



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection report
BURY
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: January 2003

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Basic information about the LEA

Name of LEA:	Bury Local Education Authority
Address of LEA:	Athenaeum House Market Street Bury Lancashire BL9 0BN
Lead inspector:	Barry Jones HMI
Date of inspection:	January 2003

Introduction

1. This inspection of Bury 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)*, which focuses 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. The previous inspection of the LEA took place in June 1998 and the report was published in January 1999.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with elected members, staff in the education and other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. The inspection also draws on the inspection of children's services conducted by the social services inspectorate in November 2002. In addition, a questionnaire was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 81 per cent. Use was also made of the LEA's own self-evaluation.

3. The inspection also involved discussions with partners, governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The inspection considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in schools and provides value for money.

4. For each inspected function of the LEA, the inspection team makes a judgement which is converted into a numerical grade. An inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made against criteria for each inspected function of the LEA. These criteria (and the guidance notes on functions of an LEA that may be inspected by Ofsted) can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report, along with short explanations of what each numeric grade represents. Judgements on inspected functions of an LEA are made during the inspection of the LEA and indicate the effectiveness of the LEA's performance of individual functions at the time of the inspection. The numeric grades awarded by the inspection team complement the areas of the report which comment on the individual functions scrutinised on this inspection, and, as such, must be considered in the light of those comments.

5. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be updated annually so that the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next annual assessment.

6. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of several aspects of the local service, including pre-school and adult education. The CPA for education is composed of a number of inspection judgements, as well as other performance indicators, such as improvement trends at Key Stage 3. The assessment, published in December 2002, gives star ratings for each local authority for a range of local services, for example social services, benefits, environment etc, whereas this report focuses on the local authority's work to support school improvement.

Commentary

7. Bury is the fourth smallest metropolitan authority in England. In socio-economic terms, Bury is broadly average. Unemployment is well below the national average, but this masks a low wage economy generally. The total school population is similar to that at the time of the last inspection in 1999, but there are 2000 fewer children aged under five.

8. Pupils in Bury schools consistently achieve standards above the national averages at all key stages. Given the average socio-economic context and very low levels of funding, this is a notable accomplishment that reflects credit on pupils, schools and the LEA alike. The LEA strives for excellence and elected members and senior officers have high expectations, which are translated into high education targets. The 2004 targets for the General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE) are very challenging, but are achievable. The 2004 target for Key Stage 2 literacy, however, is not based on prior attainment, does not command the support of schools and has a detrimental effect on the partnership between the LEA and its schools. This target is unlikely to be met.

9. The education service continues to be an effective organisation. It is very well led, has a distinctive ethos and clear principles, and has developed very good relationships with its schools and other partners. The quality of planning is good and monitoring and evaluation are strengths of this LEA. The quality of data produced by the LEA is excellent. This underpins the LEA's strategy to develop self-evaluating schools and is a model of good practice. However, the LEA has not sufficiently helped schools to become discerning customers. Also, analysis has not been used sufficiently rigorously to challenge the high number of exclusions in Bury secondary schools.

10. Since the last inspection, the LEA has improved its support for social inclusion and for raising the attainment of pupils with special educational needs (SEN). The LEA has also vigorously tackled the issue of surplus places arising from the change in age distribution. Elected members are committed and have demonstrated that they are prepared to tackle difficult decisions such as school closures. The council has, however, not consistently performed well its role as corporate parent to looked after children and attempts to rectify this have been slowed by staffing difficulties within social services.

11. The LEA does most things very well. Particular strengths include:

- formulation and implementation of school improvement strategy;
- strategy for social inclusion;
- allocation of resources to priorities;
- support for primary literacy and numeracy strategies;
- monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools;
- support for schools causing concern;
- support for school leadership, management and governors;
- support for early years;

- support services for special educational needs;
- school places;
- support for catering and grounds maintenance;
- support for attendance;
- leadership by senior officers and elected members; and
- contribution to partnerships and multi-agency work.

12. The LEA performs the majority of its other functions satisfactorily, but the following are not satisfactory:

- support for looked after children; and
- support for gifted and talented pupils.

13. The Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) is extremely low by national standards. Education has been designated as the highest priority by the council and is funded above SSA. The level of delegation is in line with the government target but, despite this, individual school budgets (ISBs) are among the lowest nationally. The LEA makes good use of its relatively limited resources, which are well targeted on priorities and pupils' attainment is high despite the low funding. However, pupil-teacher ratios are unfavourably high and accommodation and teaching resources are often unsatisfactory, particularly in secondary schools. The LEA has, nevertheless, maintained good relationships with schools and the low funding is a source of discontent with schools and the LEA alike.

14. This is a good, improving LEA. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment, published in December 2002, gave the education service two stars for performance. This reflects the high standards in schools and strong leadership by the LEA, but also some below average performance by looked after children, in the LEA's provision for information and communication technology (ICT) and in completing assessments for pupils with special educational needs. The LEA is addressing these issues rigorously and making good progress. The CPA rating for improvement is three stars (the highest category) and this accords with the inspection findings. There are major strengths in all tiers of the leadership of the education service, which partly explains the good CPA rating for education, while the authority is rated as weak overall. The capacity for improvement is good. The education service is well placed to address the recommendations in this report and contribute significantly to improving performance in the authority generally.

Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement

Context

15. Bury is an urban metropolitan district to the north of Greater Manchester. It includes the six towns of Bury, Prestwich, Whitefield, Radcliffe, Tottington and Ramsbottom. It is the fourth smallest metropolitan authority in England with a population of around 183,800.

16. According to the indices of deprivation (DETR 2000)¹ Bury is the 130th most deprived of 354 districts. Although unemployment is only 2.2 per cent, there is a low wage economy and pockets of high deprivation. The educational indicators are a little more favourable. For instance, the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is 18 per cent in the primary phase and 15 per cent in secondary, just below the national figures. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need in 2001 was 2.3 per cent in primary education (below the national average) and 4.8 per cent in secondary education (above the national average).

17. The percentage of pupils from a Pakistani heritage has increased to 6.2 per cent since the last inspection. In total, 11.8 per cent of Bury's pupils are of minority ethnic origin, in line with national averages. Bury is participating in the Asylum Seekers Dispersal Scheme.

18. Since the last inspection, the total number of pupils has changed little, but the proportion in high schools has increased relative to primary pupils. There are, for instance, 2000 fewer children under five years of age. Consequently the LEA identifies that it has surplus places in some primary schools. In January 2003, there were 68 primary schools, 14 secondary schools, three special schools, two pupil referral units and one nursery school with a total population of 28,890 pupils; 37 schools had nursery classes.

19. The proportion of Year 11 pupils staying on into higher education was 73.9 per cent, just above the national average.

20. Class sizes are high. Pupil-teacher ratios in primary and secondary schools are above statistical neighbours² and national averages. Since the last inspection, the gap with the national figure has worsened in primary but not secondary schools.

Performance

21. The previous inspection noted that performance on entry to school was broadly in line with national norms. Attainment was above or well above national averages at Key Stage 2 and at GCSE level; in some respects it was above average at Key Stage 3; it was in line with national averages at Key Stage 1. Standards have improved well, particularly at Key Stage 2 and GCSE level.

¹ Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000 index of local deprivation, a summary of results.

² Bury's statistical neighbours are Dudley, Southend, Enfield, Stockton, Bolton, Warrington, Stockport, Trafford, Bexley, City of Bristol.

22. In general, results in 2001 at all key stages were at least in line, and usually above, both national and statistical neighbours' averages; in two instances the results were well above, namely the percentages of pupils gaining Level 4 or better in mathematics at Key Stage 2 and at least one GCSE grade at age 16.

23. Pupils' attainment has improved further since the last inspection. Since attainment was already high, it has been a challenge to make further improvements in line with the national rate, for instance at Key Stage 2. Nevertheless, analysis by the Department for Education and Skills shows that the rate of improvement from Key Stage 1 in 1998 to Key Stage 2 in 2002 was just above that found nationally. At GCSE level from 1998 to 2001, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more grades A*- C increased by 6.9 per cent compared with 3.9 per cent nationally. This trend has been continued in the 2002 results.

24. Ofsted data show that for the latest cycle of inspections the percentage of good or very good schools is well above the national average at primary level and above for secondary schools. Equally significant, and indicative of the high performance of Bury schools, is the fact that no primary or secondary schools were in need of 'much improvement'; this is below the average for statistical neighbours and nationally.

25. In 2001, attendance in primary and secondary schools was above the national average. The rate for permanent exclusions was below the national average in primary schools, but above in secondary schools.

Funding

26. At the time of the last inspection, Bury's education SSA per pupil was in the lowest quartile for all metropolitan authorities. Until 1996/1997, the council had chosen to spend well above the SSA, but, because of other financial pressures, there were cuts between 1996/1997 and 1997/1998. It was some time before the council was able to increase funding levels. In 2002/2003, Bury's SSA remains very low at 93.3 per cent of the metropolitan authority average and 88.5 per cent of the national average. However, the council has identified education as a high priority and additional funds are currently allocated above the SSA.

Academic year	SSA for education £m	Net expenditure on education - £m	Expenditure as per cent of SSA
2002/2003	81.59	82.94	101.66
2001/2002	78.34	78.83	100.66

27. Even with these additions, the level of resources available to Bury schools is relatively very low. The proportion of the local schools budget delegated to schools meets the government target of 87 per cent and is very close to the national average and metropolitan group average. In 2002/2003, the secondary individual schools budget is eight per cent below the national average and five per cent below the average of its statistical neighbours. The primary individual schools budget is 13 per cent lower than the national average and nine per cent below average for its statistical neighbours. Bury's primary schools have the lowest individual schools budget per pupil of all 36 metropolitan authorities.

28. Spending on most of the centrally-held elements in the local schools budget is broadly in line with similar authorities. The only exception is strategic management on which Bury

spends 24 per cent more than its statistical neighbours (but six per cent less than the metropolitan authority average). This is explained largely by diseconomies of scale in a small LEA and Bury makes good use of the funding it receives. The 1999 Ofsted report concluded that the LEA allocated and targeted its resources precisely. The evidence provided by the LEA confirms that this aspect of its work is still good and no fieldwork was carried out for the allocation of resources to priorities.

29. The LEA has recently achieved greater success in securing external funding which totals £11.3 million in 2002/2003. In particular, take up of the Standards Fund was increased to 100 per cent in 2002-2003 and £2 million was allocated to create 340 new places under the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative. A private finance initiative proposal has been submitted to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to start in 2004/2005, costing £37.5 million, and involving four high schools.

Council structure

30. The council currently consists of 33 Labour members, 12 Conservative and three Liberal Democrat members. A new constitution was implemented in September 2002. There is a leader and a cross-party executive with two opposition members serving without portfolios. One cabinet member has the portfolio for education and one of the five overview and scrutiny committees has the dedicated brief for education. The latter has wide representation including elected members, diocesan, governor and teacher representatives. All meetings of the executive and scrutiny committee are open to the public with an opportunity to ask questions. The new arrangements have speeded up the decision-making process. Members and officers are clear about their respective roles.

31. A new chief executive was appointed in 2001. As part of a subsequent reorganisation the division for education and culture was created. This means an increase in status from third to second tier for the director of education. He now sits on the management board for the authority. This properly reflects the importance of education and this change was welcomed by the schools.

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

32. The strategy for school improvement is good, having been highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It is effective, well understood by schools and commands the support of partners. This reflects the extensive, effective consultation process.

33. The audit of performance is comprehensive and the quality of data analysis is a major strength. For instance, there is pupil-level data analysis for minority ethnic groups, looked after children and for all pupils transferring from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. The excellence of the data enables the authority to target resources at areas of greatest need effectively. There is a detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses for the five national priorities. There is a clear and sensible rationale for the inclusion of information and communication technology as a local priority.

34. Targets are very challenging and this is consistent with the LEA's pursuit of excellence. This is a shared goal of officers, elected members and schools. The 2004 GCSE targets should be achievable, but those for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 require considerable acceleration in current rates of progress. At Key Stage 3, this is underpinned by the Key

Stage 3 strategy, extra resources and improved value-added analyses that should enable resources to be targeted precisely. However, based on current trends and an analysis of prior attainment, the target for Key Stage 2 literacy is unrealistic. In 2002, Bury pupils on average improved faster than the national rate in Key Stage 2 literacy, but the results were still 11 per cent below the EDP target. It is, therefore, not surprising given the quality of their data analysis, that schools were not committed to this target or to the even higher 2004 target. The LEA has made no progress in addressing the recommendation from the first inspection and the gap between the LEA's and the schools' aggregated target has grown. This is not due to lack of effort, but because the target was set too high. This has undermined the target-setting process and seriously reduced its credibility in schools.

35. The Education Development Plan (EDP) is the main plan. A robust, honest evaluation of EDP1 was undertaken in constructing EDP2. The EDP for 2002-2007 is highly satisfactory. It is complemented well by underlying operational plans that are of good quality, for instance the action plans for special educational needs. School improvement plans are clearly focused. Success criteria are specific and measurable in almost all cases. Most activities are precisely targeted and there is appropriate cross-referencing between plans. Good attention is given to the performance of under-achieving or vulnerable groups of children. An exception is the strategy for gifted and talented children where the actions are too vague.

Recommendation

In order to improve target setting:

- seek to renegotiate with the Department for Education and Skills the 2004 target for Key Stage 2 literacy, based on an analysis of prior attainment and an appropriate degree of challenge so that the target is realistic and achievable.

36. Good progress has been made on implementing the LEA's strategy. The LEA has addressed the recommendations from the first Ofsted inspection robustly. Effective LEA support has been a contributory factor in raising pupils' standards of attainment, maintaining good attendance, and reducing exclusions and considerably improving the provision for pupils with special educational needs. Strategies for raising the attainment of looked after children have improved recently, but are not yet effective.

37. In 2002, the LEA met its targets for Key Stage 2 numeracy and GCSE, but not those for Key Stage 2 literacy, the percentage of unauthorised absence and permanent exclusions. Under the local public sector agreement, the LEA has agreed increased targets for Key Stage 3, looked after children and unauthorised absence. These are appropriate choices, but it does mean that very challenging targets are even more aspirational, and increases the possibility of financial penalties in the future.

38. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating progress are good. The quality and advisory service planning group regularly monitors progress on the EDP and reports are taken to the EDP partnership and to elected members. Programmes are revised appropriately in the light of findings. Schools are kept fully informed about progress. Reports are made available to the wider public and copies are placed in the education office and public libraries.

39. The low level of funding is the cause of much discontent in the LEA. The inspection did not identify any adverse impact on pupils' attainment. However, Ofsted data show that pupil-teacher ratios are unfavourably high and the LEA contend that the larger than average class sizes in Year 6 are a barrier to meeting their targets. Ofsted inspection data also reveal that the standards of accommodation and availability of resources are well below national levels, particularly in secondary schools.

Structure for achieving Best Value

40. This area was not covered in the 1999 inspection. It is highly satisfactory. A particular strength is the council's new, comprehensive performance management system, which links corporate objectives with service plans and individual targets. Many of these features had been in place for some time within the education directorate and have been further developed in the new corporate system. Although only recently introduced, it has the capacity to secure real improvements. In particular, it creates a clear mechanism for ensuring action is taken on Best Value and other service reviews.

41. The corporate assessment report by the Audit Commission in December 2002 noted that the council had a poor track record of delivering Best Value reviews and had failed to capitalise on the potential for change. Only one Best Value review has been undertaken within education to date. Its scope, aspects of pupil support services, was fairly narrow. It has resulted in an internal reorganisation and has helped to promote a culture of inclusion. Members had some involvement in the review at the scoping stage and in providing challenge, but their contribution was limited because of pressures on members' time.

42. Outside the formal Best Value review process, Best Value principles have been used to undertake improvement work in other areas such as out-of-borough placements for pupils with special educational needs and ICT infra-structure, with a new council-wide broadband network being put in place. Sensibly, the relationship between the scrutiny function and Best Value has recently been clarified. The role has been widened to include policy development as well as challenge to the executive.

43. The LEA is highly self-evaluative and generally accurate in its assessments. It has identified for itself most of the issues raised in this report. There is agreement within one grade between the LEA self-evaluation and inspection judgements for 49 of the 52 functions. Exceptionally, there has been a lack of rigour in analysing reasons for shortfalls in some EDP targets and making it clear what additional action will be taken to get back on track. This reflects a view that some targets are unachievable.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

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

44. No fieldwork was necessary on many functions as the LEA and schools confirmed that good support, identified in the previous report, had been maintained. This encompasses monitoring, challenge, intervention; the focusing of the LEA's support on areas of greatest need; the leadership, management and deployment of services; and support for literacy, numeracy and governors. Since the last inspection, the LEA has significantly improved its support for the leadership of schools, for pupils with special educational needs, curriculum ICT and for early years' provision. Management services are sound. There are weaknesses in the support for gifted and talented pupils and recent enhancements in the staffing and resourcing of looked after children have yet to be effective in raising attainment. The support and capacity for further improvement are good. The LEA's support for school improvement gives good value for money.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

45. At the time of the last inspection, services were effective and they remain so. The recommendations from 1999 have been acted upon and services to support school improvement are uniformly good. The LEA has reviewed and tightened working practices to ensure more consistency. Revised procedures for defining categorisation of schools, and the amount of visiting have been introduced. Schools are involved in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the visits in supporting schools' self-evaluation. Training to improve advisers' skills in analysing data and the mentoring of new advisers have been introduced to ensure consistency across the team. The secondment of headteachers and the appointment of specialist consultants have been introduced, and this adds to the expertise of the advisory team.

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

46. Procedures for monitoring, challenge and intervention are good, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. The role of the quality and advisory service has been clearly defined in the recent publication of the school improvement manual. School categories are clearly defined after full consultation with schools. The work of the advisory service is well aligned with the principles of intervention in inverse proportion to success.

47. The monitoring of schools is very good and is underpinned by the high quality use of data by the LEA. The LEA's self-evaluation confirms that support continues to be focused on areas of greatest need. At termly joint planning meetings, support is reviewed to ensure that there is a focus on schools' identified needs.

48. Comprehensive individual assessment booklets are issued to schools in good time. The booklets include trends, value-added analyses, contextualised information and local benchmark data together with guidance notes on their interpretation and use. There is effective monitoring of the progress made by minority groups and vulnerable children generally. General advisers undertake training on the use of performance data and training is also offered to headteachers and governors.

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

49. Identification of and support for under-performing schools is very good. The LEA has an excellent track record in supporting improvement. Since the previous inspection two schools have been identified by Ofsted as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses and both were removed from these categories quickly. Currently one school is designated as underachieving.

50. The LEA has identified a further 11 schools of concern. These schools have specific needs requiring intensive support from the quality and advisory service. For example, eight schools require short-term support arising from issues around school closure.

51. General advisers play a key role in working with schools of concern. They assist the school to develop an action plan and a well-planned programme of support differentiated to meet needs. Headteachers and governors receive regular written reports on progress to assist them in taking the school forward. Senior officers review progress made by schools at fortnightly meetings of the quality and advisory service team, and reports are presented to elected members. Monitoring is effective, tightly focussed on progress and the outstanding issues that need to be addressed. This ensures good communication throughout the quality and advisory service team and effective linkage between the agencies and individuals providing support. The scaling down of support and exit from a category are planned well.

52. The LEA allocates all schools to one of seven support categories that range from category one, schools in special measures, to category seven, schools receiving a core entitlement visit. Clear procedures for identifying, monitoring and providing support to schools are linked to each of the categories and are known to schools. Since the last inspection, visits have been reviewed and improved to give greater purpose and direction. The visits focus appropriately on standards, target setting and monitoring the implementation of national strategies. The visits also enable early identification of issues and pre-emptive action ensures that they do not escalate into major problems.

Support for literacy and numeracy and Key Stage 3 strategies

53. The evidence provided by the LEA's self-evaluation shows that support in primary schools for numeracy continues to be good, and that for literacy is still very good. The strategies are well managed and responsibilities are clear. Schools express high levels of satisfaction. Support for the Key Stage 3 strategy is a new function since the previous inspection. Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is highly satisfactory.

54. At Key Stage 3, results in the national tests are above statistical neighbours' and national averages. Improvement rates for English and science are at least in line with national trends, but mathematics is below the national trend. High standards of attendance are being maintained and exclusion rates are declining. The LEA provides schools with detailed information on the prior attainment of pupils. The quality of the data to show progress of pupils from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is excellent. It clearly identifies, for each school, strengths and weaknesses in terms of subjects, ability groupings and for specific groups of pupils. It is a model of good practice.

55. The deployment of consultants, however, is not sufficiently differentiated. All schools in turn have received consultancy support for English and mathematics as a core entitlement. Further support is available through the categorisation of schools. Hence, there is a degree of differentiation, but the analysis provides the potential for resources to be targeted much more precisely at areas of greatest need in mainstream schools. Targeted use of the support materials and specialist training to meet the needs of staff in the special schools is contributing to pupils' progress.

56. The consultants are well managed and schools report that they have made a strong impact. They have quickly gained credibility and provide high quality training and complement a good quality and advisory service. Support to schools in developing cross-curricular perspectives on teaching and learning are generally at an early stage. A good start has been made to the foundation subject strand and schools speak highly of the initial support. There have been some delays in implementing the science strand because of difficulties in appointing consultants. This has been resolved for September 2003.

57. The LEA takes appropriate steps to promote continuity between the Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 strategies. There has been effective use of cross-phase clusters for training in English and mathematics strands.

Support for information and communication technology

58. At the time of the last inspection support for ICT was unsatisfactory. Since then the LEA has addressed the recommendations well. A clear strategy for ICT has been developed in consultation with schools, additional curriculum consultants and technical staff have been appointed to drive forward the strategy, and plans are in place to address the connectivity and infra-structure issues that have impeded progress. Support is now satisfactory and the LEA has good capacity to improve further.

59. There is considerable variation in pupils' attainment between the key stages. Ofsted data show progress at Key Stage 1 is slightly higher than nationally, but teacher assessments reveal that standards at Key Stage 3 have declined sharply in the last three years. The LEA has good knowledge of standards in schools, but the good quality data are not yet used effectively by the LEA to allocate support to schools or set targets at Key Stage 3 for pupils' attainment in ICT. The LEA is taking reasonable steps to improve confidence in assessments. Appropriate and extensive guidance on assessment and levelling work has been provided to schools, including an on-line portfolio of pupils' ICT work.

60. A phased allocation of National Grid for Learning resources over four years has ensured that all schools receive an equitable amount. Schools support the LEA's scheme to purchase computers in bulk and allocate them to schools and this ensured that the national target for the ratio of computers to pupils was met. However, the national target to connect secondary schools to high-speed broadband connections was not met.

61. Take-up of New Opportunities Fund training is good and better than nationally. The LEA has supported schools well and a range of ICT courses to support the teaching of literacy and numeracy is also provided. Training courses have recently been offered to support the use of ICT in other subjects, but it is limited. The LEA recognises this and further expansion of resource material and training is planned.

62. A particular strength in the LEA's support is the annual monitoring and reporting of the impact of National Grid for Learning initiative and the New Opportunities Fund training. This involves visits to a sample of schools, observation of lessons and discussions with staff. Recommendations are identified and the LEA has acted on them to guide the development of a local scheme of work and training courses.

63. Almost all schools purchase technical support services under a service level agreement and are satisfied with it. Further developments are planned to improve the service although a Best Value review has yet to be undertaken.

Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers

64. Support for minority ethnic and Traveller pupils was not reported on in the 1999 inspection. Support is good. The new linkage with the quality and advisory service offers further potential and capacity to improve is also good.

65. The LEA has clear, appropriate policies. The requirements for the distribution of the Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant are met and the grant is devolved to the 16 schools with the highest proportion of minority ethnic pupils. Fifteen of these schools elect to buy back the services of the curriculum and language access service. The retained portion is used to support the work of the service in schools, and more widely across the borough, in providing a broad range of projects, translation services and bilingual work with minority ethnic pupils and their families. All curriculum, language and access staff have received training on numeracy, literacy and Key Stage 3 strategies.

66. The LEA provides very good quality data on individual pupils to schools. It is well integrated into the reviews of performance conducted by advisers and monitoring by the LEA is good. The LEA's analysis is good including the use of value-added data. This shows that the gap between the performance of pupils of Pakistani heritage and all pupils in the LEA is closing at Key Stage 2, but the LEA has not achieved its own very challenging targets. In 2002, the percentage of pupils of Pakistani heritage achieving five or more higher grades at GCSE level was 56 per cent, four per cent higher than the national average.

67. Schools report that the quality of training is good. The majority of schools choose to buy back the service for asylum seeker pupils. This service has supported 46 pupils in schools in 2001/2002, including the provision of interpreters and has supported an additional 80 pupils since September 2002.

68. There are few Traveller pupils in Bury. The administration of the Travellers' achievement grant meets requirements and pupils receive good support from the LEA Traveller education service. Attendance, attainment and progress of these pupils are monitored by the service and data are collected and monitored effectively.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

69. This is a new area since the last inspection. The LEA has taken insufficient action to implement its EDP priority and support is unsatisfactory. The authority has for many years provided policy and direction to its schools to enable them to support able children. However, the needs of gifted and talented pupils are not met within this. Provision lacks coherence and schools are generally dissatisfied with the lack of progress.

70. The LEA does not have a policy nor is sufficient guidance given to schools and consequently there is not a consistent approach in schools. This leads to confusion in documentation and setting targets. The LEA has provided, however, a termly training course for teachers, and recently held a well-attended conference for governors that stimulated wider interest in, and investigation of teaching and learning styles. Consultants for English and mathematics have also given training and support to schools in using differentiation strategies to develop work for gifted pupils.

71. The LEA has supported two annual summer schools for the last three years. Schools present proposals to host these events and are selected by the LEA. Evaluation reports on the summer schools are limited. In general, they focus on Key Stage 2 to 3 transition, involve around 60 pupils, and include generalised activities that enhance motivation and increase pupils' confidence about moving schools. They do not contribute significantly to influencing and extending development for gifted and talented pupils.

72. The LEA is working in partnership with a local Beacon school to support and promote interest and a working party involving a dozen schools meets regularly to develop further work on identifying gifted and talented pupils. This is a positive development and their work is to be disseminated to teachers through a major conference, which is planned for the summer term. All of these developments indicate a satisfactory capacity to improve further this function.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for gifted and talented pupils:

- develop and circulate to all schools a gifted and talented policy that clearly identifies the categories of gifted, talented and able; and
- in consultation with schools, identify appropriate and consistent measures to identify the progress of gifted, talented and able pupils.

Support for governors, leadership and management

73. Support to governors was very good in 1999. Since then the LEA has supported the setting up of an independent governors' forum. There are fewer unfilled vacancies for LEA nominated governors than nationally. Evidence from the LEA's evaluation confirms that support continues to be very good.

74. Support for school leadership and management was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, substantial progress has been made and support is now good.

75. Support to all schools has improved as a result of a revision and refocusing of the self-review visits to schools by general advisers, provision of training for schools in self-evaluation, and provision by the LEA of extensive and thorough benchmarked data and analysis to assist financial and curriculum decision making. These actions have been effective and welcomed by schools. Ofsted data show that the quality of leadership and management has improved in both primary and secondary schools since the last inspection.

76. General support for management is regarded highly, particularly by primary headteachers. The LEA brokers, where appropriate, further specialist support from external management consultants to support primary and secondary headteachers. Some primary headteachers have benefited from this focused support to assist them in tackling difficult and sensitive issues. They appreciated an opportunity to obtain an objective view from outside the family of Bury schools. Some secondary schools have developed their own arrangements to supplement the advice they receive from the LEA through networking. All newly appointed headteachers receive a good induction and mentoring programme, which involves experienced headteachers and the LEA's advisers.

77. Training for deputy headteachers and heads of department is provided well through a range of buy-back courses, although the focus has largely been concerned with supporting leadership and management in implementing the national initiatives of literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

78. Several of these individual services (finance, human resources, property services and cleaning and catering) were inspected in 1999 and found to be at least satisfactory. This remains the case and no further fieldwork was undertaken.

79. The effectiveness of services to support school management remains satisfactory. In the school survey, headteachers rated clarity of service specifications and access to high quality services as better than satisfactory. A folder has been issued to schools setting out the services available in-house through detailed service level agreements. Information is set out in an accessible manner, but there is limited recognition of the role of schools as customers. Generally, menus and prices are fixed. Contracts of up to three years are proposed in some areas. However, schools are offered the opportunity to contact individual providers and negotiate variations to the core entitlements if they wish. There is considerable variation between services. Some, such as grounds maintenance and catering, are highly flexible and responsive, offer a wide choice of packages, and actively encourage schools to consider alternative providers. In contrast, other services such as finance offer much less flexibility.

80. Although advice is given on an *ad hoc* basis, the LEA has not yet developed a consistent strategy to help schools become informed purchasers. It was clear from discussions with the inspection team that some officers have not adapted to this culture either. Some headteachers feel that the LEA is reluctant to see them opt for external providers and can be slow to provide information and guidance. As shown in section 5 of this report, this issue is being addressed at the strategic level but action has not yet fully filtered down to schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve choice and to ensure Best Value:

- provide guidance and training to schools on their role as purchaser.

81. **ICT in school administration** was unsatisfactory at the time of the 1999 inspection. It is now satisfactory and with a good capacity to improve. The key elements of electronic communication are in place and a common basic data set has been developed. It is used throughout the education department and is efficient, requiring data only to be entered once.

However, the current infra-structure connecting schools and the LEA has proved insufficient to meet the demands placed upon it, and is unreliable for Internet connections and restrictive for e-mail. For example, only half the schools used it to submit pupil level annual school census returns electronically.

82. Improving ICT is a corporate priority and a comprehensive, authority-wide strategy has been put into place with £1 million investment in education in the first year. By March 2003, schools and the LEA will be connected to a fast broadband infrastructure designed to provide more reliable services for Internet access and e-mail.

83. Primary schools were generally very satisfied with technical support but, at the time of the school survey, some secondary schools were finding the support hard to access. The team of technicians supporting administrative ICT has now been merged with the curriculum ICT team and enlarged, allowing greater flexibility and reducing response times. Training and on-screen help are available through buy-back, but take-up varies across schools. A website and intranet are in place, but not all schools use them. Work is planned to update them, taking into account the evolving needs of Bury's schools.

84. Support for **grounds maintenance** was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now very good. About three-quarters of Bury's schools buy in to a central contract, which is highly flexible so that individual needs can be met. Most schools reported a good level of satisfaction. A robust, risk-based monitoring system is in place and action is taken promptly where necessary.

85. **Catering** was highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, and is now very good. All but three of Bury's schools use the in-house service and headteachers are generally well satisfied. The contract is flexible and advice about using external providers is offered. A profit-sharing system has been put in place with high schools, which has been well received. Nutritional advice is readily available. Contract monitoring systems are sound and responsive. Free school meals are provided according to legislation and take-up was exceptionally high at 92 per cent in 2001/2002. Arrangements are in place to ensure that kitchens are adequately maintained.

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

86. This area has not been inspected previously. Work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers is highly satisfactory. The LEA has made use of national and locally developed strategies to recruit and retain teachers and is a partner with another LEA in the graduate and registered teacher programme. As a result of these activities the proportion of teacher vacancies in Bury is below the national average and capacity to improve further is good.

87. Retention rates for teachers are good and are above those found nationally. However, the sickness and absence rate among teachers is also high. Consequently, the LEA has responded to difficulties that schools face in obtaining sufficient, high quality supply teachers. The LEA manages a recruitment pool for supply teachers and this is used extensively by Bury's schools. Through this scheme supply teachers, including those returning to teaching after a career break, can beneficially gain free and open access to the latest training provided by in-service training courses. A further local initiative has been the introduction of a retired teachers supply scheme.

88. Bury has been proactive in early recruitment of newly qualified teachers to a Bury pool, and primary schools use this to select new staff. Newly qualified teachers have access to a well-structured induction programme of training and development including a conference organised by the LEA.

89. Data collection is good, but the analysis of it to support longer term and strategic planning is not. For example, strategies to increase the representation of minority ethnic groups in the teaching force are very limited. The LEA recognises this and is attempting to address it through funding the appointment of a recruitment strategy manager.

90. The LEA provides good support to the recruitment process for headteachers and induction and mentoring programmes following their appointment. Satisfactory use is made of national training programmes through joint working with a university. The LEA makes good use of a range of external trainers, consultants, and staff from the LEA and Bury's schools to deliver a highly regarded programme of in-service training.

Section 3: Special educational needs

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision

91. The previous report contained criticisms of aspects of the authority's arrangements for meeting the special educational needs of pupils. Since that time, through structural change, new appointments, and a change of strategic emphasis the LEA has made very good progress. It now has a clear vision of how it will seek to meet those needs through a programme of action and intervention based on a commitment to inclusion.

92. The LEA meets statutory requirements and provides sound support to schools. The LEA has identified difficulties and is actively taking steps to reduce placements outside the borough and improve the number of statements prepared within the guideline time. The LEA has identified these difficulties and is actively reducing the number of pupils placed outside the borough, and improving still further the number of statements prepared within the guideline time.

The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

93. The strategy for special educational needs was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Since that time, the LEA has made very good progress, and the current strategy is highly satisfactory. The only significant weakness relates to the high number of statemented pupils placed at the pupil learning centre. This is examined in Section 4 of this report.

94. There is a clear policy. It is based on increasing the inclusion of pupils who have special educational needs, both within mainstream schools and through securing appropriate placements close to pupils' homes. This policy has been translated into an effective action plan. One example is a project to provide for children with physical disability who were previously placed outside the borough. The LEA has plans to make similar arrangements for other groups of pupils. Around 72 per cent of all pupils with statements of special educational needs now have places in mainstream schools, which is ten per cent higher than the national average.

95. As part of this strategic drive, the LEA has also introduced new criteria to guide decisions on whether to undertake a statutory assessment, and whether to issue a statement of special educational need. These are clear and well written. The number of statements being issued (200 in 2001 down to 121 in 2002) has reduced as greater emphasis is put, appropriately, on supporting children and meeting their needs in mainstream schools within the arrangements for 'school action' and 'school action plus'. Currently 3.5 per cent of the children in the borough have a statement of special educational needs. This, appropriately, will reduce given the new criteria.

96. There has been widespread consultation with schools, including the two community special schools, over these changes, which have been broadly welcomed. Changes were made to the criteria in the light of those consultations. The school survey indicated levels of satisfaction above the national pattern for all the functions relating to special educational needs. The LEA is consulting on the role of special schools, but it is not yet articulated. A working party is due to report in January 2004 following the publication of guidance by the Department for Education and Skills.

97. Some schools express reservations over the authority's ability to fund provision for pupils at 'school action plus'. Action is now being taken to increase delegated resources to schools from savings on budgets held centrally to fund statements. This process started in the financial year 2002/2003.

98. Elected members are aware of the strategy for special educational needs and are committed to moves to secure greater integration. The LEA has a good capacity to improve this function further.

Statutory obligations

99. At the time of the last inspection the LEA was meeting its statutory obligations satisfactorily and that continues to be the case. The proportion of statements prepared within 18 weeks was 73 per cent where no exceptions applied in the six-month period to December 2002. This is in line with national averages and is satisfactory. However, this figure does not take into account delays caused by late provision of information by other agencies. When these exceptions are included, the completion rate was only 41 per cent for the same period. This represents an improvement on the 30 per cent for 2001/2002, but it is still too low. In the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in December 2002, the LEA score for issuing first-time statements including exceptions was the lowest score in the performance rating.

100. The LEA's general arrangements for the identification and assessment of pupils with special needs are good and include improving liaison with other agencies. The LEA is very active in monitoring the provision made for statemented pupils in each school. Until recently, officers have attended all annual reviews. Whilst this arrangement allows for very tight monitoring, the LEA, appropriately, is reviewing the use of its officers' time to focus attention where it is most needed.

101. The LEA has been proactive in discontinuing a number of statements. This has been done at a rate nearly four times that found in the authority's statistical neighbours. In the cases reviewed, the decisions were entirely appropriate. These monitoring and review arrangements are a significant strength of the LEA. The authority has decided that it will not seek to discontinue statements made under its old criteria simply because they would not have been made under the new criteria. The LEA is aware of the potential financial consequences of this decision.

102. The LEA has made robust arrangements for the parent partnership to be operated by an external agency. Schools and parents rated the support they received through this arrangement to be good. The service also provides for effective conciliation to try and resolve disputes, which has resulted in many fewer referrals to the SEN tribunal than found in other, similar authorities. The contractual arrangements are currently being reviewed to create a tighter service level agreement. This is a strength of the LEA.

Recommendation

In order to improve the completion rate of all statutory assessments, the LEA should:
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• take effective management action and engage with other partners such as health and social services to ensure that assessments are completed within the 18 week period. |
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School improvement

103. This function was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, there has been good improvement since that time, and support is now good. The support provided has led to improvements in the attainment of pupils with special educational needs. For example, recent data show that between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 pupils with special educational needs make good progress in English. There is a wealth of statutory assessment data on, and analyses of, pupils' attainment.

104. The criteria that have been developed through consultation with schools are well constructed and entirely in line with the new Code of Practice; they are a strength of the LEA's work. The LEA has worked effectively to introduce the new Code of Practice and schools acknowledge the worth of the LEA's officers' efforts on this, as well as the quality and professionalism of the training and support they receive on other aspects of work to support pupils with special educational needs. The quality of this support is also a strength of the LEA.

105. Standards Fund resources have been allocated against clear criteria and the use of these resources is monitored effectively. Support services for special educational needs are funded from centrally retained budgets and most schools are satisfied with this arrangement.

Value for money

106. Value for money is highly satisfactory as it was at the time of the last inspection. The LEA has put together good guidance and procedures, which make clear the relative roles of schools and the authority in making provision for pupils with special educational needs. The LEA is proactive in monitoring the use schools make of delegated expenditure for pupils with a statement and relating that to the progress made by the pupils. The various special needs support services have very appropriate performance management systems in place.

107. Central budgets for special educational needs, and resources provided to support the needs of children with statements, are effectively monitored. Of all the metropolitan authorities, Bury spends the highest percentage of the local schools budget on special needs placements in non-LEA provision outside the borough. The budget for this provision was overspent in 2001/2002 by just over four per cent, with a smaller overspend projected for 2002/2003.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

108. The authority's effectiveness in promoting social inclusion is highly satisfactory. The council's social inclusion plan addresses social, physical, economic and community regeneration. The plan confirms the commitment of Bury to tackle poverty and social exclusion and this is reflected in the authority's core values.

109. The education department echoes this strong overall commitment to social inclusion and has made this a major element in its work with pupils who have special educational needs, and other groups at risk. It has a good strategic overview of the effectiveness of its policies and support services. One indicator of its success is that in 2002, 99.1 per cent of all pupils gained at least one GCSE pass – the fifth best result for all LEAs.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

110. The LEA's strategy is good. Corporately, the council recognises the priority given to education in both local and national plans. The new linked management arrangements with social services for some functions is an area of strength. Other partnership arrangements are well developed. The best value review added impetus for structural and policy changes, which have enhanced the LEA's work to promote social inclusion including arrangements for the new access and inclusion service.

111. Promoting social inclusion is an EDP priority and activities set out in that plan include addressing the attainment gap, raising the attainment of able pupils, reducing permanent exclusions, tackling poor behaviour and education for pupils whose first language is not English. The LEA has very good data collection systems and these provide ample opportunity for analysis, which, appropriately, has identified the progress of many groups at risk of social exclusion.

112. Other projects in education relevant to this function include funded local childcare to allow young mothers to return to school; reducing social exclusion for Traveller pupils; increasing school access for disabled pupils; outreach support to address pupils defined as being at risk of exclusion; an alternative provision programme for older excluded, or at risk of exclusion, pupils linked to the local college and work on developing family literacy.

113. The LEA has a good strategic overview of the effectiveness of policies and support services for attendance and the provision of school places. This overview is very satisfactory with regard to admissions, behaviour and child protection. The work to support looked after children was slow to start and the authority is now behind most others in this respect, but there is now an appropriate strategy.

The supply of school places

114. This was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, there has been good progress, and the LEA's support is now good. Strengths include accurate forecasting, which aids planning, willingness to take early action and make difficult decisions and effective consultation procedures. The school organisation plan sets out the LEA's strategy clearly and

links with the EDP. The school organisation committee functions independently of the LEA and consultation with diocesan boards has been detailed and effective. The main improvement since 1999 is that overcrowding is being tackled more pro-actively.

115. The LEA's forecasting remains highly accurate; the primary forecast made in 1996 for 2002 was accurate to within 0.01 per cent. In accordance with forecasts, the demographic context is changing. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA was experiencing rising rolls and there was a severe shortage of places, especially in the secondary sector. Rolls soon began to fall and a surplus of 14.6 per cent in primary places was predicted unless action was taken. The LEA is now taking decisive action to reduce this surplus to five per cent by removing places from eight schools through amalgamation or closure. Consultation has been full and detailed, although the outcome has not been welcomed by all stakeholders.

116. Secondary schools' rolls are expected to peak in 2004. Three secondary schools are currently overcrowded by more than ten per cent and the LEA has taken action to create additional permanent or temporary accommodation there. No secondary school currently has more than 25 per cent unfilled places, but this is expected to change. The authority is beginning a review of the secondary sector so appropriate proposals can be drawn up.

Admissions

117. This was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection; performance in this area has improved and is now highly satisfactory. Information for parents is clear and accessible, admissions criteria are unambiguous and objective, and admissions arrangements are generally well co-ordinated. Appropriate procedures are in place for reintegrating excluded pupils and handling casual admissions.

118. The main area of improvement is that the appeals timetable has been brought forward so decisions are made much earlier, which is a benefit for both schools and parents. Although the number of secondary appeals continues to increase (from 280 in 1999 to 337 in 2002), 90 per cent were heard by the end of May 2002. The rate of successful appeals is in line with the national average. However, the proportion of successful first preferences at secondary transfer has declined to 92.6 per cent in 2002 from 95.6 per cent in 2001. This is explained by roll rises and unpredicted over-subscription at one particular school.

Asset management

119. This area was not covered in the 1999 inspection. It is now satisfactory. There is a clear relationship between the local authority's corporate capital strategy and education priorities. The DfES initially rated the authority's asset management plan as unsatisfactory because of concerns about the robustness of the condition survey, which had been carried out by external consultants. The survey has since been repeated using in-house staff and is now improved. The LEA has identified a maintenance backlog of some £401 per pupil, which is substantially below the national average. A three-year programme has been put in place to tackle the highest priority work, which constitutes a quarter of the total backlog of £11.6 million.

120. The LEA provides advice on all capital projects in schools and satisfactory systems are in place to monitor schools' property management. By agreement with schools, the LEA manages devolved capital funding on their behalf to maximise take-up in any one year. Most

of the management costs are met from central funding. Schools are encouraged to apply for seed challenge funding and are assisted in bidding through sound written guidance and individual advice. Evidence from the survey shows that schools are generally satisfied with the transparency of the asset management planning process and with the authority's management of school buildings.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

121. Provision for pupils with no school place is highly satisfactory. There has been good progress on the satisfactory performance at the time of the previous inspection. In particular, the LEA has addressed the recommendation in that report well and all permanently excluded pupils now receive full-time education within 16 days of being excluded. There are emerging concerns about provision for pupils at risk of exclusion.

122. Provision for permanently excluded pupils is good. Currently 31 pupils are excluded and all receive full-time tuition at the pupil learning centre. The pupil placement panel (exclusions) involves headteachers and considers all cases of permanent exclusion, and any pupil at risk of exclusion and recommends a future placement. It operates very effectively and referral procedures are very clear. With minimum delay in 2001/2002, 62 per cent of pupils were reintegrated into mainstream schools. The remaining pupils are educated full time at the pupil learning centre.

123. Aspects of the provision at the pupil learning centre are acknowledged as excellent, but there are emerging issues concerning arrangements from September 2002. For instance, part-time attendance for secondary pupils has been discontinued. At the time of the inspection, 98 pupils were being taught full time. Of these, 67 had not been permanently excluded. There are two significant concerns. Firstly, contrary to the LEA's policy, only two per cent of pupils have been reintegrated into mainstream schools since September, which contrasts sharply with the high figures in earlier years. Secondly, there is a high proportion (about 40 per cent) of statemented pupils at the pupil learning centre. In the autumn term, the operation of the pupil learning centre was closer to that of a special school than a pupil referral unit.

124. The LEA successfully provides alternative programmes. The curriculum is broad and balanced, although the LEA cannot provide the full curriculum at Key Stage 4. There is good collaboration with other agencies, including the youth offending team and good links with the local further education college. This aspect of the pupil learning centre's work is a strength of the LEA.

125. Arrangements for educating pupils at home or in hospital owing to illness are good and appropriate to their need and capability. Pupils in Key Stage 4 are taught by a subject specialist in each area. An HMI visit in October 2002 acknowledged the good support. The support for pregnant schoolgirls is also good. A designated midwife ensures a single referral route and that all girls are identified and supported.

126. The LEA's spending on education other than at school is about half the national average. Value for money is good.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for pupils with no school place:

- monitor the impact of new arrangements at the pupil learning centre and improve the reintegration rates.

Behaviour support

127. This was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, but there were three specific recommendations. There has been good progress with the recommendations relating to management and monitoring arrangements. As reported earlier, there has also been good progress in providing for excluded pupils. As a result of providing full-time education to these pupils, however, new issues have arisen in addressing the recommendation for pupils at risk of exclusion. Hence, while current provision is satisfactory there are growing pressures and the capacity for improvement is unsatisfactory.

128. A significant strength in the LEA's provision is the very good quality of the support provided to schools by outreach support from the pupil learning centre. The support is spread across both phases and the demand is increasing markedly. The number of pupils supported has risen by 50 per cent from 407 in 1998/1999 to 612 in 2001/2002. In the corresponding period the number of outreach teachers has reduced from 6.5 to five teachers. Hence, while the service continues to be very good and gives very good value for money, it is more stretched. This good support is complemented by good quality advice and supporting documentation on exclusions, behaviour, action against bullying, pastoral support programmes and substance abuse. These are well regarded by schools.

129. The number of pupils permanently excluded fell significantly from 63 in 2000/2001 to 48 in 2001/2002. However, the rate of exclusion from secondary schools is still above national averages. There are also 23 pupils who are at imminent risk of exclusion, have no school place and are taught full-time at the pupil learning centre. The LEA has good data, but there is limited sharing across schools. In discussion, schools seemed unaware of the unfavourable position nationally and the LEA has not been sufficiently challenging, particularly over exclusions from secondary schools.

130. The LEA's strategy for emotional and behavioural development and inclusion has good principles. It is proving difficult to implement with regard to behavioural issues. There are no easy solutions for an LEA with scarce resources. For instance, Bury schools do not have learning mentors and few learning support units, which are a feature of other LEAs participating in Excellence in Cities initiative. The increasing demands for in-school support and placements at the pupil learning centre, full-time provision for high numbers of permanently excluded pupils and the fact that specialist provision is increasingly difficult to find, places the system under pressure. Some of the flexible arrangements are being lost and there is no clear plan as to how these issues will be resolved.

131. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are effective generally. They are good for monitoring the quality of provision and the progress made by pupils. A weakness is that the length of time a pupil spends at the pupil learning centre before reintegration or a placement into a special school is not analysed.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- further effort should be targeted, where appropriate, to create a culture wherein permanent exclusion is seen genuinely as a last resort and schools take greater responsibility for improving pupils' behaviour.

Attendance

132. At the time of the last inspection the LEA's work to support attendance in schools was satisfactory. There has been highly satisfactory improvement since that time and provision is now good.

133. Attendance levels in the borough are high with total attendance for 2001/2002 at 94.7 per cent; well above the figure for comparable authorities. Unauthorised absence is also relatively low, although, for secondary schools, the LEA did not meet its demanding, 2001/2002 target. Local public sector agreement targets for reducing unauthorised absence are very challenging.

134. Officers make strenuous efforts to promote good attendance. There is a simple, but effective, strategy, which is well understood by schools. The LEA meets its statutory duties fully and makes robust and appropriate use of its legal powers to prosecute, although there is no written procedure for prosecution. Extensive use is made of publicity focussed on the importance of school attendance and there is good co-operation with the police on the truancy sweeps that are conducted, which are also well publicised.

135. The LEA has published well-written and helpful guidance on promoting attendance and the construction of a school attendance policy. The same document gives examples of strategies that have proved effective, drawing on experience from within the borough and elsewhere. The LEA has good data to inform its strategic planning, and discussions with schools. It makes effective use of these data to target its efforts according to need.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

136. The previous inspection did not cover this area of LEA activity. The LEA's provision for health and safety is highly satisfactory. The systems and the strategy for ensuring child protection are sound, but take-up of training is poor and this has not been adequately challenged by the LEA.

137. Strategies for vulnerable children are well rooted in wider council strategies. The LEA contributes fully to the area child protection committee. Child protection procedures are circulated to all schools and there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring children on the child protection register. At the end of March 2002, the requirement to review all cases on the register was met within the agreed timescales in 100 per cent of cases and above the average for statistical neighbours. There is good joint working between education and social services in relation to child protection and children in need. In the school survey, schools rated the LEA's support as good.

138. Each school has a designated teacher and governor for child protection and the LEA monitors training undertaken. There is a good range of multi-agency courses available, but the take-up in schools is unacceptably low. There is a high level of awareness raising, but only 13 out of 85 designated teachers have received the foundation course training identified by the LEA as a minimum requirement. Six schools also received whole school, on-site training. In 2001/2002, no governor training courses actually ran. This issue has not been identified sufficiently in reports to elected members and is not being given the high priority it warrants. Relevant plans do not set targets to improve attendance on training courses or consider the resource implications.

139. Comprehensive health and safety advice is issued to schools along with sound risk assessment documentation and guidance. Training has been delivered by the corporate centre. Statistical data have been used well to diagnose the cause of problems and to take remedial action. Security systems have been placed in schools based on risk analyses and these measures have resulted in a reduction in vandalism in schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve the provision for child protection:

- ensure that all designated teachers receive the required training.

Looked after children

140. The previous inspection did not cover this area of the LEA's activity. However, the attainment of these children in the years since the inspection has been too low and the authority has been too slow to take remedial action. It is now fulfilling its role as a corporate parent, but belatedly. Significant changes have been made in the last nine months, but attainment has not yet been raised. Support for looked after children is unsatisfactory, but the changes made mean that its capacity to improve considerably is now highly satisfactory.

141. There were 255 looked after children at the time of the inspection. This is a higher proportion of the under-18 population than found nationally. Of these, approximately one-quarter were receiving education outside the borough. The LEA has very good data and has established procedures to monitor progress for children educated within Bury. This contrasts with the paucity of information for out-of-borough placements. The exchange of information between social services and education for these children is very poor. The small numbers means that the incompatibility of the computer systems in education and social services is insufficient explanation.

142. Bury's performance indicators show that the authority is in the lowest quartile for educational outcomes for looked after children, while being one of the highest performing authorities generally. For instance, in the last two years, no pupil has gained five or more higher grades at GCSE level. The target for 2004, including an increase negotiated through local public sector agreement, is for 20 per cent of looked after children to obtain five GCSE grades at A*- C. This is a highly desirable outcome, but the target is not informed by analysis of data. The level of challenge is exemplified by the fact that in 2002 no pupil gained five or more passes at any grade.

143. The completion rates of personal education plans, at five per cent, are very poor. The authority lags well behind other authorities in this respect. The LEA has set a target of July 2004 for all looked after children to have a plan. However, this is too late and the plans should be produced as a matter of urgency.

144. Significant improvements have been made in the last nine months. It has been given a high priority by elected members and is a feature of the recent local public sector agreement. A sound corporate policy has been adopted and issued to schools. A well-resourced multi-disciplinary team is partly in place. The education department appointed key personnel by September 2002, but there have been delays in the appointment of staff by the social services department. There is agreement for the appointment of two additional teachers. The education advisory teacher has been in post for one year and her individual support and guidance and training offered are valued by the schools. Top-up tuition for looked after children is planned to start in September 2003. Laptop computers have been provided to foster carers for use by young people in their care. Each school has a designated teacher and governor, and an enhanced training programme has been devised. For children educated in Bury, there is now good liaison between education and social services.

Recommendations

In order to improve the attainment of looked after children:

- improve the exchange of data with social services to monitor more effectively the performance of pupils placed out-of-borough; and
- produce a personal education plan for each looked after child as a matter of urgency.

Measures to combat racism

145. The LEA's work on combating racism was not inspected in 1999. It is highly satisfactory. The education department has been active for some time in developing the required policies and providing guidance and training about racism to schools. Often this has been in advance of policy development at a corporate level, which has been too slow. For example, a policy, guidance and a monitoring procedure for racial harassment was developed for schools in advance of the development of policy at council level. Capacity to improve further is good.

146. Training and policy development for the last 12 months, at both corporate and department level, have concentrated around race equality, although this has often been at a slow pace. The new race equality scheme was introduced by the council six months late, following a lengthy and protracted consultation process. However, the education department has acted more speedily and developed action plans across all services. Links with the local Commission for Racial Equality and the Asian Development Association are good. The Commission for Racial Equality's local government standards have been adopted recently. Progress has been made in moving from level one to level two in one year and challenging targets to achieve higher levels have been set in the Best Value Performance Plan. All senior officers in the council and education department have recently undertaken training on the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.

147. The education department, along with the council, is committed to fulfilling the recommendations of the committee of enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

Appropriate systems for recording racist incidents are in place in all of Bury's schools, racial harassment co-ordinators are designated and appropriate training has been given. Monitoring and analysis indicates that there is a rise in reported incidents, but these are minor. Adviser visits also usefully include the monitoring of racist incidents. Further training for all newly qualified teachers, and for governors has supported the introduction of racism reporting procedures.

148. The results of a recent council-wide audit of the workforce were unavailable at the time of inspection. Targets for the recruitment of teachers and governors of minority ethnic heritage have not been set by the education department, although the council has targets for increasing representation in the workforce as a whole. The LEA recognises this as an area for development.

Section 5: Corporate issues

Introduction to corporate issues

149. The first inspection revealed strengths in the strategic management of the LEA. It selected its priorities well after full consultation and it operated in a culture of evaluation and improvement. There was no judgement on the contribution of elected members. A new chief executive was appointed 12 months prior to this inspection. Changes introduced are now being embedded into corporate planning. The drive for improvement has brought further progress as a result of the work of both members and officers. The corporate assessment, published in December 2002 by the Audit Commission, supports this judgement. There are criticisms of the council generally, but education is highlighted as a high performer.

Corporate planning

150. Education is afforded a high priority and the corporate structure ensures that this is shared across all directorates. There are satisfactory links between the community plan, the Best Value Performance Plan, the corporate plan and other major plans such as the EDP. The council has developed a twenty-year community strategy and the local strategic partnership will have a central role in overseeing delivery. There are local community plans for each of the six local townships. These incorporate the priorities in the community strategy and report on pupils' attainment, but do not feature local education strategies. This partly reflects that the deprivation factors in Bury do not trigger funding for neighbourhood renewal or other initiatives such as Excellence in Cities.

151. Performance management in the education service is good, but has been a weakness at corporate level. To address this, a comprehensive framework has recently been drawn up, but collection of data has been hindered by a weak ICT infra-structure. Corporate priorities are now being cascaded into departmental and service plans and monitoring of performance against education targets is in place. Performance against Best Value performance indicators (BVPIs) is reported to members and more widely through the Best Value Performance Plan. Bury is in the top quartile for 16 BVPIs in education and nine BVPIs improved further in 2001/2002. However, the set of BVPIs selected for particular scrutiny has not been fully updated to reflect changes in educational priorities, namely attendance, education otherwise than at school and looked after children.

Decision making and leadership of senior officers and elected members

152. There is a clear and effective process of decision making at the corporate level. The procedures are widely understood and implementation is speedy and makes effective use of the weekly meeting between the director of education and the executive member with the portfolio for education. Financial decision making is open and timely. The corporate assessment in December 2002 confirmed that financial management is a strength.

153. Elected members demonstrate a high level of commitment and are very supportive of schools. Members have given strong leadership on funding, surplus places and special educational needs. Difficult decisions are made after a rigorous and open process involving full consultation with interested partners. There is cross-party consensus on the great majority of issues. An exception has been the submission of a private finance initiative bid

for a new school. The quality of advice given to elected members is good generally and includes a suitable range of options.

154. Processes for accountability are well established. The director has clearly identified targets and priorities, which are regularly reviewed. Delegation to officers is appropriate and contributes to clear decision taking. Members have sound procedures for scrutinising policy decisions. The scrutiny committee has held the executive to account on several issues including admissions, supply teachers and support for behaviour. Improvements in the working of scrutiny have been made following a review by the council.

155. Senior officers give good leadership and this is clear in the effective school improvement strategy. They have high expectations and these are shared by elected members and schools. Relations with schools are good and there is a strong bond between the LEA and its 'family of schools', but more challenge is required in relation to levels of exclusion. The officers have given effective leadership and initiative in developing schools as self-evaluating institutions, but not as discriminating customers. The new chief executive has issued a clear directive to address this issue and it is included as one of the director's targets, but it is too early to report improvements in the schools.

Partnership

156. The LEA has formed effective partnerships that have contributed to the high standards detailed in this report. There are very good links with the local further education college and sixth form college. This is reflected in the high staying-on rate and the success of the alternative curriculum arrangement for pupils in Key Stage 4. The Bury learning partnership is well supported by the LEA. The Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership is also strong and there are good links with the local Commission for Racial Equality.

157. A children and young people's strategic partnership has recently been established with committed management and political leadership. There are high levels of collaboration with health and other agencies in responding to national priorities. In many cases, this is achieved through multi-agency teams. The education department leads for the children's disability service, although it would be desirable for health to be represented in the management. Liaison with the police is good regarding the youth offending team and truancy patrols. The LEA has participated in the northwest SEN regional partnership exercise to establish benchmarking criteria for all special educational needs support services.

158. Liaison with social services is now strong at the strategic level, but was more variable in the two years following the last inspection. This coincided with a period of turbulence in the senior management of social services involving three changes at director level and four changes at assistant director level. Collaboration on child protection issues remained good throughout this difficult period. Social services also take the lead for looked after children, but provision has been adversely affected by delays in formulating and implementing policy allied to staff changes and delays in appointments to agreed new posts. In general, schools regard support for vulnerable children to be well co-ordinated and effective. Some dissatisfaction was expressed regarding the lack of a designated person in social services to deal with an individual school's queries.

159. The LEA is seeking to improve its capacity to deliver services cost-effectively to its schools. It is actively exploring the potential of a partnership with five other LEAs and

involving a commercial organisation. Phase one of this project was completed in March 2002, and the follow-up proposal has been submitted to the Department for Education and Skills. Bury is also one of a number of Greater Manchester authorities that are seeking to develop a brokerage service. This is still at an early stage.

Support for early years

160. This area was not reported on in the last inspection. The LEA's support for early years education is good. Particular strengths are the provision of training and support for all special educational needs co-ordinators, which is extensive, well regarded, and effective in supporting children and their families. A further strength is the close working between early years' staff and literacy and numeracy advisory teachers, which enables well-planned joint support to be given to early years' settings. The recent establishment of an early excellence centre, increased staffing and continuing dissemination of good practice means there is very good capacity for further improvement.

161. Ofsted reports show attainment is high and well above average in almost all of the settings inspected and progress is very good. The few where this is not the case, are known and are in areas of disadvantage. Short-term support to train staff and provide resources are targeted to these settings through the work of early years' advisory teachers. There are good links with Sure Start, Neighbourhood Nursery initiatives and the work of the social inclusion co-ordinator. The LEA's planning is coherent with activities to support early years and programmes developed by the Early Years and Childhood Development Partnership.

162. The SEN forum, chaired by an educational psychologist, ensures that information on the specialist services provided by the council and other providers is made available. This integrates well with procedures in the LEA whereby children as young as two years old are assessed for statements of special educational need and provision is tailored to meet their needs.

163. The Nursery Education Grant has been administered appropriately by the LEA to providers and provision for all four year-olds is available. Further development to increase provision of places for three year-olds is moving forward and both the LEA and the partnership are confident that this will enable the 2004 target to be met. Information about provision is circulated widely and is provided in community languages.

164. Extensive and well regarded training on child protection, health and safety and basic food hygiene are provided by the LEA on an annual rolling programme to all maintained and non-maintained providers working with young children and their families. Information on training needs is gathered through annual audits and acted upon to match provision to need. The LEA's good practice on supporting creativity in early years has been recognised nationally following the recent well-attended conference for providers.

Appendix 1: Recommendations

This report makes a number of recommendations designed to help the further progress of the LEA.

The following are key to that progress and should be considered as priorities for action. They are:

In order to improve the attainment of looked after children:

- improve the exchange of data with social services to monitor more effectively the performance of pupils placed out-of-borough; and
- produce a personal education plan for each looked after child as a matter of urgency.

In order to improve the completion rate of all statutory assessments the LEA should:

- take effective management action and engage with other partners such as health and social services to ensure that assessments are completed within the 18 week period.

The report also makes the following recommendations:

In order to improve support for gifted and talented pupils:

- develop and circulate to all schools a gifted and talented policy that clearly identifies the categories of gifted, talented and able; and
- in consultation with schools, identify appropriate and consistent measures to identify the progress of gifted, talented and able pupils.

In order to improve choice and to ensure Best Value:

- provide guidance and training to schools on their role as purchaser.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- further effort should be targeted, where appropriate, to create a culture wherein permanent exclusion is seen genuinely as a last resort and schools take greater responsibility for improving pupils' behaviour.

In order to improve support for pupils with no school place:

- monitor the impact of new arrangements at the pupil learning centre and improve the reintegration rates.

In order to improve the provision for child protection:

- ensure that all designated teachers receive the required training.

In order to improve target setting:

- seek to renegotiate with the Department for Education and Skills the 2004 target for Key Stage 2 literacy, based on an analysis of prior attainment and an appropriate degree of challenge so that the target is realistic and achievable.

Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

SECTION 1 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	4	
2	The performance of schools	2	
3	Funding, including the co-ordination of external funding	6	
4	The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EIC	2	
5	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EIC	2	
6	The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities	2	NI
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	3	
SECTION 2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT			
8	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understanding with schools	2	NI
9	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	2	NI
10	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	1	NI
11	The effectiveness of the LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	1	
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	1	NI
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	2	NI
14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	4	
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stages 3	3	
16	Support to schools in raising standards of ethnic minority and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grants	2	
17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	5	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value	2	

19	Support to school governors Early Years	1 2	NI
20	The effectiveness of its service to support school management	4	
20a	Financial service	3	NI
20b	Human resources	3	NI
20c	Property services	4	NI
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	4	
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	3	NI
20f	Grounds maintenance	1	
20g	Catering	1	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	3	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support improvement	2	NI
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	2	NI
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	2	NI
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	2	NI
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	2	NI
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	2	NI
28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	2	NI
SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	3	
30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	4	
31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	2	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value of money	2	
SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION			

33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	3	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	4	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	
37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place	3	
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	3	
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	4	
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	3	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	5	
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	3	
SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	3	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluation corporate plans	3	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	2	
46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	2	
47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	2	
48	The quality of advice given by elected members	2	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	2	
OVERALL JUDGEMENTS			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	2	

51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	2	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	2	

* grades in () brackets indicate functions not inspected and where evidence was insufficient to make an evaluation.

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 1 to 7 point scale:

- Grade 1 – Very good
- Grade 2 – Good
- Grade 3 – Highly satisfactory
- Grade 4 – Satisfactory
- Grade 5 – Unsatisfactory
- Grade 6 – Poor, significant weaknesses
- Grade 7 – Very poor, fails to provide effective support to schools