate the accuracy and quality of the work. The DfES has indicated that it is likely to approve these and grant the LEA autonomy over how capital allocations are spent. The task of conducting suitability surveys was delegated to schools after the LEA had issued guidance on how to do the work. This has been satisfactorily completed but has yet to be moderated. Plans are in hand to undertake sufficiency surveys; these are important in Calderdale because they will influence the next SOP particularly regarding the sufficiency of secondary provision across the LEA.

153. The LEA capital programme has grown significantly from £2.3m in 1998-99 to £7.8m in 2000-01 and £5.5m in 2001-02, particularly as a result of large increases in capital grants. There are good processes to allocate capital funding across the council's priorities, which are supported by the good consultative relationship that the LEA has developed with its schools. After a difficult period positive relationships have been established with the council's building consultancy service. The school building improvement group is an effective means of monitoring the progress of capital projects, both those managed by the LEA and those managed by schools themselves.

154. There has been an extensive building programme at one Halifax secondary school over the past few years. The LEA was also granted £36.4m of PFI credits for a programme that includes rebuilding another Halifax secondary school, refurbishing a further one and replacing a primary school. All of these schools serve

disadvantaged urban communities, some largely white and some largely minority ethnic. The PFI scheme constitutes a major part of the plan to improve secondary provision in Halifax. It will also rebuild one secondary school and refurbish another, both outside Halifax. The improvements should be completed by 2004. In December 2001 the external auditor reported satisfactory progress on the PFI scheme against a very demanding timetable.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

155. The LEA's provision for pupils who have no school place was judged to be very poor in 1997. The 1999 inspection noted that improvement had been too slow, and that there was still a lack of coherence, co-ordination and monitoring. Recommendations highlighted the need to monitor attendance and lengths of stay in alternative provision, together with rates of reintegration into mainstream schools. The LEA has made considerable progress in addressing some issues, but overall its support is still unsatisfactory.

156. The LEA lacks a clear strategy and its provision is fragmented and too variable. For example, there is currently no policy for the education of sick children. Provision for pupils educated other than at school with statements of special educational needs is unsatisfactory: almost half of these have less than 10 hours education a week and only 2 of these 25 pupils currently have more than 20 hours. However, by contrast, the LEA's provision for pupils educated at home is good, and appropriate provision is made for pregnant schoolgirls, including their reintegration to school.

Recommendation

In order to improve provision for pupils educated other than at school:

- agree an explicit strategy for the provision for all groups of pupils educated other than at school; and
- agree a policy for provision for sick children.

157. The LEA's permanent exclusion rate from secondary schools is low and there are currently no exclusions from primary or special schools. This is partly because the LEA has developed a range of alternative provision for excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion. Secondary schools' rating of this provision is in the top 25 per cent of LEAs and there is some innovative practice. It includes a college link programme, provision for vulnerable secondary girls with behaviour and attendance problems, and youth service provision comprising accredited work in basic skills, ICT, and work in areas such as performing arts and motor vehicle maintenance.

158. However, the LEA closed its only registered non-school provision, its pupil referral unit (PRU), in 2001. None of the other centres for alternative provision were registered with the DfES until very recently, and were therefore not until then subject to external inspection. This provision, in enhanced form, is an essential strand of its strategy to meet the requirements for full time provision by September 2002.

159. The other key strand of this strategy, a sensible restructuring of the behaviour support service (BSS), has been subject to slippage. At present the level of provision for some pupils educated other than at school is much too limited. Whilst there has been some improvement in the hours provided for excluded pupils, 42 per cent still received less than ten hours a week and six pupils on the BSS database had no hours allocated. At the time of the inspection improved staffing and accommodation were required. The key steps, responsibilities and timescales to meet the statutory deadline of full-time provision were insufficiently precise and ran the risk of the authority not achieving its objectives. The LEA acknowledges that it made unsatisfactory progress at first, but the allocation of new resources and vigorous work now being undertaken by some officers, has enabled the LEA to be significantly more sure that it will meet the deadline.

160. The LEA has made marked progress in establishing systems to track pupils, through the development of specific databases and frequent review meetings, such as the multi-agency provider forum. The LEA is now confident that it can track all its pupils and has procedures in place to review the progress of pupils in alternative provision for more than six months. The LEA has also established a clear process for re-integration, which starts at the point of referral. However, with the exception of education at home, quality assurance of provision is currently weak. A significant proportion of pupils has been in alternative provision for well over a year. Whilst the establishment of the databases has been an important step forwards, there is now a need to rationalise them and to ensure that all relevant information is included for monitoring purposes. Overall, the LEA is stronger on collecting information on these pupils than it is on analysing it to judge performance and thus inform its own decisions.

Recommendation

In order to improve provision for pupils educated other than at school:

- rationalise the number of databases whilst ensuring that all relevant information is recorded for the LEA to be able to review its own performance; and
- analyse pupil performance data and use it to target support.

Attendance

161. The LEA's support for school attendance was satisfactory at the time of the 1997 inspection. Primary school attendance is better than the national rate, and unauthorised absence is below the national level. Rates of attendance and unauthorised absences in secondary schools are broadly in line with those found nationally. With the exception of unauthorised absence in secondary schools, attendance is improving. Schools are broadly satisfied with the LEA's support for attendance, representing a significant improvement in the view of secondary schools since the 1999 survey. As a result of this evidence, detailed inspection was not undertaken. The inspection team judges that LEA support has improved and is now satisfactory with strengths.

162. The LEA is developing a more coherent strategy, demonstrated in the targeting of support by the education welfare service (EWS) to schools with higher absence rates. Greater use is being made of data to deploy resources, although the LEA is not yet able to complete the termly analysis to which it aspires and data is not yet analysed by ethnic group. The EWS is increasingly used within multi-agency teams, for example in monitoring the attendance of children in public care, and the service has been expanded sensibly to undertake this work. Revised guidance has been produced for schools, which is clear on the role of the EWS and on procedures. However, the dissemination of good practice is under-developed. The LEA makes less use of prosecutions than is used nationally or by its statistical neighbours, but its procedures for such action are clear.

Behaviour support

163. The inspection of 1999 judged this area to be poor. It is now satisfactory; this represents a good level of improvement.

164. The Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) is unsatisfactory in that it fails to set out a strategy for improvement and is clearly out of date. There are proposals in place to produce a redrafted Behaviour Support Plan. However, the council has already analysed behaviour support in its very recent Best Value review of children with special educational needs and produced an action plan that is a useful preparation for redrafting the Behaviour Support Plan. Even so, there is no clear and concise statement of the strategies that the LEA intends to adopt to reduce exclusions and promote good behaviour.

165. Targets for reducing exclusions are contained in the Best Value Performance Plan. The LEA has met its target for reduction in the primary sector, where there have been no permanent exclusions for two years. OFSTED inspections also show that the school climate has been improving in primary schools. In the secondary sector, OFSTED inspections judge schools' climates to be deteriorating somewhat, and exclusions are rising. However, this is from a low base and even the current level of permanent exclusions from secondary schools compares favourably with that in other LEAs.

166. The behaviour support service has recently been reorganised and a new manager has taken up post. The service performs two main functions: delivery of support to schools for pupils with challenging behaviour, and provision of education otherwise than at school. The latter function is covered elsewhere in this report and is currently poor. However, behaviour support in schools is a much better service. There is a good balance between work with individual pupils and work on policy, procedures and practice at the whole school level. Advice and support for individuals is particularly highly regarded and is seen by schools as practical and pragmatic. They report that it responds quickly and flexibly to their needs. Liaison with the health service is good, and the behaviour support service includes a mental health worker.

167. The service offers access to provision otherwise than at school on a traded basis. Schools welcome this and take up these places as a way of preventing

permanent exclusion. Whilst the service provided is often innovative it is subject to the difficulties outlined earlier in this report.

168. In addition to the LEA's service, there are initiatives organised by schools using their Standards Fund allocations, and other work to support behaviour is carried out in collaboration with the Halifax Learning Zone. This is all co-ordinated at school level, which works well in practice, though a better Behaviour Support Plan would give it clearer strategic direction. This should also help to address the perception in some schools that the provision currently made, though of good quality, is inadequate in quantity.

169. The LEA makes satisfactory arrangements for providing advice to schools when an exclusion is under consideration, and for the hearing of appeals against exclusion by an independent panel.

170. Because there is a good understanding of the strategies required to improve pupils' behaviour and a commitment to redraft the Behaviour Support Plan, prospects for further improvement are good.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

171. Provision for child protection was satisfactory when the LEA was inspected in 1997, but health and safety provision was not inspected. Both are now satisfactory, with strengths.

172. The LEA meets its statutory obligations in relation to child protection. All schools have a designated teacher and training records are complete. The LEA has provided enhanced training at the request of schools. However, it recognises that it needs to tighten up on some procedures and guidance, and has consulted on appropriate actions. At a strategic level, relationships with social services are good, but the school survey indicated some concerns about the effectiveness of liaison with social services. The LEA has innovative plans to review representation on the Area Child Protection Committee to increase the voice of schools, and to work with schools to review expectations and provision.

173. The LEA's support for health and safety is satisfactory overall, and its audit and training are good. The annual self-assessment procedure usefully emphasises schools' responsibilities. Training for both staff and governors is well received. Schools consider that there has been some improvement since 1999. The LEA has recognised the pressures on its small team of officers, which have contributed, for example, to a delay in updating guidance to schools. It has increased the staffing accordingly. The team works closely with corporate health and safety officers and also contributes to cross-service reviews of schools.

Children in public care

174. The LEA's provision for children in public care is good. The council responded usefully to the recommendations of a national report by establishing the Looked After Children Education Service (LACE) in September 2000 and enhancing the resources provided for this work. Jointly managed and funded by the schools'

and children's services and the health and social care directorates, LACE has been responsible for raising the profile of children in public care and significantly improving the LEA's provision for them. All schools have received helpful training and have a co-ordinator in post. The service is now rated highly by schools, in the top 25 per cent of LEAs, and was commended last year in the Social Services Inspectorate's report as a positive cross-directorate initiative. The LEA has set challenging targets for educational attainment by this group of pupils.

175. The attainment of children in public care last year was above that achieved nationally at Key Stage 2, and more pupils achieved at least one GCSE grade than did so nationally. However, last year, none of the 22 Year 11 pupils achieved more than five GCSE grades A*-C. The Quality Protects management action plan outlines a clear strategy for provision, which includes the improvement of cultural, leisure and sports opportunities for children in public care, in addition to addressing issues about their education and health. The work of LACE is now very focused on raising attainment and is beginning to have an impact. The service now has good information on the attainment and potential of each child and uses the data rigorously to negotiate support for the attainment of individual pupils. LACE and the Education Welfare Service (EWS) monitor their attendance well, thus ensuring speedy identification of problems. Overall, these pupils exceeded their attendance target figure last year.

176. Children are now benefiting from the council's attempt to improve their quality of life. Schools recognise their increased confidence and self-esteem, which is thought to have resulted, for example, from a club for leisure activities and from the supported access they now have to libraries. An LEA awards evening complemented this work as well as raising elected members' awareness of children in public care. Elected members are improving their commitment to corporate parenting in response to Social Services Inspectorate recommendations.

177. The joint management and funding of the service are beneficial. Protocols between education and social services are clear, and information exchange about placements is now greatly improved, although not always sufficiently timely. The leadership of LACE is very clear about the priorities for children, and combines pragmatism and determination in realising them.

Measures to combat racism

178. The action taken by the LEA to combat racism was very poor at the time of the 1997 inspection. It has improved significantly since then, but is still unsatisfactory.

179. The council has recently given a valuable lead in promoting good race relations by identifying this as priority for improvement, establishing a multi-agency panel to plan strategy, expanding relevant resourcing within the corporate centre, and committing all directorates to working towards equality standards. Headteachers interviewed applauded this stand by the council, and welcomed the very recent establishment of a procedure to monitor racist incidents in schools.

180. The implementation of these new procedures is not all the council has done. The schools' and children's services directorate has long provided keen and expert support to the standing advisory council on religious education (SACRE), and the local agreed syllabus for religious education reflects diversity of faiths. The directorate is running a useful campaign to augment the number of school governors from minority ethnic backgrounds. The chief executive of the council and the group director (health and social care) were personally very active last summer in attempting to heal divisions in the local community, and the racial harassment officer and youth workers were active in working with young people on the streets. Perhaps most significant of all in the long term is the council's commitment, in order to establish better bonds between schools and their communities, to improve the facilities of secondary schools in central Halifax, despite some local opposition to the re-siting of the one which serves a largely minority ethnic population.

181. Against these very positive indications of progress must be set certain weaknesses. Although there is much consultation on particular projects the council does not yet have a good permanent system of consultation with the full range of minority ethnic communities. The area lacks a recognised race equality office, although the council has part-funded a temporary worker. The draft community plan makes no reference to race relations and the local strategic partnership has no representative of minority ethnic groups. The introduction of racist monitoring is so recent that the schools' and children's services directorate has not yet achieved an overview of the extent and nature of racist incidents or a focused strategy for dealing with them. There has not yet been reliable monitoring of the ethnicity of the education workforce.

Recommendation

In order to combat racism more effectively:

- renew efforts to establish a permanent system of consultation with the full range of minority ethnic communities; and
- monitor the ethnicity of the education workforce in order to inform recruitment and staff development strategies.

182. The pattern of take up of secondary school places in Halifax by different ethnic groups is complicated by the existence of two selective grammar schools and two denominational comprehensive schools, all of which recruit from across the whole LEA, and three community comprehensive schools which largely serve local communities. Pakistani-origin and Bangladeshi-origin pupils comprise 85 per cent of one of the community comprehensive schools, whereas these groups range from nil (in another of the community comprehensive schools) to six per cent (in one of the grammar schools). Pupils' school experience of ethnic diversity therefore varies markedly, as it does, though to a lesser extent, in the comprehensive schools outside Halifax. The LEA cannot directly affect the ethnic composition of any school, but it has an opportunity to broaden pupils' educational experiences by encouraging partnership between schools. Some work of this sort is currently in progress within the youth service and within the school system; it can now be extended further.

Recommendation

In order to promote good race relations:

- extend partnership work between schools serving differing populations.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction to corporate issues

183. This is now, in most respects, a well run and well managed LEA. The council gives a strong commitment to education and has ensured that, where necessary, improvements have been made to corporate services in order to support schools. Elected members give sound leadership, and senior officers have won respect from schools for their efforts to enter into partnership and to give a better focus to school improvement work. Collaboration with other agencies is becoming increasingly strong and gives an indication of the potential of the LEA to develop its currently embryonic leadership role. There is now a need for clearer overall policy-making by the council, better planning systems, and better use of management information by the schools' and children's services directorate.

Corporate planning

184. Corporate planning for education was poor at the time of the 1997 inspection, and the implementation of plans was very poor. Key weaknesses then were the lack of explicit strategic thinking and the failure to use data to evaluate progress. Significant improvements were made by the time of the 1999 inspection, but some weaknesses remained. The LEA's priorities were then judged to be too numerous and evaluation structures were still weak. The more important failings have now been overcome, and corporate planning is now satisfactory and its evaluation is satisfactory with strengths.

185. The draft plan of Calderdale Forward, the local strategic partnership, of which the council is a leading member, gives useful performance indicators showing what improvements are expected in education. Good links are made with the council's statutory plans. Useful references are made to the need to target particular parts of the borough in order to combat disadvantage, and to address social concerns. This helps to set the scene for further partnership work.

186. The council's Best Value Performance Plan describes usefully how it intends to fulfil its community leadership role, in particular by improving consultation and by tackling disadvantage. Work within education has already achieved the first of these, but has not yet fully achieved the second, as detailed in other sections of this report. Although the council does not yet have an explicit overall policy on social inclusion or regeneration, there is a reasonable informal understanding amongst officers of the overall direction of policy and a coherent range of activities is undertaken. There is a medium term, three year review of the council's likely financial position but there is as yet no mechanism to direct resources toward long term strategic priorities as set out in various corporate plans. However, the council intends to institute such a procedure. The council has recently embarked on an improvement plan that involves coherent council action on race equality as well as other cross-cutting issues. This is a sound response to a recent consultant report from the Improvement and Development Agency.

187. The council's five priorities appropriately include "improving attainment in schools and standards of education" and "supporting vulnerable people and tackling disadvantage". There is cross-party commitment to these priorities, and the council's work in recent years demonstrates the seriousness with which its commitment to education is held. The council has undertaken to pass on to education any increases in the SSA, and it has maintained an active interest in school improvement whilst recognising and safeguarding schools' autonomy. Restoring the effectiveness and reputation of the education service following the previous adverse inspection reports has been the council's top priority. It has devoted not only money but also the time and attention of the chief executive and leading members to securing improvement. It has achieved significant success in this. An evaluation panel, chaired by the chief executive, has overseen progress on the council's action plan following the 1998 OFSTED inspection and reports to the scrutiny panel and the cabinet. This body, whose membership includes headteachers, governors, unions, and representatives of the DfES, has met frequently over a long period to scrutinise the details of action on each of the recommendations of the OFSTED report. The group director has supplied a great quantity of reports to the panel, and the panel has demonstrated vigour in its work.

188. The chief executive has identified certain key performance indicators across the range of the council's work in which he expects rapid improvement. In education these currently include alternative provision for excluded pupils and the number of exclusions. The corporate management team monitors directorates' progress against their performance indicators annually. The chief executive calls in directors six-monthly if there is concern about any aspect. This did not apply to education this year. Within schools' and children's services there is regular appraisal of progress on plans by senior officers.

189. The development plan for schools' and children's services sets out the directorate's purposes and in general, work is appropriately oriented to these ends. However, the directorate is not good at writing strategic plans, even though officers' ideas are clear when expressed orally, and it is therefore difficult to see the wood for the trees in some documents. For instance, the Behaviour Support Plan is very weak: it fails to give a clear idea of how provision is to be improved. Moreover, although there has been improvement since the previous inspections, the directorate's detailed planning sometimes lacks measurable success criteria, making later evaluation difficult, and frequently lacks reliable costings of activities. Some service plans and Best Value review action plans are unsatisfactory for this reason. As explained elsewhere in this report the use of management information needs further improvement.

Recommendation

In order to improve the LEA's approach to strategic planning and improvement:

- consistently develop service plans, action plans and development plans across the directorate so that they all include measurable objectives, quantified resource requirements, tight success criteria and precise timescales; and
- ensure that plans are consistent with each other in their objectives and timescales.

Decision making

190. The council's decision making was severely criticised in the 1997 inspection report for lack of transparency, lack of genuine consultation, and over-involvement by elected members in the work of the education department. This had not entirely improved by 1999, because key financial decisions were still the subject of muddle. The 1999 report made a number of recommendations concerning the provision of clearer budgetary information as the basis for consultation and to allay the suspicion of schools. This council has taken a major step forward and decision making is now good.

191. The LEA now has a clear commitment to school autonomy and to maximising the proportion of school funding that is delegated. There is extensive discussion with schools about the value of services provided using centrally retained funding; if anything, there have been items that have been delegated before all affected schools were prepared to assume the responsibility that goes with delegation.

192. The LEA now consults schools and other stakeholders very well on the overall shape and the detail of policy. It has established a comprehensive system of consultation groups, involving headteachers, governors and unions, and brings emerging issues to these groups readily. Specific groups are established to examine particular matters and a working group chaired by an external partner has examined a long-time bugbear, the system of corporate recharging. Overall, this consultative work has had a very great impact on relations between the LEA and schools. Interviews and discussions in this inspection indicated that the LEA is now trusted and respected for the genuineness of its approach to consultation. It is recognised that this is a genuine and major step forward by the LEA, for which the group director, with the backing of the political leadership, is particularly responsible.

193. Relationships between senior officers and elected members are now good. The portfolio-holder for schools' and children's services keeps closely in touch with the group director on emerging issues and the implementation of policy, but properly so. The delegation of powers to officers is understood and respected. Major decisions are discussed at cabinet after a report from the group director and then proceed to full council for decision. In many cases, the cabinet seeks preliminary discussion from the scrutiny panel for schools' and children's services, before its own discussion. This clogs up the work of that panel and restricts its capacity to scrutinise cabinet decisions, but at least it symbolises the council's desire for

openness. Minority parties appreciate the routine briefings they receive from senior officers. Overall, this is a good working system, and that it has been achieved is very much to the credit of members and officers.

Leadership of officers and elected members

194. The 1997 inspection found that the leadership both of elected members and of senior officers was very poor. By 1999 a new senior management team was in place. Elected members in general had an improved approach to their role, and the management team was proving to be energetic and competent. This improvement has continued. The quality of officers' leadership is now good; that of elected members is now satisfactory with strengths.

195. The leadership of the chief executive has been a crucial factor in ensuring that the improvement of the LEA has been pursued rigorously. Equally, his role in promoting good partnership with some external bodies has been very significant. The group director and her senior management team, widely respected amongst headteachers, governors and partners, have done a very great deal to restore the reputation of the LEA. They have ensured that reform has been based on clear evidence of need and have established good departmental structures and working procedures for meeting the authority's obligations effectively and efficiently. They have transformed the authority's relations with schools. Policy advice to members is detailed, clear and well informed. On occasions it has had to be bold, but has been well justified. Monitoring of the work of the LEA has been assiduous, for instance, both in routine reporting on the Education Development Plan and in the special reporting required by the evaluation panel. Strategic planning has not yet attained the quality of the more urgent remedial work that has been forced on officers by the legacy of the past; but the present team have the capacity to take this next step. Some important moves have already been made in developing work with partners, especially concerning the 14-19 age-range, and there is scope to build on this.

196. School representatives and stakeholders interviewed paid testimony to the transformation in elected members' conduct since 1997. The interference experienced in the past has ceased. It is widely felt that members, overall, now recognise the autonomy of schools.

197. Elected members have made clear their commitment to education in their council budget, and in the time they give to detailed monitoring of the work of schools. They are accustomed to taking the sound advice with which officers provide them, after consideration of the implications. They have recently made a difficult and controversial decision about relocating a school after considerable debate, and have launched a new policy on racial harassment. This all represents very sound leadership. Their strategic thinking is not so well developed, as indicated by their lack of clear policy on social inclusion.

198. The scrutiny panel has been very active indeed in discussing the LEA's work but it has been too concerned with covering all the ground. At one recent meeting members discussed six major items about schools: baseline assessment, Key Stage 3 results, ethnic minority achievement work, school budget balances, progress on the OFSTED recommendations, and early years developments. This style of

work detracts from the potential of scrutiny to challenge the executive on matters of policy. The specific enquiry it initiated into school balances demonstrated its potential for more purposeful work.

Partnership

199. Partnership between the LEA and external agencies was found to be satisfactory at the time of the 1997 inspection; it was not inspected in the 1998 or 1999 inspections. It has improved since 1997 and is now good.

200. Senior officers of the LEA have made a major commitment to extending partnership work. The involvement of the directorate in the Local Learning Partnership is particularly good and is likely to enhance co-operation between post-16 providers. Liaison with the Halifax Learning Zone is very sound and, for instance, has led to good joint work on target setting. There is a good strategic working relationship with the police authority, likely to be beneficial in promoting good race relations. The good work of the LEA in supporting the SACRE has enabled it to disseminate good practice amongst schools. The early collaboration with the Connexions Partnership has facilitated additional educational welfare support to one school facing very challenging circumstances. Regular joint working between the council and local health bodies, recognised by a national Beacon award, has benefited the operation of systems to support vulnerable children. Liaison with the dioceses about school premises and planning, and on more general aspects of school improvement, is efficient. Liaison between the LEA and unions interviewed is good: it promotes positive working relations with staff.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has made a number of fundamental recommendations, which are key to the further progress of the LEA. Work should begin on them immediately. They are:

In order to clarify its strategy for school improvement:

- produce a simple, written strategic statement of the directorate's vision and share this with schools.

In order to improve the LEA's approach to strategic planning and improvement:

- consistently develop service plans, action plans and development plans across the directorate so that they all include measurable objectives, quantified resource requirements, tight success criteria and precise timescales; and
- ensure that plans are consistent with each other in their objectives and timescales.

In order to improve provision for pupils educated other than at school:

- agree an explicit strategy for the provision for all groups of pupils educated other than at school.

The report also makes the following recommendations. They are:

In order to align schools' budgets more effectively to their needs:

- ensure that the process of revising the funding formula in consultation with schools, in the light of national policy development, does lead to the necessary revisions.

In order to give greater strategic support to governing bodies:

- ensure that all notes of monitoring and review visits are sent to chairs of governing bodies.

In order to give greater support to minority ethnic attainment:

- make more detailed analyses of minority ethnic pupils' progress and attendance by school and age group, in order to plan the support and challenge to schools more effectively.

In order to improve the support for gifted and talented pupils:

- ensure that adequate resources, notably officer time, are allocated in order to provide leadership and guidance for schools.

In order to improve arrangements to support service procurement:

- integrate information about Calderdale council provision with that for external providers including appropriate arrangements about service costs.

In order to strengthen schools' abilities to procure appropriate service provision:

- monitor the arrangements to provide client support to schools and ensure that it does effectively meet their requirements.

In order to assure the supply of teachers:

- in collaboration with schools, collect and analyse data on teaching posts to identify emerging issues and thereby inform future decisions.

In order to improve the strategy for SEN:

- produce a written strategy document setting out how the LEA proposes to implement its policy for inclusion and identifying the implications for schools, council services and for the deployment of resources.

In order to meet statutory requirements:

- ensure that provision for pupils with statements of special educational needs who are educated other than at school is appropriate and is regularly monitored.

In order to improve provision for pupils educated other than at school:

- agree a policy for provision for sick children;
- rationalise the number of databases whilst ensuring that all relevant information is recorded for the LEA to be able to review its own performance; and
- analyse pupil performance data and use it to target support.

In order to combat racism more effectively:

- renew efforts to establish a permanent system of consultation with the full range of minority ethnic communities;and
- monitor the ethnicity of the education workforce in order to inform recruitment and staff development strategies.

In order to promote good race relations:

- extend partnership work between schools serving differing populations.

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

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A copy can also be obtained from the OFSTED website: www.ofsted.gov.uk