



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

INSPECTION OF STOKE-ON-TRENT LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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**OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out under the Education Act 1997 by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission, using *The Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities**. The focus of the inspection was the effectiveness of the LEA's work in supporting school improvement.

2. The inspection was in two stages. An initial review established a factual picture of the LEA's context, the performance of its schools, its strategy and the management of services. The initial review was based on data (much of which was provided by the LEA), school inspection and audit reports, documentation and discussions with elected members, staff in the education department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. A questionnaire on school views of aspects of the LEA's work was sent to 92 schools. The response rate was 73 per cent.

3. The second stage of the inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work and included visits to a selection of schools: five secondary schools, ten primary schools, two special schools and two nursery schools. The purpose of the visits was to discover the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money.

4. This report draws on material from the initial review, from the school survey and from the school visits, together with relevant evidence drawn from other recent HMI visits to the City's schools.

* LEA Support for School Improvement: A Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities, London, OFSTED, 1997.

COMMENTARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. The City of Stoke-on-Trent has considerable problems. Its traditional industries have declined steadily for a quarter of a century and much of the remaining employment is low wage. Compared with most LEAs in the country as a whole, more of its residents experience social difficulties, more of them are unhealthy, and fewer of them have higher education qualifications.

6. The schools serve a community in which educational aspirations, evinced in a very low staying-on rate, have been limited. Many schools have major weaknesses and standards of attainment are low in each age range, although recently the rate of improvement has been generally, but not always, above the national rate. The rate of exclusions from secondary schools has been very high. School buildings are in a poor state of repair and some of them have been seriously under-occupied.

7. The City Council welcomed the responsibility for education it took on from Staffordshire in April 1997 as an opportunity to set education at the heart of a programme of regeneration and to address the problems in schools. It is carrying the responsibility with enthusiasm. The Education Committee is strongly led in its quest to raise standards. The Education Department has an effective senior management team — no small achievement given the difficulties which the LEA experienced in recruiting staff.

8. The legacy the LEA inherited was not an easy one. In the early months of the LEA's existence, it was faced with a succession of primary schools which were judged in inspections to require special measures. Supporting these schools was the LEA's immediate and inescapable priority, at a time when gaps in staffing led to the real possibility of the LEA being overwhelmed by the weight and urgency of the needs. To the LEA's great credit, that has not occurred. Its support for schools in the greatest difficulty has become a strength. Equally importantly, concentration on those schools has not been allowed to prevent development elsewhere. Most services to schools are now functioning efficiently and, although there are examples of loss of service capability due to the change of scale after local government reorganisation, these are largely offset by the capacity of the new services to concentrate on issues specific to the City.

9. A notable feature of the new LEA's work has been practical action with its partners, something which is particularly appropriate given the limitations of the LEA's resources and the extent of its needs. Liaison often goes well beyond what exists elsewhere, in scale and effectiveness, with, for example, the police, the health service, higher education and education television. Another notable feature is the willingness of the Council to seek out additional sources of funding, such as for information and communication technology and a major programme of school refurbishment.

10. Despite a dispute with the teaching unions about retirement benefits and other early difficulties, schools are generally clear about and amenable to the LEA's approach to school improvement. They show a considerable degree of satisfaction with the quality of services offered. Much has been done to plan and pursue improvement. In its drive to help schools to raise standards, the LEA has convincing strategies, showing signs of success, for:

- enabling schools with significant weaknesses to face up to them and bring about improvements in teaching, management and organisation;
- providing challenge and support to other primary and, to a lesser extent, secondary schools, and developing skills in middle and senior management in both phases;
- improving the teaching of literacy, and to a lesser extent, the teaching of numeracy in primary schools;
- improving the resourcing and the teaching of information and communication technology;
- recruiting and inducting newly-qualified teachers; and reducing surplus places in primary schools.

11. On other important issues, some improvements and further plans have been made, but more progress is needed. Among these issues are:

- advising schools on the effective use of performance data;
- supporting secondary schools in improving the teaching of literacy and numeracy;
- guidance and support on attendance, particularly in secondary schools;
- support for behaviour management in secondary schools;
- providing prompt and suitable alternative provision for pupils excluded from school;
- improving the organisation and quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs;
- improving the quality of teaching for the under-fives; and
- providing help for the administrative use of information and communication technology.

12. There is, then, much more to be done, most especially in the provision of support for secondary schools. Behind some of the weaknesses in the LEA's work lie deficiencies in the coherence and practicability of some plans, particularly the Education Development Plan. Although this has admirable intentions it needs to be more sharply focused on what is to be achieved and on how the activities are to be managed. The LEA has started this process. Planning overall needs consolidation, simplification and, in some cases, greater directness. Associated with this is a need for greater clarity in the specification and evaluation of services to schools.

13. Nevertheless, provided that the planning of the LEA's efforts is focused enough to acknowledge its limited resources of funding and energy, there are grounds for much optimism. This new LEA is facing up to the difficult challenges which it inherited with considerable vigour. The LEA still has a long way to go in raising standards and building greater self-reliance and improvement capacity in its schools, but it is taking a sensible course in moving schools in that direction and they are beginning to see the benefits of LEA support in a number of areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A *In order to increase the effectiveness of its planning, the LEA should:*

- i. simplify and consolidate planning so as to focus more directly on major priorities and to make the necessary connections between areas of activity;
- ii. revise its Education Development Plan so that action is simplified, more clearly targeted and more manageable; and
- iii. re-establish its consultation arrangements with schools and improve the clarity of its documentation.

B *In order to improve the efficiency of services to schools the LEA should:*

- i. specify service standards and performance indicators for all services and monitor their cost and effectiveness; and
- ii. review and strengthen the quality and extent of technical support that it provides for administrative uses of information and communications technology, particularly in secondary schools.

C *In order to strengthen its work in helping schools to raise standards of attainment, the LEA should:*

- i. clarify the performance data issued to schools and give further guidance where needed on its interpretation and use;
- ii. develop or secure further training to enable teachers to teach information and communications technology effectively;
- iii. take steps to improve the effectiveness of teaching in early years settings, especially where there is insufficient input from qualified teachers;
- iv. in offering advice to schools on planning, ensure that adequate attention is paid to tackling the need to raise standards directly; and
- v. tighten its procedures for evaluating the impact of advisory work on schools and for improving advisers' performance.

D *In order to improve support for attendance, the LEA should:*

- i. define its approach to promoting attendance clearly, (b) review the actual allocation of Education Welfare Service time devoted to attendance in schools, and its use, (b) increase the time available for secondary schools with particular needs, (d) set out detailed specifications for how education welfare officers will work with schools and (e) monitor the delivery of the work;
- ii. on a City-wide basis, analyse attendance patterns and the effectiveness of school and Education Welfare Service action; and
- iii. provide detailed advice on how schools can improve attendance, drawing on good practice in the City's schools and elsewhere, and ensure that school development advisers support action in schools where necessary.

E *In order to improve the City's provision for special educational needs the LEA should:*

- i. present, following consultation, a combined set of proposals for specialist provision, including for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- ii. rehearse for all staff and governors in schools the intentions and the implications of its policy on special educational needs, including the financial implications;
- iii. provide itself with the capacity to monitor and advise on the quality of school provision for special educational needs and its outcomes and (b) ensure that fruitful connections are made with mainstream school improvement activity;
- iv. clarify the roles and working practices of support services, both in relation to pupils at stage 3 and above of the Code of Practice and to advice on school-wide issues; and
- v. continue to improve the rate at which statements of special educational needs are issued and (b) ensure that annual and transition reviews of statements are undertaken rigorously and reported on time.

F *In order to improve its support for behaviour management in secondary schools and to reduce the use of exclusions, the LEA should:*

- i. undertake a detailed analysis of secondary school behaviour policies and procedures, including the use of exclusions, and, drawing on this evidence and evidence from elsewhere, produce an LEA behaviour policy and associated guidance for schools;
- ii. in the light of the analysis (a) revise its target for reducing permanent exclusions by 2002, (b) produce a costed and sequenced operational plan as a supplement to the Behaviour Support Plan, designed to step up practical, co-ordinated support for secondary schools as a matter of urgency, and (c) ensure that the issue of behaviour remains a high priority for the Achievement and the Special Needs divisions in their contacts with schools;

- iii. in revising its guidance on the assessment of special educational needs, give particular attention to the criteria for assessing emotional and behavioural difficulties and to the range of action which schools can take in relation to pupils with such difficulties at stage 2 and above of the Code of Practice; and
- iv. move ahead as rapidly as possible on its plans to provide better alternative education for those permanently excluded from school and for pupils at risk of exclusion.

SECTION 1: THE CONTEXT OF THE LEA

The City

14. The City of Stoke-on-Trent has a population of 254,000. Its economy has depended on traditional industries, notably ceramics and mining, which have declined steadily or disappeared over 25 years. Unemployment is on a par with the national average overall, but there are pockets of very high unemployment, particularly for young men. Much employment is low wage. The statistics indicate that the population is less healthy than is the case nationally. Drug misuse is at a high level.

15. On the basis of the 1997 national Index of Local Conditions, Stoke-on-Trent is the 48th most deprived district in the country. Of the adult population, 5.8 per cent have a higher education qualification, compared with 13.5 per cent nationally. The Basic Skills Agency estimates that 18 per cent of adults are functionally illiterate.

Schools and Pupils

16. Appendix I gives details. Among the salient facts are:

- of the total school population 7.6 per cent are of minority ethnic origin, with the largest groups being of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin;
- there are 121 maintained schools - 11 nursery, 88 primary, 16 secondary comprehensives (of which one is grant-maintained), one (grant-maintained) grammar school, six special schools and a Pupil Referral Unit;
- only five primary schools do not have a feeder nursery class or school and nearly 90 per cent of three year olds are currently in nursery provision, together with 100 per cent of four year olds;
- in 1997, the pupil-teacher-ratios (25.4:1 in primary and 17.6:1 in secondary) were higher than the national averages (23.4:1 and 16.7:1), with correspondingly higher percentages of classes with more than 36 or more pupils (43.7 per thousand in primary, compared with 22.9 per thousand nationally);
- in 1997, the proportion of pupils in primary schools known to be entitled to free school meals was 31.8 per cent (compared with 22.8 per cent nationally) and in secondary schools 23.5 per cent (compared with 18.2 per cent);
- in 1997 the proportions of pupils with a statement of special educational needs (2.2 per cent of primary age and 3.6 per cent of secondary age) were below the national averages (2.6 per cent and 3.9 per cent), while the proportion of pupils attending special schools was at the national average (1.1 per cent) for those of primary age and below it for those of secondary age (1.3 per cent compared with 1.6 per cent). The number of statements has increased considerably in the current year as a substantial backlog has been tackled. Meanwhile, the proportion of pupils identified by schools as on stages 1-3 of the Code of Practice is very low (at 10.55 per cent), indicating, in the Stoke-on-Trent context, under-identification;
- the proportion, though rising, of pupils staying on in full-time education post-16 (56.3 per cent in 1998) is one of the lowest in the country, with the proportion not in education, training or employment (16.1 per cent) being very high.

The Council, The LEA and The Education Department

17. Of the 60 Council members, 48 are Labour, two Conservative, four Liberal Democrat and six Independent/Alliance. The Education Committee has 28 elected members. There are sub-committees or panels covering special educational needs, school inspections, nursery education, early years (jointly with Social Services), grants, ethnic minority educational services and trade union consultation.

18. The Education Department has:

- an Achievement Division led by an Assistant Director and encompassing the music service, the information technology team, the English for speakers of other languages team, community languages and the advisory service;
- a Special Needs Division led by an Assistant Director and encompassing the
- Educational Psychology Service, the Special Educational Needs Support
- Service, behaviour support, the statementing section and the Education Welfare
- Service;
- a Support Services Division, led by an Assistant Director and with teams for premises and client services, school liaison and governor support, admissions and family services, education personnel and early years;
- a Continuing Education Division, led by an Assistant Director; and
- an education finance support unit.

Education Funding

19. The Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) formula means that the amount per pupil for Stoke-on-Trent in 1998/99 was in the lowest third of all LEAs. The Council has budgeted to spend at the level of the SSA, with other resources being provided for education from other services. The education SSA rose by 3.73 per cent between 1998/99 and 1999/2000. Despite this, the LEA was able to pass on the full estimated rate of inflation of 4.3 per cent in school budgets. Education has derived considerable benefit recently from external grants, including Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and Standards Fund.

SECTION 2: THE PERFORMANCE OF SCHOOLS

20. The performance of maintained schools in Stoke-on-Trent is summarised below. Appendix 2 gives further details.

21. ***Attainment on entry to primary schools in the city is generally below levels found nationally.*** OFSTED inspectors judged that in three-fifths of these schools many pupils entered with poor standards of attainment. This compares with three-tenths of schools nationally and just under a half of schools in LEAs similar to Stoke-on-Trent. However, the first year of the LEA's baseline tests in English and mathematics (1997-98) show that most pupils progressed during reception classes at or above the expected rate.

22. ***Attainment generally, and in the core subjects, is below and often well below national expectations at all stages of compulsory education.*** For example, in 1998:

- at level 2 at Key Stage 1, pupils' test results were below national figures in English (reading, writing and spelling) and mathematics;
- similarly, performance was below national figures in English, mathematics and science tests at level 4 at Key Stage 2;
- at level 5 at Key Stage 3 performance was well below national levels in the three core subjects, particularly so in mathematics and science;
- at Key Stage 4 the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grade G or above was below national norms and it was well below those for the percentage gaining five or more passes at grade C or above; and
- at Key Stage 4 results in vocational qualifications were well above national norms.

23. ***Levels of attainment generally rose between 1995 and 1998 in most of the core subject tests at Key Stages 1-3, but there were some exceptions.*** For example:

- at level 2 at Key Stage 1, test results improved in reading and mathematics and writing;
- at level 4 at Key Stage 2, test results improved significantly in English and mathematics but they remained static in science and fell back in mathematics in 1998;
- at level 5 at Key Stage 3 results improved in all of the core subjects until 1997 but they fell back in mathematics and science in 1998; and
- GCSE results at Key Stage 4 improved slightly in terms of the percentage of pupils achieving five or more passes at or above both grades G and C.

24 ***From a low base, the overall rate of improvement has been generally, but not exclusively, above the national rate.*** For example:

- at level two at Key Stage 1 results between 1995 and 1998 rose more rapidly than they did in the country as a whole in reading, writing and mathematics;
- at level 4 at Key Stage 2 results between 1995 and 1997 improved more rapidly than nationally in the three core subjects and this rate was maintained in science in 1998, but progress in English and mathematics fell back in 1998 relative to England as a whole;
- at Key Stage 3, Stoke-on-Trent schools narrowed the gap with schools nationally in English but the gaps in mathematics and science remained similar between 1995 and 1998; and
- the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grade C or higher has risen between 1995 and 1998, but at a lower rate than that nationally.

25. ***Inspection data confirm that attainment is largely below national norms and that many of the LEA's schools have significant weaknesses.*** For example:

- only 26 per cent of Stoke-on-Trent primary schools were judged to develop high standards of achievement, with 46 per cent of schools doing so in similar LEAs and 52 per cent of schools nationally. Seven per cent of secondary schools were rated good or very good in this respect, compared with 18 per cent in similar LEAs and 22 per cent nationally;
- with regard to the quality of education provided, the schools' climate and efficiency, inspectors judged Stoke-on-Trent schools to be behind those nationally and in similar LEAs. Fifty per cent of primary and 64 per cent of secondary schools provided a quality of education which required some or much improvement;
- currently three primary schools, a special school and a pupil referral unit require special measures to solve the problems identified by inspectors, while eight primary, two secondary and two special schools have serious weaknesses; and
- the LEA's analysis of schools' needs, shows some strengths in teaching, learning and management at both primary and secondary levels. However, it highlights, in line with OFSTED inspection evidence, significant shortfalls in the subject expertise of teachers, their expectations, the quality of their planning and their use of assessment data. It also reveals significant weaknesses in the management of many schools, including middle management and monitoring the quality of education.

Attendance and Exclusions

26. Attendance in Stoke-on-Trent primary schools in 1997 was a little below the national average and in secondary schools it is two percentage points below. A high level of authorised absence from secondary schools is a particular concern for the LEA. Attendance improved in both phases in 1998.

27. While in 1997 the rate of permanent exclusions from primary schools was average, in secondary schools it was well above average (7.5 per 1000 pupils, compared with 3.0 in similar LEAs and 4.5 nationally), with exclusions of boys accounting for most of the difference. Overall, permanent exclusions from Stoke secondary schools were the ninth highest in the country for the three years from 1995 to 1997. Meanwhile, fixed-term exclusions amounted to 643 from secondary schools in 1997/98, an average of 40 a school, with one school having 218.

SECTION 3: LEA STRATEGY

ROLE AND PRIORITIES

Stoke-on-Trent took on responsibility for education in April 1997. The transfer of responsibility was thoroughly prepared and has been handled competently, though not without difficulties, some of which were the result of difficulties in recruiting staff to the new LEA. Services have continued to work in the main efficiently, but planning needs to be consolidated.

The Planning of the Education Service

28. The Council's political and managerial approach is marked by an enthusiasm to tackle the considerable problems of Stoke-on-Trent's education service. What is sought is nothing less than a transformation in the Stoke-on-Trent culture. The approach is pragmatic; it honestly acknowledges the difficulties the City faces; it emphasises open communication, within the Council and outside it; and it places a premium on inter-service working and on the energetic pursuit of external funding. There are practical mechanisms at member and officer level to secure these processes.

29. The LEA's strategy is not set out in consolidated form. The broad aim has been to develop schools' capacities to manage their own improvement and to support this through:

- a) the delegation of funding for services so that schools can exercise discretion over their use;
- b) the promotion of school self-evaluation, development planning and target-setting;
- c) (management development programmes;
- d) national strategies on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology; and
- e) the facilitation of advice on other aspects of the curriculum.

30. At the same time the LEA has recognised the need to work intensively with schools which have major weaknesses.

31. The original model assumed minimal staffing at the centre. The balance of that model has been skewed by the large numbers of primary schools which, following OFSTED inspections, particularly in the first year of the LEA's life, have been judged to have serious weaknesses or to need special measures. This has necessarily led to a decision to invest more heavily in advisory staff than originally planned.

32. The principles on which the new LEA is basing its action for school improvement - and the priorities it is adopting — are the right ones. There are, however, weaknesses in the LEA's planning: it is not always as cogent, accessible and direct as it needs to be and in some respects it takes on too much for its inevitably limited capacity, given its size.

33. The LEA's undoubted commitment to improvement was clear to the inspection team. The new Council's strategic aims embrace raising aspirations and achievement for all. Of the Council's ten priorities, three are related to education and education has a contribution to make to others including the developing regeneration plans. The Education and Leisure services share objectives in an attempt to achieve a co-ordinated thrust. In practice, this has little discernible effect.

34. Education features strongly in the regeneration plans to which the Council is party. The strategy is clear and links well with other activities designed to support the raising of achievement. So far, the overall funding for education has amounted to £1.2 million. The bid for the latest SRB round is intended to dovetail with a pilot of the education maintenance allowances scheme and with other aspects of post-16 participation. It is also intended to link with an Education Action Zone proposal developed through ideas submitted by groups of schools.

35. Education's Strategic Development Plan, in draft at the time of the inspection, is intended to pull together the statutory plans that have been produced or are about to be produced and summarise the aims of all education service activity. The key themes are: achievement for all; empowering and involving parents; widening the scope of achievement; equal access for all within the community to high quality learning; a pleasant, secure environment that supports learning; and maximising the impact of information and communications technology to enhance learning. With its 14 objectives, the plan suffers somewhat from overlaps and repetition and needs to be reshaped in relation to the Education Development Plan, as is intended.

36. The priorities set out in the Education Development Plan are consistent with the LEA's audit of provision and they are appropriate for Stoke-on-Trent. The priorities are: high quality learning and teaching; high standards of leadership, management and governance in schools; literacy; numeracy and mathematics; inclusive learning (which covers exclusions, attendance, health promotion and special educational needs); raising attainment; support for schools causing concern; and early years education. The targets are usually set at challenging levels and include a voluntary target for increasing the staying-on rate.

37. The plan has been given three-year approval, but it is expected by the Department for Education and Employment (DEE) that changes will be required following this inspection. The plan is notable for the effort to draw together action on a wide range of fronts. The programme, however, threatens to sink under its own weight and complexity. The LEA reported concern from headteachers in relation to the draft plan about its feasibility and reduced proposed activities as a result. However, it has not gone far enough in this respect. Too many activities are specified, some of which are no more than vague aspirations. Many of them have too little direct focus on improvement, lack clearly defined success criteria and are undifferentiated in their targeting of schools. It is not clear in some cases how the activities will in practice be managed to meet clear and feasible deadlines. The LEA has begun to rationalise the plan to overcome these weaknesses.

38. Among the weaknesses is that the Education Development Plan does not do justice to work on minority ethnic achievement. Minority ethnic achievement has too low a profile in the plan, despite the relatively high expenditure on support services. This is also reflected in the Council's equal opportunities work programme, in which countering disaffection and action on disability feature much more prominently than access for minority ethnic communities. The LEA's plan on the use of the new Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant is sensible, but not sufficiently urgent.

39. Special educational needs provision is represented in the Education Development Plan. The LEA's policy on special educational needs pursues inclusion and the LEA has set a target to increase the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs who are provided for in mainstream schools to 65 per cent in 2000/01, from the present 55 per cent. A range of actions is set out in the Education Development Plan designed to promote progress towards this target. However, the LEA has insufficient information about the current provision and capacity of its schools to form a secure judgement of their ability to implement the policy.

40. The Behaviour Support Plan seeks to reduce the high level of exclusions and to support children with behavioural difficulties, potential or actual. However, as shown later, the plan does not deal clearly enough with secondary schools. Nor does work on attendance, which is not well planned generally.

41. The department's planning process connects the Education Strategic Development Plan, the Education Development Plan and other major plans with section plans. Progress on these plans and the spending they involve is checked on a half-yearly basis. The one-year operational section plans are of variable quality, differing in the clarity of action and success criteria and in the extent to which they relate to the overall objectives. The inclusion of statutory duties for which the services are responsible would improve their clarity of purpose. There is an intention to require sections to set out plans over a three year period. There also needs to be a sharper focus on what services will do to enable schools to become more discriminating users of services. The hope that they will become so is not supported by disciplines of service specification and evaluation.

42. Despite a commitment to the principle of evaluation of services, too little is carried out. The preface to the April 1998 booklet on services to schools admits that there has not been time to establish quality assurance arrangements and there is no system for gathering and collating evidence of school use of and views of services. With a couple of exceptions, the descriptions of services in the booklet fail to provide a basis for evaluation because they do not set out standards and costs.

43. The extent of the data available to councillors, as well as others, on pupil and school performance has increased markedly over the two years of the LEA's existence. The School Inspection Sub-Committee takes regular reports on the progress of schools causing concern, with the reports deriving from Education Department meetings which pool intelligence and review action for improvement. A weakness in the Council systems is that the Education Committee does not receive direct reports on education-related regeneration programmes.

Consultation

44. Schools and governors are generally satisfied with the LEA's carefully structured arrangements for consultation and are clear about its school improvement practice. That this is so is no small achievement, given a long industrial dispute that has impaired the functioning of a number of the consultative procedures. However, a settlement has now been agreed. Partly as a result of that dispute, there has been too heavy a reliance on paperwork, which has been burdensome for governors in particular. Following its settlement, consultation arrangements need to be reestablished and refined.

45. The visits to schools in the inspection confirmed the findings of the school survey, namely that, although there is no crisp and consolidated written description of LEA's approach to school improvement, the regime of training, meetings and other LEA contacts with schools has succeeded generally in communicating the strategy to them. There is, however, some unevenness in communication and understanding, notably in relation to developments in special educational needs, considered in section 5 of this report.

EDUCATION FUNDING

' *The LEA has spent at around the education SSA. It has attracted additional resources from a variety of sources into initiatives to counteract educational disadvantage, develop information and communications technology and improve the condition of buildings. The LEA's ways of allocating resources and providing budget information to schools are now broadly satisfactory. However, service specification and the evaluation of service costs and effectiveness need to be much sharper.*

46. In 1999/2000, the percentage of the Local School Budget delegated to schools is 81.2 per cent, slightly higher than the average of 79 per cent for unitary authorities. As a result of the Standard Spending Assessment Distribution, the delegated resources of £2006 per pupil in 1999/2000 is in the lowest quartile for all LEAs in England. This has been supplemented by additional resources obtained through the bidding process.

47. The priorities for education expenditure for 1999/2000 were analysed thoroughly by the Education Committee. The major priority for this financial year was to maintain the real value of the resources available for teaching in schools. These were maintained in line with estimated inflation of 4.3 per cent, despite the overall increase in education SSA being only 3.7 per cent. Expenditure in the major service areas appears to be broadly in line with other unitary authorities, except that expenditure on premature retirement costs is relatively high.

48. There is some way to go before all services have clear and precisely specified standards and indicators which provide a basis for schools to make purchasing decisions.

49 The LEA's success in drawing in additional resources for education have included:

- £1.45 million from Capital Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget;
- over £5 million in capital investment from the New Deal for Schools and supplementary credit approvals of £2 million for school re-organisations;
- £1.6 million in relation to infant class sizes;
- over £5 million from the Standards Fund for 1999/2000 including £1 million for Pathfinder status for the National Grid for Learning;
- a proposed capital investment of £60 million to improve school buildings over the next five years through a Public/Private Partnership initiative.

50. The resources obtained from the Standards Fund per pupil in 1999/2000 are in the highest quartile for unitary authorities in relation to total resources and those for the major categories of the National Grid for Learning, school improvement, class sizes, and national literacy and numeracy strategies for primary schools. They are further advanced than most LEAs in developing a Public/Private Partnership Initiative for building and energy maintenance.

51. The LEA has positively used available resources in pursuit of key priorities including, for example its investment in ICT, development of a PFI scheme for building maintenance, in the 'College in the Community' initiative and to address concerns in primary schools following OFSTED inspections. The way that these resources are being linked to the priorities are described in the later sections.

SCHOOL PLACES AND ADMISSIONS

' *The LEA inherited substantial surplus places in the primary sector and uneven popularity of secondary schools. It is reorganising primary provision where there were surplus places. In secondary provision, a more direct approach to admissions and action taken by schools to improve their popularity in the north of the City has increased the pupil numbers in the schools causing greatest concern. A few schools, however, remain vulnerable and they and LEA need to continue to attempt to match available places with demand. Special educational needs provision needs to be comprehensively re-shaped and provision for secondary pupils excluded from schools needs to be improved urgently.*

52. The figures for 1999 showed that there were 15 per cent surplus places overall in primary schools and that 17 schools had more than 25 per cent surplus places. District Audit calculated in 1997 that the LEA could, taking into account continuing falls in the primary population, remove 1800 places in the primary sector. Since April 1997, proposals have been made to remove 1338 places and further reductions are in prospect. The LEA has, therefore, tackled positively issues of surplus places in the primary sector and other proposals should strengthen the viability of some primary schools. The LEA will need to maintain this impetus and continue to review primary provision on an individual school and area basis.

53. The LEA inherited some unpopular secondary schools. Under Staffordshire, popular schools had been encouraged to expand in line with government policy and this had led to falling demand for places in a small number of secondary schools. The 1999 figures showed that two schools had more than 25 per cent surplus places. Since April 1997 the LEA has encouraged a voluntary agreement between secondary schools under which schools have chosen not to expand their numbers. Partly as a result of this agreement, but also because of rising numbers in the north of the City, there have been increases in numbers in most of the schools where there were concerns. The school visits illustrated, however, that one secondary school still faces considerable uncertainty about future numbers.

54. As in many unitary authorities, the organisation of special schools remains problematic. The inherited provision made in them and in units is unbalanced, with none for emotional and behavioural difficulties and a complex pattern of placements outside the LEA. One special school is in special measures and two have serious weaknesses. The policy on special educational needs adopted in September 1998 forms the basis for a review of provision throughout the city. Among the LEA's policy targets is to reduce such external placements by 50 per cent by 2002, to reduce the use of statements and to devolve more of the resources associated with statements to give schools more discretion over their use.

55. Managing the reviews of provision and other changes in serial fashion is not a strong approach. As the visits to schools in the inspection demonstrated there is much uncertainty and some confusion about the relationships between what are seen as different developments. A fundamental review, with wide-ranging initial consultation over the principles to be adopted, is needed.

56. The alternative provision inherited by the LEA for pupils excluded from secondary schools was wholly inadequate. Most of the pupils permanently excluded in 1997/98, including large numbers in Key Stage 3, were not readmitted to a mainstream school. The main alternative was a 24-place pupil referral unit, which was in special measures, designed for pupils at Key Stage 4 who had been excluded twice; otherwise the provision was normally home tuition, usually for no more than three hours.

57. Not only was the alternative provision itself limited but the LEA's capacity to process placements was also over-stretched for much of its first two years, leading to unacceptable delays. About a third of the pupils permanently excluded from secondary schools in 1997/98 either experienced delay of six months or more in admission to another school or alternative provision, or had no confirmed provision at the end of 1998. The system for tracking exclusions and making alternative provision is now much better because the LEA is applying staff time and energy to it. The average time between a permanent exclusion and admission to new provision is now six weeks - a substantial improvement.

58. Meanwhile, the LEA is now making better alternative provision, responding to the recommendations of a study run jointly with Staffordshire of the existing arrangements. The approach taken at Key Stage 4 has been revamped, so that 120 places are now commissioned from a range of providers (including the further education colleges, a work experience centre and a NACRO project). The new arrangements are imaginative and well-managed, with efficient monitoring of

progress and outcomes. The pupil referral unit, under new management, is being refocused on Key Stage 3 and will have an outreach function. Discussions are in progress with secondary headteachers about a collective approach to exclusions and alternatives to it. Two pilot projects have been established in secondary schools to explore good practice and a bid is being pursued through the SRB and the Standards Fund to take such developments further. The need for better provision across the age range remains urgent. The current numbers of pupils on home tuition are given as 42 due to permanent exclusion and 18 for non-school attendance. There is much to be done to meet the objective of providing by 2002, as required by the DfEE, appropriate full-time education to all pupils excluded from school for more than 15 days.

LIAISON WITH OTHER SERVICES AND AGENCIES

' *Much emphasis is put on working with partners, based on a recognition that the problems faced by Stoke-on-Trent schools need a multi-agency approach and that the LEA, given its staffing, can in any case not hope to do all the work itself. There are promising signs that liaison is producing or at least working towards some positive outcomes.*

59. As a small LEA, Stoke-on-Trent is aware of the need to maximise the impact of its relatively sparse resources. Among its strategies for achieving this is an unusual degree of co-operation with other departments of the Council and other agencies. The LEA is genuinely attempting to tackle a number of issues, especially those related to social exclusion, through a multi-agency approach. Its approach is distinctive, consistent with national policy, consistently applied and, in some areas, already fruitful. In others, notably liaison with the Social Services Department, better information systems, clearer objectives and more rigorous evaluation are needed if the Council is to get an adequate return for the time invested at senior level. The school visits showed that liaison on the ground is weakened by poor mutual understanding of the work of school staff and social workers and by inconsistent communication.

60. In the area of post-16 provision, through fora such as the Trans-16 Group, the LEA has been able, with the willing co-operation of post-16 and adult education providers, to foster a coherent and co-ordinated strategy, aimed at supporting economic regeneration, in which raising post-16 aspirations and raising school standards are perceived - as they should be - as aspects of the same problem. A particularly distinctive, and already successful, feature is the 'College in the Community': a means of making adult education provision in primary schools, focused on key priorities, such as literacy and information and communication technology, and aimed principally at parents. A key aspect is an intention to enhance parental skills as educators through accredited courses, with a defined progression route, negotiated with further and higher education institutions, that can in principle lead to a teaching qualification. The 'College in the Community' thus establishes a convincing link between adult education and school provision, and gives added coherence to a pattern of further education that evinces a high degree of co-operation and a sustained effort to match provision to a rigorous analysis of the needs.

61. The Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), the Careers Service and the Education-Business Partnership share and powerfully reinforce this coherent effort at raising aspirations. The degree to which they are aware of the priorities of the LEA, and accede to them as the right aspirations for the City, is unusual and leading to an increasing tightness of focus on the priorities set out in the Education Development Plan.

62. There are other examples of effective, co-ordinated work. Liaison with the police appears to have been particularly effective, not least in addressing problems of intrusion, vandalism and criminal behaviour in the vicinity of particular schools. Liaison with the health service has borne fruit in drugs education and the Health Promoting Schools Scheme.

63. In all these partnerships, there is goodwill and evidence of hard thinking, which the LEA is doing much to foster and co-ordinate. It may be that there is too much going on adequately to track, and it is certainly the case at present that not all partners are fully informed about what each is doing. It is also true that data-collection and information sharing are, at this stage, imperfectly developed arts in this new authority. That leads to the LEA and its partners having to address problems that are not clearly defined. It would respond to this that the imperative is to act, and that the information systems are developing. Both points are valid.

STATUTORY DUTIES

64. The LEA is taking reasonable steps to discharge its statutory duties. The exceptions are:

- headteacher appraisal is not taking place and although there is an LEA scheme for the appraisal of teachers, it is barely functioning;
- the percentage of draft statements of special educational needs issued within 18 weeks is low;
- annual reviews and transition reviews of the progress of pupils with statements are not routinely carried out and documented; and
- further action is needed to provide suitable education for secondary pupils excluded from school, especially during Key Stage 3.

SECTION 4: THE MANAGEMENT OF SERVICES

65. The Education Department is well structured to provide an acceptable range of services to its schools. The LEA is tightly staffed however and has had to make use — which it has done effectively — of some services provided by external agencies. Despite the LEA's newness and its initial difficulty in staffing the services, schools are satisfied with most of the services provided. However, despite recent improvements, a significant minority of services remain inadequately resourced or prioritised to provide a reasonable level of support to the schools.

THE ADVISORY SERVICE

The small, and only recently fully-established Advisory Service is well managed and shows increasing signs of effectiveness in schools. It is appropriately focused on raising standards and has adequate expertise in major aspects of school management and evaluation, and in the teaching of the core subjects and information and communications technology. Steps are taken to fill gaps by co-operation with other providers. The work of the Advisory Service is routinely evaluated but there is a need to strengthen procedures to measure and, where necessary, increase the impact of advisers on schools.

66. The Advisory Service is located within the Achievement Division. The service identifies the needs of schools using a variety of sources including their development plans, inspection reports and performance data, school development advisers working within an annual cycle of visits to schools and regular meetings of LEA staff to share intelligence on schools. There was strong evidence during the inspection and the school visits that the LEA has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of most, but not all, of its schools. However, the LEA does need to be better informed about its special schools and about provision for special educational needs in mainstream schools.

67. The service has only recently reached its full complement of advisers. There are 11 advisers, two advisory teachers, eight part-time consultants, a research officer and five administrative staff. Two principal advisers — primary and secondary — contribute to the management of the service. Much senior management time has been necessary to recruit advisory staff of suitable calibre. A core-funded team covers management and the subjects of English, mathematics, science and information and communications technology in all phases. Schools can buy additional services from the LEA and, by arrangement, from Shropshire and Staffordshire advisory services. The LEA also provides a service to vet the quality of courses and consultancy from external providers in order to give informed advice on their quality to schools.

68. The allocation of staff time to specific service objectives has evolved rapidly since the inception of the LEA as new priorities have emerged and as staff have been appointed. There has necessarily been a heavy emphasis on supporting schools causing concern. Plans have recently been drawn up to rationalise further the allocation of staff time to particular service objectives. The roles of school development advisers and subject advisers have been defined. Advisers' workloads

are recorded for analysis. Advisers are supervised through analysis of their reports on school visits, paired work with senior staff, and termly reviews of targets. Whilst managers recognise the need for continuing professional development for advisers, this is under-developed.

69. The school survey shows unevenness in the ratings of various aspects of the work of the Advisory Service. There is a difference between judgements made by primary and secondary schools. Primary schools were satisfied with the LEA's understanding, monitoring and supporting of schools and with its assistance in improving the teaching of most subjects, especially literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology. Whilst secondary schools were satisfied that the LEA understood them adequately, they were less convinced of the value of the LEA's monitoring and support work and were critical of support for the teaching of most subjects. Headteachers were generally impressed with recent LEA work to improve the teaching of information and communication technology but were dissatisfied with general support for curriculum planning.

70. The role of the school development adviser is developing well and there is ample evidence that most, but not all, schools are receiving an acceptable amount of guidance and challenge, in appropriate balance. However, the school visits, together with evidence drawn from past HMI visits to underperforming schools, suggest that there has, at times, been a lack of monitoring, challenge and willingness to tackle difficult problems. In this event, in the recent past, senior staff of the LEA have intervened to improve guidance to the schools but more needs to be done to evaluate and develop the performance of advisers — in terms of their impact on schools - so that a consistently useful service is provided.

71. The LEA is promoting school self-evaluation through training and discussions with schools, although practice is as yet at an early stage.

The Service for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

72. In accordance with the terms of its previous Section 11 funding, the main function of the service has been classroom support to pupils. Schools are satisfied with this provision. Visits to schools in receipt of the service showed, in the main, adequate and effective support, although in one instance both service and school staff needed more training to meet the needs of the pupils.

OTHER SERVICES TO PROMOTE ACCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

' *The Special Needs Division encompasses education welfare, special educational needs assessment and support, and behaviour support. The division has a development plan with a set of targets and a work plan covering a range of objectives, with the main emphasis being on special educational needs. The plans of individual teams are of varying quality; while targets are usually set, planning to meet them sometimes lacks detail. Developments are being pursued across the constituent services to establish better quality assurance and evaluation. There are already some measures in place.*

The Education Welfare Service

73. About 80 per cent of the time of the Education Welfare Service is spent on attendance. The service regards itself as overloaded, rather marginal within the LEA's operations and responding in a reactive way rather than on a basis of policy. The service is pursuing certification for its officers to improve their standing, although most have higher education qualifications in other fields. Service planning, specification, communication and evaluation are rudimentary. There are, for example, no targets for outcomes in the service plan; service agreements lack specificity; communication systems and the use of information technology are basic; the recording of service activities began in October 1998 and no analysis is yet available.

Services on Special Educational Needs

74. The Special Needs Division is giving positive overall direction on special educational needs developments. The division's development plan indicates that there was and is a good deal to do to establish management systems. Reasonable progress has been logged against the objectives given. Realignments in the work of the constituent services are intended, but the basis of new practice, including the relationships between the services, is not yet firmly established.

75. The Statutory Assessment Section has needed to deal with a backlog of assessments left on handover and mainly for this reason the proportion of pupils with statements has risen steeply. Procedures to support initial statutory assessment are now good. However, although the percentage of statements issued within the recommended timescale improved from 10.8 per cent in 1997/98, it remained low, at 24 per cent (excluding permissible exceptions), in 1998/99, in part because of continuing difficulties with the computer system and variable performance in the provision of advice by health and social services and by the LEA's own services. New statements are well written and specific. However, annual reviews are not yet carried out routinely and the LEA records that only 65 per cent of 14 year olds in 1998/99 had a documented transition plan. This is, of course, unacceptable.

76. The aims of the Special Educational Needs Support Service (SENS) are appropriate and are followed through in the service development plan and work plan. Service agreements with schools are carefully spelled out, with each tailored to specific requirements and circumstances, and records are maintained. The basic allocation of time to schools has been reduced by 15 per cent against the previous year. The service is looking to shift the balance of its work towards whole school advice and monitoring and to target more attention on schools with particular needs, rather than provide an undifferentiated entitlement. Pursuing this realignment, the service has developed an approach to the monitoring of and advice on statemented provision in primary schools (including help for primary schools with individual education plans and attendance at annual reviews) with a view to extending this to secondary schools.

77. Service development planning for the Educational Psychology Service has been marked by a preoccupation with management principles and does not relate well to the division's targets. Again, the intention is to shift the balance of the

service's work further towards school-wide intervention, but the nature of such work is not clearly defined and the implications for the handling of individual casework are not specified. The service has fewer psychologists per pupil than similar LEAs, but it also devotes less of its time to casework in schools than is common. The time allocated to school- and LEA-initiated work 'on behalf of pupils' leaves a generous allocation for service and professional development. A specified minimum allocation of time is made to schools on the basis of a service agreement, subject to negotiation with individual schools, and its use is carefully recorded.

Services on Behaviour and Exclusions

78. Responsibility for action on behaviour and exclusions is dispersed between the Support Services and the Special Needs divisions, and across the services within the Special Needs Division.

79. The LEA is understandably keen to reduce the high level of exclusions from secondary schools and has taken some steps which should help to do so. Officers in the Support Services Division have worked with schools effectively to tighten up exclusion procedures. While the level of exclusions continued to rise in 1998/99, they believe this reflects the fact that schools are following procedures more closely than in the past. Schools are being encouraged to work through the Code of Practice on the assessment of special educational needs in relation to pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties; the rate of referral of such pupils has been low. The issue of exclusions and the need for collective action on it have been debated with schools, although the debate has been handicapped to a degree by the industrial dispute, and the issues are central in the Behaviour Support Plan. As described in Section 3, the LEA is in the process of reshaping its alternative provision and is supporting new arrangements in two secondary schools to offer in-school alternatives.

80. There are some successes here, but not enough. The LEA has to date focused its support for behaviour management, including training, in primary schools. A Standards Fund-supported project team has worked with ten primary schools on behaviour review and policy and will be extended for a further year, while a new project team will provide intensive support to children with emotional and behavioural difficulties in primary schools. However, the LEA has not had the organisation and capacity to support secondary schools, where the problems of behaviour and exclusions are concentrated. A lack of clarity about the coverage given to behaviour issues across the services has compounded the difficulty. As a result, the problems in some secondary schools have not been tackled directly enough and not enough has been done to help them to improve behaviour management.

81. The Behaviour Support Plan is not itself a full account of what needs to be done. It sets intentions to improve planning and proposes some sensible steps, but it does not engage in detail with planning issues, such as those involving special educational needs, and with wider work with secondary schools. There is an intention to establish an LEA behaviour policy - which might have been expected to be in place by now. The objective 'to help schools develop effective policies and practices by which to promote positive behaviour' is a vital one, but it is not fixed by reference to any audit or expectation. The target agreed with the DfEE to cut permanent exclusions to 85 a year is itself modest - about what it was in 1996/97. The continuing high level of exclusions, together with the evidence from visits to

secondary schools in this inspection given in Section 5, underline the need for concerted action to be pursued urgently.

MANAGEMENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Financial Support Services

82. The Finance Support Unit provides the link with the services of the Finance Department. Schools are offered a service agreement for financial support services which they can purchase at three different levels. All schools buy back the service, the majority at the middle level.

83. Initially, the quality of financial information provided to schools was poor. However, following action taken by the LEA, schools now feel rightly that the quality of financial information has improved substantially over the last six months. The problems prior to that, have, however, left schools with residual doubts and the improvement in information will need to be sustained to strengthen their confidence in the total reliability of information.

Personnel Services

84. Personnel services are provided to schools through the Support Services Division of the education department. The services link with support to headteachers and governors provided by the Achievement Division. Around 20 per cent of the cost of the personnel services was delegated to schools in 1998/99. All schools buy back the service. For 1999/2000, more of the costs of the service have been delegated to schools. In the survey, schools felt that the personnel services provided by the LEA were good. The school visits confirmed that schools overall valued the quality of advice provided on personnel issues such as competency procedures and contracts for non-teaching staff.

Premises Services

85. The LEA inherited a large number of schools that require substantial investment to their building fabric. School visits showed that headteachers were understandably concerned about a range of problems affecting their schools. There is a maintenance arrangement with the Council's direct labour organisation, City Works. The performance of City Works in carrying out day-to-day repairs to the satisfaction of schools was reportedly variable.

86. Over the last three years, around £4.3 million has been gained in capital grants for improvement schemes along with funding for a variety of smaller schemes. Further investment in improved buildings is taking place as part of primary reorganisation schemes. The level of investment that it has been possible to obtain through conventional capital allocation has not been sufficient to eliminate the backlog in investment in building repair. As a result, the Council is currently taking forward a major Public/Private Partnership initiative which will incorporate building maintenance and energy management. If successful, it will result in an investment of at least £60 million in the repair and maintenance of all the LEA's schools within the first five years of the scheme.

SECTION 5: SUPPORT FOR IMPROVEMENT IN STANDARDS, QUALITY AND MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

- ' *There was clear evidence of improvement in the primary schools visited, more so in those where the need to improve was greatest. The LEA had made a significant contribution to these improvements although there were signs that there had been too little rigour in identifying development needs in two schools. Support for special education was variable: its strengths included help with school management and the teaching of literacy but there were weaknesses in specialist assistance to develop the curriculum and the overall quality of teaching and learning. Secondary schools showed improvements in parts: support provided or arranged by the LEA was usually effective within the core subjects but was patchy and sometimes weak in other subjects.*

SUPPORT FOR THE USE OF PERFORMANCE DATA AND TARGET-SETTING

- ' *The LEA inherited no extensive tradition in the use of performance data in its schools. Developments have been useful for target-setting and, more generally, for those schools already active in data analysis, but more needs to be done to ensure widespread use of data to help to raise the performance of pupils.*

87. Although support for schools in the use of performance data has improved considerably, the effectiveness of it is at this stage variable. The support was judged to be less than effective in both the special schools visited, in two of the five secondary schools and four of the ten primary schools. The support has generally been most helpful where the school itself already has a sophisticated understanding of the use of data, although the most effective support of all was provided to a school whose use of data was identified as a key issue in an inspection.

88. The LEA distributes copious data to schools in the form of packs for each key stage which analyse performance in detail. The volume of the data represents a difficulty for the less expert schools, who need a commentary and, in some cases, further guidance on the use of data. The utility of the information is, moreover, limited, since it is confined to cohort, not individual, data with benchmarking against national and local figures.

89. Nevertheless, the provision of data is certainly sufficient to inform target-setting, and the LEA staff involved are provided with clear guidance on its use for this purpose. Performance data are used to extrapolate anticipated future attainment, and any gap between what can be predicted and what is desired is the subject of a discussion focused on the changes in provision that need to be made if performance is to rise above the level of prediction. The school visits suggested that this discussion was usually rigorous, challenging and helpful.

SUPPORT FOR LITERACY

- ' *The LEA's support for literacy has been impressive in its breadth, planning and targeting to need. Much effective practice was seen during the visits to primary schools. Planned work needs to be taken forward in secondary schools.*

90. The priority accorded by the LEA to literacy is appropriate in the light of the performance data and inspection evidence. The management of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) is in the hands of the adviser for English. It is steered by a group, headed by the Director, which draws together a broad range of interest and expertise, both across the LEA and from outside. The co-ordinator of the existing SRB-funded key skills project, which has a large literacy element, is included in this group. The group also oversees a number of initiatives designed to promote parental support of children's literacy, including home-school partnerships, Bookstart, family literacy initiatives provided through 'College in the Community' and parents in school. The 'College in the Community' has a half-time co-ordinator dedicated to it. The rationale for this is that it is a strategy for providing a qualifying route for adults as educators, initially as parents, subsequently perhaps in a more formal sense. School development advisers are involved in the setting of literacy targets.

91. The scope of planning for literacy is wide. It includes the provision of training to support the literacy hour, with differentiated support for early years, pupils learning English as a second language and those with special educational needs. Support is planned for secondary teachers other than English specialists in teaching the literacy skills applicable to their subject areas. Particular emphasis is also given to improving the quality and relevance of literacy provision for boys. An audit of curricular needs in the subject has been conducted. The use of English in science examinations at Key Stage 4 is one issue to be pursued.

92. The school survey shows that primary schools are very satisfied with the support they receive from the LEA in the teaching of literacy; however, secondary schools are generally dissatisfied. The evidence of the visits undertaken for this inspection partly bore out these judgements. Support for literacy was effective in stimulating improvement in three of the five secondary schools visited but it had been insufficient in the other two and ineffective in one of these. On the other hand, it was both sufficient and effective in all the primary and special schools visited and in five out of nine primary schools and in both the special schools, the support provided was very effective.

93. Significantly, some of the best support was provided where it was most needed. For example, in one primary school in which weaknesses in literacy were impairing progress across the curriculum the LEA had made a critical contribution to a rise in standards. Pupils had gained confidence through whole-class teaching and were working competently at word and sentence level in small groups grouped by ability. This contrasted sharply with the earlier position. Improvement had largely been achieved through intensive support for the literacy co-ordinator, leading to a complete review of resources and methodology. In achieving this transformation the LEA's literacy adviser, the NLS consultant and the school development adviser had worked effectively in partnership. This was not the only example of its kind; others involved the contribution of the early years adviser.

94. Both the general training provided by the NLS staff and the particular support given are regarded by schools as having been highly effective. The quality of the teaching seen confirmed this view. Much good teaching was seen, including a remarkably effective lesson in which children with profound and multiple learning

difficulties were highly stimulated by a superbly planned use of books. They enjoyed, anticipated and responded to a familiar story very well told.

SUPPORT FOR NUMERACY

' *Not surprisingly, support for numeracy is less far advanced than that for literacy, though it is equally a major priority for Stoke-on-Trent. Evidence of effectiveness was clear in special and primary schools, but less so in secondary schools.*

95. The target of 78 per cent of pupils reaching level 4 by 2002 is demanding. The LEA has appointed four consultants to deliver the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS), managed by the mathematics adviser. The conferences for both the schools receiving intensive support and for the others have been planned, as has the training for leading teachers. An audit of provision across the LEA has been undertaken, and school development advisers have been involved in target-setting.

96. The LEA proposes to integrate its existing developmental work into the NNS, and to establish links between national projects and secondary mathematics departments as a way of raising standards; in addition, all such departments are intended to become familiar with the NNS. Among the LEA's particular emphases are a stress on improving numeracy in families, through the work of the 'College in the Community'.

97. The judgements made as a result of the school visits mirror the views of schools in the survey, in that the LEA's contribution was effective in all the primary and special schools where a judgement was made, but in only one of four secondary schools. In view of the national position, it is not surprising that support for numeracy should be less far advanced than that for literacy.

98. LEA support leading to the NNS has been focused on subject co-ordinators, particularly in schools where weaknesses have been identified. That support has included designated 15-day courses, audits of resources, advice on schemes of work and advisory visits (though these have been relatively few, owing to the very recent appointment of a specialist adviser). Evidence of improvement in attainment is not yet strong, but elements of the NNS, such as an increased focus on mental mathematics are being put in place.

99. The support provided for secondary schools has been very limited, even where there was evidence of considerable need. There was evidence in the inspection of poor standards in Key Stage 3 lessons, where less able pupils had little grasp of number bands or place value and were unduly dependent on calculators for simple arithmetic. In one school, standards appeared to be falling, yet LEA support had been confined to funding for Year 6 pupils to use over the summer. The Cognitive Acceleration in Mathematics Education project has been promoted by the LEA; some effective teaching associated with this initiative was observed.

SUPPORT FOR INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

' *The LEA has invested substantially in information and communication technology (ICT) developments. This is beginning to have an impact on the curricular use of ICT in a variety of subjects. This progress needs to be maintained through investment in training, and the dissemination of good practice in the curricular use of ICT. There is also a need to tackle equipment and support issues for administrative ICT, particularly in secondary schools.*

100. As part of its quest to attract modern industries to the City, the Council has a policy to develop ICT skills and use among the population. The Education Department has been heavily involved with this work. An early analysis of school needs showed that the provision of hardware and software and the skills of teaching were patchy and that major investment was needed.

101. Inspection evidence echoes the LEA's evidence of need. Primary pupils make slower progress in the use of ICT than those in similar LEAs and in the country as a whole. Progress in secondary schools is nearer the national rate, although the incidence of good progress is much less frequent.

102. A development plan for ICT in schools was produced in November 1998. Substantial investments are taking place through Capital Challenge, SRB, the National Grid for Learning and resources invested by the City Council: resourcing in Stoke-on-Trent schools is now around or slightly better than the national average. The LEA's plans will substantially increase equipment levels over the next few years. Schools value the leadership and support provided by the LEA in the development of curricular ICT: for example, an innovative partnership with Channel 4 education television is making high quality resources available. However, schools are disappointed about delays in setting up the local intranet now planned to be working in Autumn 1999.

103. School visits illustrated variety in the level of ICT use in different schools. In the four primary schools where ICT was studied, resourcing had been improved considerably, including networked multi-media computers, specialised suites and impending access to the intranet. By purchasing the full LEA support package schools are able to secure good comprehensive information, advice and technical support. The LEA's assistance to schools in their production of ICT development plans had helped to spread the use of computers throughout the schools and improved somewhat the capacity of most teachers to teach ICT. Time is now needed for this to show in an improvement in pupils' attainment. The LEA's and its schools will need to take steps to avoid the problem, seen in some subjects of the curriculum, in which coverage of those subjects was hindered, rather than helped, by ICT as a result of inexperienced use of computers.

104. Resourcing in the ICT curriculum has also been improved considerably with LEA support in the three secondary schools visited. In one example, formerly good teaching had been recently augmented by access to a well-equipped open learning centre, participation in the Channel 4 partnership project and links to European schools. Overall, this represented very good LEA support for a school with staff capable of making productive use of it.

105. Support and progress in relation to the administrative use of ICT have been patchy. Useful developments included the installation of updated software for budget management in all primary schools during the spring of 1999. Secondary schools are less positive than primary schools about the support provided to administrative ICT. Some schools were having serious problems with equipment leased through the LEA and experiencing considerable frustration with delays in sorting them out. As a result, these schools were reconsidering whether to purchase support contracts for administrative ICT from the LEA.

SUPPORT FOR TEACHING

' *The LEA is doing much to focus on the necessary improvement of teaching in Stoke-on-Trent schools. There are promising signs of improvement in the schools visited.*

106. Inspections have shown that the quality of teaching is not as good in Stoke-on-Trent as it is in similar LEAs and in the country as a whole, with much of it being sound but unremarkable and a significant proportion being poor. Deficiencies are particularly marked in primary schools in subject command, teachers' expectations, planning, the pace of lessons and pupils' capacity to work independently. Secondary school teaching is closer to, but still below, national norms.

107. The Advisory Service understands clearly the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of teaching within the city. Advisers have analysed inspection evidence and performance data, visited schools, observed lessons and made specific reviews, for example, of early years provision. This understanding has clearly influenced the LEA's well-focused range of programmes to help schools to improve their teaching.

108. The LEA has also developed a coherent programme for the induction of newly-qualified teachers. The programme includes a session in which development needs are collectively identified, meetings during the year which are oriented towards the identified needs, a clear link to longer-term professional development, mentor training and assessment visits carried out by advisers. The programme has anticipated new national requirements and is well co-ordinated.

109. There was evidence that teaching had significantly improved in seven of the ten primary schools visited and that it had remained sound in the other three. Partly through the visits of school development advisers and partly through the considerable influence of the NLS, improvements in primary schools were evident in better short and medium-term planning, more clearly defined learning objectives, a better match between lesson activities and their intended outcomes, and the more purposeful use of assessment whilst teaching.

110. Widespread improvements were more difficult to discern in the special and secondary schools although there were examples of specific developments in each. Improvements in secondary schools tended to be discretely focused, sometimes brought about by the intervention of an adviser within a subject department. New teaching programmes in mathematics and science were influential, in some cases, showing impressive gains in teaching effectiveness. Attendance at middle management courses has helped some heads of departments to be more effective in evaluating teaching and helping colleagues to improve.

111. The LEA intends to implement the new national framework for teacher appraisal. There was scant evidence in the school visits that appraisal is currently conducted routinely or that its results influence professional development programmes significantly.

SUPPORT FOR ATTENDANCE

' *Stoke-on-Trent schools generally take productive action to promote good attendance and rates have been improving. However, the LEA does not have much information about attendance, has no policy on its approach, and provides little documented guidance to schools. Although the work of individual education welfare officers is well received in most schools, the value of it is undermined by poor systems. The promotion of good attendance needs more time and better management, particularly in relation to secondary schools.*

112. In 1997, attendance in primary schools was broadly in line with similar LEAs and the national figures. Attendance in secondary schools (88.9 per cent) was near the average for similar LEAs (90.0 per cent) but below the average for the country (90.9 per cent). Attendance continued to improve in both phases in 1998. In inspections in 1996/97, the quality of school procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance was judged to be in line with the national picture.

113. The Education Committee has debated school attendance levels and in particular the effect of the traditional potters' holiday. Parentally-condoned absence is known to be a problem and efforts are being made to highlight across the city the virtue of full school attendance. However, there is no LEA policy on its approach to school attendance and no substantial guidance to schools. No detailed City-wide study of school attendance patterns (such as the impact of extended holidays in term-time) has been made and no evaluation of the effectiveness of interventions has been carried out.

114. The time of the Education Welfare Service is allocated to schools by a formula, but pressure on the allocation has led to a decision to create a pool of time for schools whose regular needs are modest and to enable more attention to be given to schools with particular problems. The largest basic allocation is 10 hours per week to three secondary schools. The allocation is low in relation to the size of the service.

115. The school survey indicates that support on attendance is regarded as satisfactory by primary schools and unsatisfactory by secondary schools.

116. Attendance in the primary schools visited was in most cases improving. The schools' systems were at least sound. The schools in which attendance was a focus for the visits had received at least satisfactory support from their education welfare officers, who responded to school requests and undertook referrals efficiently. In one case there had been productive experiments with targeting pupils and group work; in another there has been success with difficult families after close monitoring of patterns of attendance. However, the lack of written guidance and training means that the dissemination and development of good practice is not systematic and schools are not getting sufficiently detailed advice on efficient practice.

117. The problem is more pronounced in secondary schools. All the secondary schools visited were making considerable and continuing efforts to promote good attendance and had seen improvement in attendance rates, although in two cases these remained unsatisfactory. The schools invest a good deal of time in the work, in some cases well beyond what is common in other secondary schools. New procedures had been put in place or existing ones revised, with benefits shown from computerisation, from close monitoring and careful follow-up (including first-day contact), and from the use of incentives. There is some good practice in these schools.

118. However, the overall contribution of the LEA to their efforts was modest. Individual education welfare officers are usually warmly regarded but the extent and quality of the service they provide are severely handicapped. First, the time they have for each school is invariably inadequate, the rationale for the allocation of additional time is by no means clear and the deployment of staff reportedly does not allow for service to be maintained when, for example, staff are on extended sick leave or involved in time-consuming case conferences or court proceedings. Second, there is a lack of clear specification of how education welfare officers can operate, which produces undesirable variation in practice from school to school, including the size of caseloads, the triggers for referrals and the extent of home visits. Third, the lack of city-wide analysis of attendance patterns, documented guidance and training means, among other things, that dissemination of good practice is haphazard and that there is no basis for evaluating the effectiveness of school programmes and LEA interventions. There is also little or no connection apparent with the work of the Achievement Division.

SUPPORT FOR BEHAVIOUR

' *While inspection evidence suggests that behaviour in Stoke-on-Trent schools and the procedures the schools use to establish good behaviour are unexceptional, the incidence of permanent and fixed-term exclusions, traditionally high, has been rising steeply in secondary schools - and notably so in a few. The LEA has been slow to work on this issue and its action in relation to secondary schools remains inadequate.*

119. Inspections of Stoke-on-Trent primary and secondary schools have judged pupils' behaviour and schools' procedures to be broadly in line with schools in similar LEAs and the country. However, the rate of permanent exclusions, which is average from primary schools, is very high in secondary schools, as is the rate of fixed-term exclusions.

120. The school survey indicates that support on behaviour and the use of exclusions is regarded by primary schools as satisfactory. Secondary schools view support on behaviour as poor, but see the help given on appropriate practice in the use of exclusions as satisfactory.

121. Behaviour was the focus of visits to all the secondary schools. The visits gave evidence that behaviour was good overall in all the schools, showing improvement from the schools' OFSTED inspections. The schools had revised policies and procedures and there were examples of rigorous analysis of behaviour patterns and some imaginative approaches to behaviour management. However the use of exclusions remains unusually high, and unusually variable, overall.

122. The fact that the LEA has highlighted the level of exclusions, including through the comments of link advisers, is acknowledged in the schools visited. Staff in the schools share a commitment to doing something about it and recognise that significant reduction in exclusions depends fundamentally on determined, collective action by the schools themselves. The visits suggest that, as a start, the schools have responded to the LEA's expectation that they will account for exclusions fully and accurately. However, the schools are right to say that they are not getting the practical help they need to improve their management of what can be very challenging behaviour by a very small minority of pupils.

123. The LEA's attention and support in individual schools has been, at best, patchy, reflecting weaknesses in its strategy, organisation and capacity. There is evidence of action by education officers, education welfare officers and education psychologists to support the continuation in school of pupils at risk of exclusion. However the action taken, though sometimes effective, is ad hoc. It depends too much on individual staff in schools making a fuss; it is not consistent, either in the challenge or the support provided, from school to school; schools receive rather more attention to prevent exclusion than help in taking on pupils excluded from elsewhere; the potential and actual contributions of different services are not well integrated; links with social workers are inconsistent; in-school alternatives to permanent exclusion or repeated fixed-term exclusions tend to be improvised and are not well-defined, readily available and solidly resourced.

124. The approach has not been underpinned by good information and has not been effectively co-ordinated. The LEA's concern is clear but its action is currently inadequate. A key weakness is the lack of a detailed analysis of exclusion patterns in the context of school practice on behaviour management. Despite their appreciation of the problem, the schools visited are generally in the dark about what lies behind the broad city-wide figures and the LEA is not in a position to analyse and evaluate their practice. The schools do not have agreed criteria on behaviour policy and procedures, supported by guidance and training, against which to judge and modify their practice. One result is that the schools are perhaps more suspicious of whether all schools are 'playing the game' than they need to be. There is also uncertainty about the use of the Code of Practice for the assessment of special educational needs in relation to pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, with some staff believing that the LEA's approach on assessment does not in fact encourage such referrals. The shortage of specialist provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties is also a widespread concern.

SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

' *Support for schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses has been a major preoccupation of the LEA since inception given the scale of the problems which have emerged. So far support has been particularly effective in those schools needing to improve the most, but variable elsewhere.*

125. A large proportion of Stoke-on-Trent's primary schools were inspected in the first eighteen months of the LEA's existence and a large number were found to be failing to provide an adequate education. Eight schools have been placed in special measures and a further nine found to have serious weaknesses.

126. Initially, faced with the considerable volume of support required and having few advisers for inspectors in post, the LEA was in some danger of being overwhelmed. That is no longer the case. The LEA meets its statutory obligations, has a clear strategy and is providing generally effective support to schools in difficulties.

127. A management group of officers, advisers, the head of education personnel and a representative of higher education keeps the progress of these schools under review and makes detailed reports to the School Inspection and Review Sub-committee. So far, two schools have been brought out of special measures, and the majority of those remaining are making satisfactory progress. The exception has been the pupil referral unit where improvement has been too slow, although recent changes in role and personnel promise acceleration.

128. The LEA has set out a framework for the identification of schools causing concern, with clearly defined criteria and appropriate levels of intervention. The respective roles of the school, the LEA and the governors are clearly defined, as is the nature of the support to be given. That support is consistent with the LEA's general approach to improving school management: the objective is not to run the school, but to help it to run itself better. The approach is being implemented increasingly well. In particular, the attachment of advisory headteachers has enhanced the effectiveness of the support given. The written advice seen by the inspection team was generally incisive and expert, and the evidence of OFSTED monitoring suggests that, increasingly, the right actions are being taken.

129. Four primary schools with serious weaknesses were visited in this inspection, including one school which had previously been in special measures. The support for the latter school had been very effective. Although expensive, it had succeeded in reestablishing the capability of the school to manage itself effectively. In the other three schools, the support was of more mixed quality, though in all three it had had some effect, despite problems in school management. A further limiting factor was inconsistent performance of the school development adviser role, which was, at least initially, in two schools lacking in rigour. Good support from the NLS staff, the HEADLAMP consultant, the early years adviser and the English adviser, however, reinforced the impact of the school development adviser, eventually if not at first.

SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

' *Inspection evidence indicates that provision for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools and in special schools has been worse than the national picture. In other respects, too, Stoke-on-Trent has inherited a considerable task on special educational needs. Almost all of the issues which need to be tackled have been identified and incorporated into a plan with relevant targets. However, schools are not well enough informed about the intended developments and the implications of them. While individual services make sound contributions, there are important gaps in the LEA's knowledge of overall school provision and in its capacity to advise on improvements - gaps which are particularly notable in relation to secondary schools.*

130. OFSTED inspections show that the quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools is less good than in schools nationally at each key stage and the LEA's analysis shows that a significant number of schools have special educational needs as a key issue in their inspection reports. Meanwhile, one of the LEA's special schools is in special measures and two have been judged to have serious weaknesses. There is, therefore, justified concern about the quality of provision in the mainstream and in special schools. As yet there is little evidence that the LEA has been able to improve it significantly, although there have been some successes and more steps are being taken.

131. As indicated in Section 1, the special educational needs profile for Stoke is untypical. Information available to the LEA on the provision made in schools was limited on handover, and only slow headway has been made on developing a profile of it. There has been no system to monitor provision for pupils at stages 1-3 of the Code of Practice and no basis for an analysis of school expenditure, with the funding attributable to special educational needs within school budgets being specified for the first time in 1999/2000.

132. The LEA has consulted on a proposal to devolve funding for mainstream statements from April 1999. The proposal, which has been welcomed by schools, is inspired by a number of factors: the increase in the number of statements issued since the LEA came into being; doubts about the efficacy of what is essentially 'non-specialist' additional provision; and a concern to increase the funding for non-statemented needs. A pilot scheme in a few schools to devolve funding has had some success.

133. This move is associated with an attempt to establish the characteristics of quality in mainstream school provision for special educational needs. Following discussion with schools, a proforma to enable schools to evaluate their provision will produce a profile for the City and meanwhile the Educational Psychology Service is carrying out a study of provision made at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice in a sample of schools. In addition, the SENSS is now helping all schools in the preparation of individual education plans and undertakes a twice-yearly review of progress by pupils with statements, and officers attend a small proportion of annual reviews.

134. A useful training strategy on special educational needs has been devised recently which has the merit of connecting with the Education Development Plan activities, bringing together the range of training intended and drawing special educational needs staff in schools into the NLS.

135. The school survey shows that primary schools are broadly satisfied with the assessment of special educational needs, the provision and review of statements and how the LEA meets the needs of pupils. Secondary schools are, however, less than satisfied on all counts.

136. In the six primary schools visited where special educational needs was the focus of attention, the support given was generally at least satisfactory. Schools where special educational needs was a key issue in inspection reports have been given good help in setting and pursuing action plans. Improvements in school provision have been made as a result of the input made by the SENSS on individual education plans, the training of learning support assistants, through the information and guidance provided

in governor and co-ordinator forums, and through advice on provision for individual pupils.

137. The main common weaknesses in support were in the completion of assessments for statements, which, despite recent improvements, were still too often subject to unacceptable delays; in the completion of annual reviews of statements, some of which are well behind; and in the lack of clear advice on the identification of pupils at the early stages of the Code of Practice. The rationale for the actual allocation of service time to schools is not always clear, with the time given being in a few cases greater than necessary, and there is also overlap at times between the work of the SENSS and education psychologists, notably on the assessment of and advice on pupils at stage 3 of the Code of Practice - a problem which is being highlighted by the shift in both services towards whole-school intervention.

138. In the secondary schools visited, support for improvement in the provision for special educational needs was unsatisfactory overall, although some good help has been provided. Again, although the processing of statements is faster than it was, there are still long and frustrating delays. Most schools are now on top of annual and transition reviews, although the rigour of these, as well as their timing, needs to be improved and the input from LEA services is erratic. Advice from LEA services on provision for individual pupils at stage 3 of the Code of Practice, and sometimes for pupils with statements, is usually helpful and the expertise is welcomed by the schools, although complaints about the shortage of time available, particularly from education psychologists, were common and invariably appeared justified. There is also justified concern that attention to behaviour of the kind that constitutes special need tends to fall between the services.

139. The key problem for LEA support, however, is in advising schools on the organisation and quality of their overall arrangements for meeting special educational needs, including the connections with wider curriculum developments. Gaps in the LEA's knowledge of secondary schools make this hard to achieve. The LEA does not know enough about the overall picture in the schools, including the use of funding and staff, to help them to move on more efficiently. Asking schools to provide a profile of their provision will not be an adequate basis for LEA action. The school approach taken to evaluation of special needs provision is disconnected from the general approach to self-evaluation. Only in the case of work on literacy was there substantial evidence of connections between special needs developments and the activities of the Achievement Division.

140. This is especially important in the light of the emphasis on inclusion in mainstream schools and the associated devolution of the resources associated with statements. Correspondingly, there is an information gap in the schools - primary, secondary and special - about the implementation of the LEA's policy on special educational needs. While school co-ordinators were generally, but not always, well informed and some governors have clearly benefited from the opportunities provided by the forum which has been set up for them, understanding varied widely among senior staff in schools. Few understood fully, for example, the intended funding mechanism - and the longer-term implications of inclusion in mainstream schools were quite differently understood.

SUPPORT FOR EARLY YEARS PROVISION

' *The LEA makes extensive provision for the early education of its three and four year old children. However, the quality of learning is not always as it should be, in part related to the lack of qualified teacher oversight in many nursery classes. The LEA has reviewed the situation and formulated plans for improvement to extend recent development work already showing promise. The plans, however, need to deal more effectively with the underlying organisation and quality assurance of provision.*

141. Early years provision is extensive, absorbing as it does £8 million of the LEA's annual resources, around 30 per cent more than the indicative SSA for the under-fives. Currently 100 per cent of four year olds and 90 per cent of three year olds are offered a maintained place. However, admissions entitlement varies between parts of the city. There is more provision in some areas, resulting in only full-time places being offered; and less in other areas where all eligible children are offered half-time places only. Notwithstanding the extent of provision, OFSTED inspections have shown that as children enter early years classes their attainment is well below levels found nationally or in similar LEAs. Pupils under five in Stoke-on-Trent need to make more rapid progress than pupils do elsewhere in order to catch them up. Inspections reveal that, overall, this is not the case and that this is linked to a higher incidence than elsewhere of weaknesses in curriculum, teaching and assessment.

142. Depending on when their birthdays fall, some four year olds are placed in reception classes and some in nursery classes. All children in reception classes are taught by qualified teachers, as are children in the LEA's nursery schools. However, of the 67 nursery classes attached to primary schools, only two have qualified teachers; the rest are staffed by nursery nurses who may or may not have support from a teacher. The LEA commissioned an extensive review of maintained nursery provision in autumn 1998. The results show that across all provision only 70 per cent of lessons observed were satisfactory or better and that standards were generally better when there was a contribution from a qualified teacher.

143. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that early years provision features as one of the priorities in the Education Development Plan. However, the outcome targets lack specificity and there is scant reference to the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan. The latter shows how places are intended to be provided, in partnership with other agencies, for September 1999, and how the use of data and procedures for training and quality assurance will be developed. It refers insufficiently, however, to ensuring the educational quality of the places which are to be provided, which may reflect the fact that key officers in the Education Department have been able to make little contribution to it. The LEA's review of nursery education had only just been finalised at the time of the inspection and had therefore not fed into either development plan. It should, however, prove to be a valuable basis for improvement.

144. The school survey rates the LEA's contribution to improving early years provision as better than satisfactory overall: this compares favourably with the average of the LEAs so far surveyed.

145. The school visits show that the early years core support provided by the Achievement Division has helped schools to sharpen up curriculum planning and assessment procedures, provided training, and assisted in the development of closer partnerships between schools and families. The introduction of a consistent baseline assessment scheme for four-year old pupils entering reception classes has provided potentially valuable data. School visits showed it was proving to be of much help to class teachers, some of whom were using the information to set appropriate targets for individual pupils. A similar baseline scheme for three year old children in nursery schools has been piloted and carefully evaluated.

146. The work of the family learning staff in the LEA is greatly appreciated in schools particularly in relation to the development of early literacy and in the strengthening of partnership between schools and parents. Courses for parents run in schools by 'College in the Community' staff, instigated by the family learning consultant, are well supported.

147. There are fundamental weaknesses, however, in the overall provision which the LEA needs, and in some cases already intends, to overcome. Firstly, an insufficiently coherent view of the purpose of early years provision has been connected to the historic differences in the staffing of, and the teaching provided by, nursery schools, nursery classes and reception classes. Secondly, the teaching deemed to be unsatisfactory, together with its underlying organisation and management, depresses standards. Thirdly, the guidance given by the LEA on curriculum planning, raising attainment (particularly in language and literacy) and improving teaching needs to be seen as consistent and well linked to the training programme for early years as well as clearly referenced in the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan and the Education Development Plan.

SUPPORT TO IMPROVE THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF SCHOOLS

In the light of the need to improve the management of many of the LEA's schools, a range of development initiatives has been designed, some in collaboration with other agencies. There is clear evidence of the beneficial impact of this on primary schools where needs are greatest. Most schools now receive satisfactory assistance for their planning. Governing bodies are soundly supported.

Support for School Management

148. Inspections have shown that school senior and middle management, overall, is less effective in Stoke-on-Trent than in similar LEAs and the country as a whole. Deficiencies are greater in primary than in secondary schools, and they include leadership, planning and the implementation of plans, staff relationships, communications and evaluation.

149. The LEA is aware of these deficiencies. A priority in the Education Development Plan is thus to improve the effectiveness of school management and to develop in schools sufficient competence for routine self-evaluation to become the norm. A series of management development programmes has been devised, including accredited training programmes for the

development of senior and middle managers. This has involved close collaboration between LEA, schools and Manchester Metropolitan University staff, with much of the work linked to national management development schemes. So far, course participants rate this training very highly. Specific evaluation case studies conducted by advisory staff show a clear influence of the programmes on improvements to aspects of management in some schools. In addition, the regular contacts of school development advisers and other LEA staff with schools, especially those with greater needs, are intended to develop planning and target-setting.

150. The school survey shows that schools are satisfied with support for senior managers and, in primary schools, for subject leaders. However, secondary headteachers are dissatisfied with support for subject leaders. Schools are satisfied with support for planning, evaluation and personnel management.

151. Overall, the visits showed the LEA has an adequate system for gathering evidence of school management, with the best evidence properly being where management development needs are greatest. More generally, the absence of effective headteacher appraisal has deprived the LEA of a significant opportunity to sharpen its overall awareness of management development needs.

152. In eight of the ten primary schools visited, there was clear evidence of improvement in management since the last inspections, dramatically so in one case. Management effectiveness remained sound or good in the other two schools. The beneficial impact of the LEA was clear in each school, but this influence had only recently become secure, as some schools did not receive help of the right kind in the early days of the LEA. In all but one case the amount and type of support, in recent months, has been appropriate to need; its effectiveness has varied from satisfactory to good, between schools.

153. Improvement was less obvious in the secondary and special schools visited. Major concerns include the lack of access to specialist advice in some subjects in secondary schools and in aspects of special education; poor support for financial management and the administrative uses of ICT; and insufficiently rigorous challenge to bring about improvements at a good speed. There was however, evidence of useful advice being given, for example on strategies to raise attainment, revising subject schemes and developing vocational courses. In at least one case, the management training provided by the Manchester Metropolitan University had clearly been highly effective.

Support for Planning

154. In their OFSTED inspections few of the schools visited had effective development plans. The school visits showed that much had been improved since the inspections, with greater focus and clarity in intentions, actions and targets, and a more businesslike conciseness and simplicity. Some impact of the LEA's advisory staff was evident in all cases, with the degree of support given being commensurate with need. The effectiveness of the support has improved in recent times. Some of the help given by advisers, consultants and advisory headteachers has been admirable in its incisiveness, especially in schools causing concern. However, the support given in a minority of cases has suffered from insufficient focus on major priorities in plans, with the more difficult issues ducked; lack of challenge from the school development adviser; contradictory and sometimes impractical advice given by different advisory staff; lack of support in general for planning in special schools.

Support for Governors

155. Nearly all governing bodies are fully constituted, with a vacancy rate below nine per cent. The LEA's Governors' Support Unit provides governing bodies with assistance in administering meetings, training, a helpline for advice and a service to check school prospectuses.

156. The school survey shows that schools are satisfied with support for governors. In all of the schools visited support given by the LEA was judged satisfactory or better. The provision of technical information and advice was welcomed by governors, not least in property and personnel matters. In the appointment of senior staff, and in dealing with issues of competence, governors receive clear advice. Clerking services are well regarded. The clerks usually provide valuable, and sometimes impressive support, going well beyond administrative support and guidance on procedures.

157. A regular newsletter and meetings of governor representatives are helpful in spreading information. Communications between the LEA and governors are generally effective although there were instances where the school development advisers' criticism of slow progress in implementing plans were not conveyed clearly to governors and one instance in which a governing body did not appreciate, from the data available to it, just how far the school needed to improve.

158. Half of all governors have attended an LEA training course in the last year. Training for governors is reasonably comprehensive and some good examples of tailor-made courses were reported during the visits. However, there were cases where the value of centrally-run courses — for example, on target-setting — was reduced by over-technical presentation.

APPENDIX I CONTEXT OF THE LEA

(a) Characteristics of the school population

Indicator	Date	Source	LEA	National
1. Number of pupils in LEA area of 1997 compulsory school age	1997	LEA		
2. Percentage of pupils entitled to 1997 DEE free school meals				
i. primary	1997	DfEE	31.8	22.8
ii. secondary	1997	DfEE	23.5	18.2
3. Percentage of pupils living in households with parents/carers				
(i) with Higher Educational qualifications	1991	Census	5.8	13.5
(ii) in Social Class 1 and 2	1991	Census	14.5	31.0
4. Ethnic Minorities in population aged 5-15. Percentage of ethnicgroup:				
Asian	1991	Census	0.2	0.5
Bangladesh	1991	Census	0.3	0.8
Black African	1991	Census	0.1	0.6
Black Caribbean	1991	Census	0.2	1.1
Black Other	1991	Census	0.5	0.8
Chinese	1991	Census	0.2	0.4
Indian	1991	Census	0.6	2.7
Other	1991	Census	0.5	1.1
Pakistani	1991	Census	4.4	2.1
5. Percentage of pupils:				
(i) with a statement of SEN				
primary	1997	DfEE	2.2	2.6
secondary		DfEE	3.6	3.9
(ii) attending special school				
primary		DfEE	1.1	1.1
secondary		DfEE	1.3	2.0
6. Participation in education:				
(i) % pupils under 5 on the roll of a maintained school	1997	Audit Commission		60.0
(ii) % pupils aged 16 remaining in full time education.	1997	LEA	56.3	69.7

(b) Organisation of schools

Types of school

Nursery schools	11
Infant schools	13
Junior schools	9
Junior and Infant schools	66
Middle schools	0
Secondary schools 11-16	14
11-18	2
Special schools	3
Pupil Referral Units	1

Surplus places

% Surplus	Year	LEA	National
Primary	1997	+14.0	+10.0
Secondary	1997	+10.0	+16.7

Source: Audit Commission

Pupil/teacher ratio

	Year	LEA	National
Nursery	1997		
Primary	1997	25.4	23.4
Secondary	1997	17.6	16.7
Special	1997		

Source: Audit Commission

Class size Rate per 1000 classes

Size of class	Year	LEA	National
31 or more KS1	1997	344.7	289.6
KS2	1997	388.1	379.0
36 or more KS2	1997	43.7	22.9
32 or more KS2	1997	73.6	35.0

Source: Audit Commission

APPENDIX 2: THE PERFORMANCE OF MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

The analysis draws on data provided by the LEA, the DfEE and OFSTED. Figures for maintained schools are compared with national averages and, in some cases, the average for the LEA's statistical neighbours - ie those LEAs which are closest to Stoke-on-Trent on socio-economic and other data.

PUPILS' ATTAINMENT

Attainment at age 7 (Key Stage I)

	Year	% of pupils achieving Level 2 or above					
		Teacher Assessment			Tasks/tests		
		LEA	National	Difference	LEA	National	Difference
English	1995	75.1	81.0	-6.0			
	1996	73.6	79.3	-5.7			
	1997	75.2	80.4	-5.3			
	1998	78.7	81.4	-2.7			
English (reading)	1995	72.5	79.1	-6.6	71.4	78.5	-7.1
	1996	73.0	78.6	-5.5	72.6	78.0	-5.4
	1997	75.2	77.8	-4.9	76.3	80.1	-3.8
	1998	77.9	80.8	-2.9	76.7	80.1	-3.4
English (writing)	1995	71.1	77.6	-6.5	76.4	80.4	-4.0
	1996	72.3	76.6	-4.3	76.1	79.7	-3.7
	1997	71.8	77.5	-5.7	76.3	80.4	-4.1
	1998	76.6	78.9	-2.3	79.4	81.4	-2.1
Mathematics	1995	72.8	78.4	-5.6	73.8	79.2	-5.4
	1996	72.2	82.2	-4.9	77.2	82.1	-4.8
	1997	79.7	84.2	-4.5	79.7	83.7	-4.0
	1998	83.4	85.5	-2.0	81.4	84.8	-3.4
Science	1995	80.4	84.7	-4.2			
	1996	78.3	84.1	-5.8			
	1997	81.3	85.5	-4.2			
	1998	83.1	86.5	-3.4			

Source: DfEE

2. Attainment at age 11 (KEY STAGE 2)

	Year	% Pupils achieving Level 4 or above					
		Teacher assessment			Task/tests		
		LEA	National	Difference	LEA	National	Difference
English	1995	50.8	56.8	-6.0	38.4	48.5	-10.1
	1996	50.4	60.1	-9.7	48.0	57.1	-9.1
	1997	59.6	63.4	-3.8	57.3	63.2	-5.9
	1998	58.4	65.3	-6.9	58.3	64.8	-6.5
Mathematics	1995	46.8	54.5	-7.7	35.5	44.9	-9.4
	1996	49.8	59.9	-10.1	41.7	53.9	-12.2
	1997	59.5	64.1	-4.6	54.7	62.0	-7.3
	1998	59.0	65.3	-6.3	50.2	58.5	-8.3
Science	1995	60.4	64.5	-4.1	63.8	70.2	-6.4
	1996	56.3	65.1	-8.9	53.1	62.0	-8.9
	1997	65.7	69.5	-3.7	64.0	68.8	-4.8
	1998	68.2	71.6	-3.4	64.7	69.3	-4.6

Source: DfEE

Attainment at age 14 (KEY STAGE 3)

	Year	% Pupils achieving Level 5 or above					
		Teacher assessment			Task/tests		
		LEA	National	Difference	LEA	National	Difference
English	1995	51.7	63.9	-12.2	39.9	55.3	-16.0
	1996	54.9	60.3	-5.4	47.1	55.6	-9.4
	1997	50.7	60.2	-9.5	43.2	55.6	-13.4
	1998	53.8	62.5	-8.6	56.7	65.2	-8.5
Mathematics	1995	49.7	62.4	-12.7	45.9	58.0	-12.0
	1996	52.9	61.5	-8.6	48.8	56.7	-7.9
	1997	53.1	64.0	-10.9	51.1	60.7	-9.6
	1998	52.5	63.9	-11.5	48.1	59.9	-11.9
Science	1995	52.6	60.6	-7.9	43.1	56.4	-13.3
	1996	53.0	59.7	-6.6	49.2	56.4	-7.3
	1997	52.3	69.2	-9.9	48.2	60.8	-12.5
	1998	49.2	62.4	-13.2	41.6	56.5	-14.9

Source: DfEE

Attainment at age 16 Key Stage 4 GCSE results

Level achieved	Year	Percentage of pupils		
		LEA	National	Difference
5 A*-C	1995	29.3	41.2	-11.9
	1996	30.2	42.6	-12.4
	1997	30.2	43.3	-13.0
	1998	32.5	44.7	-12.1
5 A*-G	1995	80.5	87.5	-7.0
	1996	82.2	88.1	-5.9
	1997	83.3	88.5	-5.2
	1998	86.0	89.8	-3.8
1 A*-G	1995	90.2	93.5	-3.4
	1996	90.6	93.9	-3.3
	1997	91.5	94.0	-2.5
	1998	93.2	95.2	-1.9

Pupils aged 15 at the beginning of the school year and on the roll in January of that year
1997 and 1998 data include GNVQ equivalents.

Source: DfEE

Attainment at age 16: Vocational qualifications

Level achieved	Year	LEA	National	Difference
Pass entries	1995	89.5	85.3	4.2
Pass entries	1996	96.2	79.2	17.0
Pass entries	1997	93.8	80.1	13.7
Pass entries	1998	40.4	77.3	-36.8

The percentage of pupils aged 15 (at the beginning of the school year and on the roll in January of that year) who were registered for and obtaining all the approved vocational qualifications or units for which they were studying.

Attainment at age 18**A level results****Average point score per pupil**

Number entered	Year	LEA	National	Difference
2 or more	1995	14.6	15.9	-1.3
	1996	17.3	16.8	0.5
	1997	16.9	17.1	-0.2
	1998	19.1	17.6	1.4
Less than 2	1995	6.0	2.7	3.3
	1996	2.8	2.7	0.2
	1997	1.5	2.7	-1.2
	1998	1.8	2.8	-1.0

Source: DfEE

Vocational qualifications of 16 to 18 year olds in maintained schools

Level achieved	Year	LEA	National	Difference
Pass entries	1995	100	80.2	19.8
Pass entries (Intermediate)	1996	88.9	69.1	19.8
	1997	100	68.9	31.1
	1998	100	72.5	27.5

Source: DfEE

Attendance

	Year	LEA	National	Difference
Attendance in Primary schools	1995	93.8	93.6	0.2
	1996	93.1	93.4	-0.4
	1997	93.6	93.9	-0.3
Attendance in Secondary schools	1995	88.6	90.6	-1.9
	1996	88.2	90.5	-2.2
	1997	88.9	90.9	-1.9

Source: DfEE

Permanent exclusions (rate per 1000 pupils)

	Year	LEA	National	Difference
Primary schools	1996	0.3	0.3	0.0
	1997	0.4	0.4	0.0
Secondary schools	1996	6.9	2.9	4.0
	1997	7.5	3.4	4.1

EVIDENCE FROM INSPECTIONS

Inspection judgements on primary schools

Aspect		Percentage of schools			
		Very good schools	Good schools	Schools requiring some improvement	Schools requiring much improvement
Standards achieved	LEA	2	24	51	22
	Statistical neighbours	7	39	44	10
	National	11	41	41	7
Quality of education	LEA	5	32	46	18
	Statistical neighbours	12	47	34	7
	National	16	44	32	8
School's climate	LEA	29	46	20	5
	Statistical neighbours	39	48	12	2
	National	48	41	10	2
Management and efficiency	LEA	16	35	31	18
	Statistical neighbours	23	41	29	7
	National	26	39	27	8
Overall	LEA	1	46	38	14
	Statistical neighbours	8	54	33	4
	National	13	55	29	4

Inspection judgements on primary schools

Aspect		Percentage of schools			
		Very good schools	Good schools	Schools requiring some improvement	Schools requiring much improvement
Standards achieved	LEA	7	21	64	7
	Statistical neighbours	18	39	34	9
	National	22	38	30	9
Quality of education	LEA	0	57	36	7
	Statistical neighbours	12	61	24	3
	National	17	49	27	6
School's climate	LEA	29	21	43	7
	Statistical neighbours	35	44	17	5
	National	42	36	17	5
Management and efficiency	LEA	14	50	29	7
	Statistical neighbours	25	47	21	7
	National	30	39	21	10
Overall	LEA	0	43	50	7
	Statistical neighbours	13	41	32	3
	National	19	49	27	5

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