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IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF  
WOKINGHAM  
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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AUDIT COMMISSION**

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## INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* (September 2000), which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the local education authority (LEA) on Best Value.

2. The inspection involved the analysis of data and scrutiny of documentation from the LEA; information from school inspections; and audit reports. Discussions were held with LEA members; staff in the education department and in other council departments; and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 93 per cent.

3. The inspection sought to establish the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 18 schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

## COMMENTARY

4. Wokingham became a unitary authority in April 1998 after the abolition of the former Berkshire County Council. The district, a blend of countryside, town and high-tech industry, is prosperous, with a thriving local economy and low unemployment. The vast majority of the population is of white ethnic origin and there is a small ethnic minority population from the Indian sub-continent, the Far East and also of black African-Caribbean heritage. The population growth is relatively high and several new housing developments are planned. This growing population is adding to the pressure on school places. The high cost of housing within the area contributes to difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in schools and within the LEA.

5. Standards of attainment in most national tests and examinations are well above national averages. In line with its clearly stated corporate priority for education 'aiming for the highest possible standards', the LEA has set high targets for improvement for eleven year-olds and at GCSE, and is largely on track to achieve them.

6. Wokingham LEA is one of the lowest funded LEAs in the country. Although there are small pockets of deprivation within the district, these are not sufficiently large to trigger additional resources. The LEA maximises income from the Standards Fund, but has few other sources of external funding. There is a clear commitment to education as a main corporate priority and members provide satisfactory leadership. During its three years of existence, Wokingham LEA has funded education slightly above its Standard Spending Assessment (SSA); has met the targets for delegation; and has agreed to pass on to schools increases in education SSA despite the potential effects of cuts in other service areas.

7. From a school perspective, the LEA struggled during the first year of operation to deliver a broad spectrum of services. Insufficient knowledge and information about schools constrained the ability of officers to monitor, challenge and intervene in them. Relationships with schools were slow to develop during this period and having three directors in three years has not facilitated strong partnership working.

8. Strengthened corporate planning, changes in education leadership and a better understanding by the council of its role and function in relation to education have brought about significant and accelerated improvement in relationships and the quality of service delivery, especially within the last year. A good rate of progress has been greatly assisted by increased cross-directorate working and by a new management structure in education which is enabling individual service boundaries to be traversed and interrelated teams to be created. There is a secure climate of mutual respect and trust between the LEA and its schools. It is, however, too early to determine the impact of many of the most recent developments in terms of raising standards or improving the quality of education.

9. The LEA performs almost all of its functions at least satisfactorily and a number of them effectively; promising strategies for further improvement are already in place. Particular strengths of the LEA include:

- support to schools for raising standards of literacy and numeracy;
- performance management of services to support school improvement;
- support to governors;
- the quality of leadership given by senior officers in the authority;
- the quality of advice received by elected members;
- financial services;
- the LEA's strategy for special educational needs and the steps it takes to meet statutory special educational needs obligations;
- support for children in public care;
- asset management planning; and
- support for behaviour and attendance.

10. The LEA has been increasingly adept at recognising its own weaknesses and progressively tackling them. Weaknesses are few and where they exist improvements are already planned. The strategic personnel service provided by the LEA is unsatisfactory. The LEA has been slow to encourage school links and consortia arrangements at post-16. The LEA has also been slow to develop policy and practice to promote social inclusion. Although steady progress and good support have been secured for Travellers, for children in public care and for children with complex behavioural problems, there continue to be weaknesses in support for some of the authority's most vulnerable pupils. In particular, support for children with English as an additional language is inadequate, and permanently excluded pupils who are educated otherwise than at school receive too little provision. The supply of benchmarked financial and performance data is improving steadily, but is not sufficiently comprehensive to enable the LEA to provide effective challenge to all schools.

11. Most schools are already performing well and few are causing serious concern. Areas for improvement, in addition to supporting schools causing concern, include: improving standards for more able pupils; raising the attainment of boys; strengthening continuity and progression in learning as young children move through the Foundation Curriculum and into Key Stage 1; and improving the performance of disaffected and vulnerable children and young people. If the LEA is to maintain a good rate of progress, the challenge for officers is in continuing to be resolute in ensuring LEA resources, and particularly the small central team of officers, are deployed carefully and focused on areas of greatest need. The challenge for schools is in understanding and accepting that this may bring changes to the way services are delivered. The LEA is clear about its brokerage role and is rapidly developing a directory of quality assured alternative providers. The LEA is also exploring 'new models of service delivery' through a partnership with two other LEAs and a private company. This venture offers the LEA further scope for enhancing support for schools and augmenting the services provided by its own small team.

12. The director of education, the chief executive and other senior officers provide a clear and definite lead. Recent positive changes in strategic planning, policy and practice have been well received by schools. The LEA has the capacity to improve further and to address the recommendations of this report. However, the current good rate of progress will only be sustained if elected members take a key role in tackling outstanding issues such as promoting social inclusion, building on the good

start made in formulating the equality policy and in securing improved provision for children in public care.

## **SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Context**

13. Wokingham became a unitary authority in April 1998 after the abolition of the former Berkshire County Council. Situated approximately 30 miles west of London and bordered by Oxfordshire to the north and Hampshire to the south-west, Wokingham district is a prosperous area with a thriving local economy and low unemployment. It is the second least deprived district in England according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation for 2000. Much of the area is characterised by rural or semi-rural communities that sit alongside towns and a concentration of high-tech industry.

14. Although there is predicted to be an increase over the next ten years in the number of people of retirement age, the population is fairly young compared to the rest of Berkshire. Of the adult population, a greater proportion has a higher educational qualification than is the national norm. There is relatively high population growth and a large number of further housing developments are planned. The growing population is adding to the pressure on school places within the district. The vast majority of the population is of white ethnic origin, and there is a small ethnic minority population from the Indian sub-continent, the Far East and also of black African Caribbean heritage.

15. The school population is just over 23,000, including 870 children in maintained nursery provision. The percentage of children eligible for free school meals is very low at around four per cent for primary and five per cent for secondary-aged pupils. These figures are well below the national average for primary (19.7 per cent) and secondary (18.1 per cent). The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs is higher than national average for primary aged pupils and in line with national averages for secondary aged pupils. The percentage of minority ethnic pupils is four per cent below the national average figure of 12 per cent. Few pupils have English as an additional language.

16. Wokingham provides one nursery school and 54 primary schools; 14 of which are for infant aged pupils and a further 14 for junior phase only. Twelve primary schools have attached nursery classes and one primary is a Beacon school. There are nine secondary schools all with sixth forms and three special schools. Seven of the primary schools are voluntary aided. Nine primary and one of the secondary schools are voluntary controlled. Five of the primary schools and two of the secondary schools have resourced units for specified special educational needs and there are three designated schools for the hearing impaired. Within a mix of schools of varying sizes about eight per cent of primary schools have fewer than 100 pupils.

17. Currently all four year-olds and ten per cent of three-year-olds have access to free part-time nursery provision. Transfer to secondary schools is at the age of 11. A high proportion of pupils remains in full-time education post-16. In 2000, the

staying-on rate was about 78 per cent and about 53 per cent of the cohort remained in sixth forms attached to mainstream schools. The authority is a net importer of pupils, attracting more pupils from neighbouring authorities than it loses through its own pupils attending schools outside of Wokingham. Many schools, especially secondary, are oversubscribed.

## **Performance**

18. OFSTED inspection data indicates that attainment on entry to primary schools is much more favourable than in similar authorities<sup>1</sup> and nationally.

19. Attainment in the 2000 writing test for seven year-olds and in the national English and mathematics tests for 11 and 14 year-olds was well above the national averages and above averages achieved in similar authorities. Attainment in reading and mathematics tests for seven-year-olds was well above national averages and in line with averages in similar authorities.

20. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A\*-C in the 2000 examinations was well above the national average and above the averages achieved in similar authorities. The average points score of pupils at A-level was in line with the national average and the average for similar authorities.

21. Since 1998, improvements in test results in writing for seven year-olds, in English for 14 year-olds and examination results at GCSE and A-level have matched or exceeded national trends of improvement. Improvements in test results in reading and mathematics for seven year-olds, in mathematics and English for 11 year-olds and in mathematics for 14 year-olds have been below national trends.

22. The most recent OFSTED inspection data indicates that the percentage of primary schools judged to be good or very good is well above the national proportions or proportions within similar authorities. The rate of progress made by primary schools between the first and second cycle of inspections is greater than the progress nationally. The percentage of secondary schools judged to be good or very good by OFSTED inspections is above the national average and in line with the averages in similar authorities. Inspections have found that one primary school requires special measures and one other primary school has serious weaknesses.

23. Attendance rates in primary and secondary schools are well above national averages. Unauthorised absence is below the national average for primary and well below the national average for secondary.

24. The rate of permanent exclusion is well below the national average for primary schools and broadly in line with the national average for secondary schools.

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<sup>1</sup> \* the LEAs closest statistical neighbours are: West Berkshire, Bracknell Forest, North Somerset, Buckinghamshire, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Surrey, South Gloucestershire, Cambridgeshire, Hampshire, Dorset

## **Funding**

25. Wokingham's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for education is one of the lowest in the country on a per pupil basis. It is lower than the national average for unitary authorities and the national average for all authorities. During its three years of existence Wokingham LEA has funded education at slightly above SSA; however spending on under-fives has been lower than SSA (74 per cent of SSA in 2000/01 and 92 per cent in 2001/02).

26. Capital expenditure has increased steadily over the last three years owing to increases in borrowing and capital grants, but remains below national averages. The LEA maximises income from the Standards Fund by fully matching funding, but has few other sources of external income.

27. In 2000/2001, Wokingham delegated a similar proportion of the local schools budget (84.1 per cent) as its statistical neighbours (84.1 per cent) and nationally (84.2 per cent). In 2001/2002 it increased delegation to 86.1 per cent to meet the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) target. The gross delegated funding per pupil in 2000/2001 was slightly lower than the England average for primary and secondary schools, but considerably higher for pupils at the three special schools. The LEA has met the DfES targets for delegation in 2000/2001 and 2001/2002.

28. Wokingham LEA's expenditure on centrally-provided services is generally close to the national average. However, expenditure on statutory and regulatory duties and on home to school transport is above the national average, whereas central spending on special educational needs (SEN) is 28 percent lower than the national average; expenditure on access is also relatively low.

29. Wokingham spends well below the average for similar LEAs and nationally on SEN, taking into account both delegated and centrally-held funding. The relatively higher spending areas are on services primarily for pupils with statements: the special schools' individual schools budget (ISB), statementing costs, fees for pupils at independent special schools, pupil-led SEN funding for pupils with statements and SEN transport. Funding is low for pupils who have special educational needs but do not have a statement. The LEA intends to increase this funding.

## **Council structure**

30. The council has 54 councillors representing 24 wards. There are annual elections involving one-third of the seats each year. Leading up to the inspection, the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives had 27 seats each and the Liberal Democrats had the casting vote. Following the council elections, which took place just prior to the inspection, the new constitution of the council is 27 Liberal Democrats, 26 Conservatives and one Independent. The council has a traditional structure, with the decision-making process operating through four main committees, including an educational and cultural services committee (ECSC). Committees report to the full council. Sub-committees, statutory committees and standing working groups support the main committees.

31. Progress towards modernisation has been steady, reflecting the major organisational and cultural shift that has been needed to bring about change. A new, modernised political management structure, which should be in place by September 2001, is in the process of being introduced. Discussions and arrangements for this are developing well. In preparation for this move, the council has sensibly been developing the role of scrutiny in advance of changes to the decision-making structures. An 'overview and scrutiny committee' has operated for the past year; this committee has made a sound start to scrutinising corporate policies. An education standards working group (ESWG) has also been in place for the past three years. The ESWG has a strategic overview of the standards and quality of education in schools. It has a remit to make recommendations to the ECSC on policy matters aimed at raising standards; it fulfils its role well.

32. The education and cultural services department, one of four main council departments, has a director and three assistant directors. The director of education and cultural services, the third director since 1998, took up his post in January 2000.

### **The Education Development Plan**

33. The Education Development Plan (EDP) provides a secure basis for the LEA's school improvement strategy. There are good links between the EDP and other statutory plans such as the Early Years policy and plans, and the SEN development plan.

34. The first education development plan, operative from April 1999, was approved by the Secretary of State. At the time of the inspection, year three of the EDP was in place. Throughout, the priorities have remained the same:

- supporting schools in raising the standards of literacy across all phases;
- supporting schools in raising the standards of numeracy across all phases ;
- raising the attainment of pupils with special educational needs;
- supporting schools in raising the standards of information and communication technology across all phases;
- promoting excellence in Early Years education;
- supporting schools in raising standards achieved by pupils in sixth forms;
- improving the quality of teaching so that pupils' individual needs are fully met; and
- improving the quality of leadership and management in schools.

35. The audit carried out for the first education development plan was sound, with the then newly-formed LEA making a determined effort to ascertain and verify data from a range of appropriate sources. Priorities are articulated clearly; they appropriately interpret the national agenda within a local context and to an extent reflect other local needs. Throughout, consultation on the education development plan has been widespread and thorough. The school survey and visits to schools confirm that there is a good understanding of the EDP and strong support for its priorities. Most schools felt the plan was comprehensive, well balanced and directly relevant to their own priorities. Most of the schools visited cross-reference their school development plan against the education development plan.

36. A thorough and more detailed audit was conducted prior to the formulation of the action plans for year three of the EDP. Consequently, these plans represent a considerable improvement on the previous plans. The EDP is coherent with detailed actions and activities set out in support of priorities. Increased and appropriate attention has been given to raising the achievement of Travellers and children in public care, but there is insufficient emphasis on raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils. There remains variability in the quality of success criteria and there is scope to improve these further so that they are more rooted in quantifiable targets relating to raising standards. Although activities are costed appropriately and schools are provided with the relevant information, the links between resources and activities are not clearly articulated within the plan itself.

#### **Recommendation**

- strengthen the success criteria in the education development plan and other strategic plans so that they are sharply focused on improving the quality of education and raising standards.

37. There are good systems and structures for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plan, with good mechanisms in place for the involvement of members and schools. A good rate of progress has been maintained throughout on implementing strategies to improve numeracy and literacy. Within the course of the last year, there has been a rapid and considerable improvement in the rate of progress in implementing improvements in information and communication technology. Sound progress has been made on the other priority areas.

38. Performance targets in the education development plan represent a suitably high level of challenge and, overall, good progress has been made towards meeting them. Targets have been kept under close review. In particular, the LEA has responded appropriately to the progress that schools have made in numeracy by raising the Key Stage 2 mathematics target for 2002 by three percentage points to 88 per cent. Targets for the number of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grade passes at GCSE have also been sensibly revised and increased by three percentage points to 65 per cent.

#### **The allocation of resources to priorities**

39. The LEA has satisfactory systems for allocating resources to agreed priorities, with some clear strengths. The authority has a tightly restricted budget, but has succeeded in meeting all government spending targets. It has successfully controlled strategic management costs despite considerable pressure on these owing to the difficulty of recruiting staff. The LEA operates strong and effective control over its expenditure through regular monitoring and reports to committee. Members' policy commitment to education, although reflected in short-term decisions, is not translated into longer-term financial commitments; for example, a decision on whether to pass on the increase in education SSA is made annually as part of the budget-making process. Scope for medium-term financial planning is restricted by the uncertainty deriving from annual elections in a context of no overall political control. Wokingham is rightly moving towards linking the revenue budget and

business-planning processes for the 2002/03 budget round and is developing a medium-term capital strategy. However, interviews and visits to schools indicate that the corporate budget decision-making process is not sufficiently open, though consultation with schools over the school funding formula and additional delegation is good.

#### **Recommendation**

- make corporate budget decision-making processes more open and transparent to schools.

40. Resources in education have been effectively allocated to priorities agreed with schools, such as additional funding at Key Stage 2, increases in the additional educational needs (AEN) allocation in the funding formula and the admission of rising fives to reception classes. The LEA closely monitors areas where expenditure is above average and has used the Best Value review process appropriately to examine the provision of home to school transport.

41. The current school funding formula is based on that inherited from Berkshire and is highly pupil-led through the age-weighted pupil unit (AWPU). It has rightly been reviewed by a working group of headteachers and officers to link it more closely to need. The review identified under-funding at Key Stage 2 and for additional educational needs. In 2001/2002 an additional £40 per pupil was allocated to Key Stage 2 and additional educational needs funding has been increased from 0.5 per cent to one per cent. Additional educational needs funding however, remains extremely low and continues to be under review. Schools show sound management of their finances and the LEA works closely with the few that have deficits.

#### **Best Value**

42. Wokingham Council's arrangements for Best Value show significant strengths with some weaknesses. It has good structures in place to deliver Best Value and the 2000 Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) received an unqualified audit. The authority has so far been less effective in completing its planned Best Value reviews. The objectives in the BVPP are well linked to those in the education and cultural services framework plan, to service plans and to individual staff objectives. Although the role of elected members in the process is developing steadily, this is not clearly described in the BVPP. The LEA has provided schools with a good model Best Value policy.

43. The authority shows a clear commitment to the use of the Best Value process to improve service provision and challenge in-house services. It rightly focused its first year of reviews on service areas which were of concern due to their cost or performance. However the over-ambitious Year 1 programme of reviews overran significantly and these, combined with the 11 reviews planned for Year 2, are excessive for a small authority. There are no completed Year 1 reviews in education so it is not possible to assess their impact. However, the interim report of two reviews in progress, home-to-school transport and children in public care, were

presented as evidence. These suggest that the approach to review is thorough. One of the reviews used specialist consultants effectively to provide input on competition.

#### **Recommendation**

- urgently appraise the number of Best Value reviews programmed and make them more strategic in order to seek genuine step changes in performance and to ensure manageability within the authority's capacity to complete reviews.

## **SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Implications of other functions**

44. The LEA inherited schools which, in the main, were already performing well. Appropriate intensive support has been given to schools to improve standards in literacy and numeracy, to develop good behaviour management and, where necessary, to strengthen whole school management and leadership. Growing and appropriate attention is being given to improving standards of more able pupils and boys. The LEA has been slower to provide sufficient provision for permanently excluded pupils. Support for English as an additional language has weaknesses.

45. More effective strategic planning is being established and there has been appropriate policy revision and development in behaviour management, bullying, child protection, restraint, equal opportunities and for children in public care. Shortcomings remain in strategic planning of personnel services, and the lack of a coherent strategy for information and communication technology has impeded the effective use of new technology in schools.

46. Services within education are increasingly working effectively together and co-ordinated approaches are, in some instances, benefiting schools; for example, the improved project management for schools causing concern and the termly project meetings involving schools and special educational needs and access services in joint discussions about strategies to support pupils and their families. Nevertheless, there are areas where co-ordinated approaches are not strong enough. In particular, the ability of quality development officers to provide effective challenge in schools is constrained by a lack of a comprehensive package of data which brings together benchmarked financial, attainment and other key performance data and which is accompanied by a rigorous analytical commentary and overview.

### **Recommendation**

- as a priority take action to produce better performance data. Ensure it is integrated with and used alongside other data already available, including financial data, to produce a comprehensive and useable package with clear analytical commentaries and overviews so that the information can be used by schools in assessing their performance. Ensure that the quality development officers are enabled to make use of the full range of data in monitoring school development.

### **Monitoring, challenge, intervention and support**

47. The LEA performs its functions of monitoring, challenging, intervening and supporting in schools satisfactorily. Evidence from school visits, focus group interviews and the school survey indicate that schools have been consulted on and informed about procedures. Arrangements support and do not undermine commitment to self-improvement. There is clarity and shared understanding about the definition of challenge and intervention. There is, however, confusion about what constitutes monitoring as opposed to support; few schools visited understand fully the relationship and difference between the two functions or are clear about the amount of time allocated for monitoring by the LEA.

### **Recommendation**

- clarify the function and purpose of monitoring by the LEA and ensure that headteachers and governors understand the deployment of quality development officers and are clear about time allocations.

48. The new LEA appointed few staff with local knowledge and background. It has invested productive time and effort in building up school profiles and now knows its schools well. All of the evidence available is used to place schools in one of three categories, which are not sufficient to allow monitoring to be conducted through a sufficiently differentiated programme. This system is being sensibly reviewed to increase the number of categories and to ensure a sharper focus of deployment of resources to need. However, not all of the options under discussion are appropriate; there is a danger of change leading to unmanageable systems involving overly complex categorisation of schools and specifically of those schools not causing concern. For those schools where there are most concerns there is well-planned differentiated provision based on the needs of schools. By contrast, the basic provision of visits for all other schools is over-generous, especially for those schools where high standards are being maintained and target-setting is secure. This arrangement does not lead to the most effective use of resources and most significantly of the small team of quality development officers.

### **Recommendations**

- design the new system of categorisation of schools so that it is manageable, focused appropriately on the identification and categorisation of schools causing concern and leads to suitably differentiated provision of monitoring; and
- reduce the number of monitoring visits made routinely to schools capable of carrying out school improvement effectively.

49. The monitoring system is focused appropriately on school development and visits regularly include joint observations and other work with school staff. In all schools visited, monitoring is furthering the school's own skills of self-review but insufficient emphasis is placed on providing an external validation or moderation of the school's self-evaluation. Schools causing particular concern receive detailed written reports following formal reviews by the LEA. These provide clear and concise judgements and recommendations for improvement. Written feedback following routine monitoring is satisfactory overall, but a few of the reports seen are not sufficiently focused and leave too much scope for ambiguity in the reporting and understanding of information. Apart from those few schools causing serious concern, information from monitoring is not given directly to governing bodies.

### **Recommendation**

- follow up monitoring visits to all schools with written feedback that provides sharp and clear judgements and focused action points, and make the reports available to the chair of governors as well as the headteacher.

50. The criteria for intervention are clear and have been shared with schools. Data and other information are increasingly used successfully to identify schools which might be coasting, weak or failing. By way of a letter, all schools causing concern are informed of the exact nature of the concern. Evidence from school visits and files shows improvements are being secured in schools causing concern, particularly when concerns have related to the quality of school management and leadership. All primary schools visited had been subject to appropriate challenge through the target-setting process, especially where the LEA considered performance targets to be too low. Target-setting in secondary schools is satisfactory overall but there remains a lack of robust data available to quality development officers upon which they can successfully challenge under-performing schools. The LEA has been slow to adapt the target-setting process to meet the needs of special schools.

51. Staff in school improvement services are highly regarded by schools. Nevertheless, difficulties in appointing staff, long-term absences and vacancies have led to a quality development team (QDT) that has been, and remains, insufficiently aligned to the LEA's priorities for improvement. This has constrained progress and

developments in the early years, within special schools and to a lesser extent within the secondary phase. Day-to-day management of the QDT is secure and assures that appropriate attention is focused on schools with greatest need. Performance management of the school improvement services is developing strongly. In particular there is evidence to show that well-focused individual performance objectives have contributed positively to the good progress on implementing education development plan priorities. Previous weaknesses in medium- and long-term strategic planning are being remedied and significant improvements have been made in the last 12 months, especially in the formulation of business plans linked to department and corporate objectives. Strategic planning and leadership to support school improvement are satisfactory.

#### **Recommendation**

- use the opportunity afforded by current vacancies to:
  - review the composition and size of the quality development team team; and
  - ensure a good match between expertise and strategic priorities and in particular to find ways to strengthen challenge and support for the early years, special and secondary schools.

52. School improvement services as a whole have made a good contribution to school development planning and in helping schools to establish monitoring and review procedures. The LEA was judged to have made at least a satisfactory contribution to school improvement in all but one of the schools visited and a good contribution in nearly two-fifths of the schools. Improvement in those schools that have received intensive support has been most marked. The costs of the school improvement services are average and they provide sound value for money.

53. School improvement services have not been subject to a Best Value review. The quality development team is, however, making steady progress in incorporating Best Value principles. There is a strong commitment to delivering improvement. Views and opinions of partners are actively sought; schools in particular help shape the levels of service. The LEA is exploring new models of delivery of advisory support through a partnership with two other LEAs and a private company. This venture is providing an appropriate opportunity for the LEA to challenge why, how and by whom a school improvement service is provided.

#### **Collection and analysis of data**

54. The LEA's support to schools on the use and interpretation of data is satisfactory, but strengths only just outweigh weaknesses. Information received by primary schools is satisfactory. This includes school-LEA comparative data, relative performance by gender and results by ethnicity, but does not include local value-added benchmark comparisons. Primary schools value the good training and

guidance they receive on the interpretation of data and its use. In particular well-targeted work has taken place in individual primary schools where external inspection identified the analysis and use of data as a weakness. Data provided to secondary schools includes school and LEA-relative subject and gender performance information at Key Stage 4, and national comparative data. Development work is taking place with secondary schools and other LEAs to extend the range of benchmarking data as part of the 'new models of service delivery' project. Admission into reception classes at the beginning of each term has meant that the LEA's baseline assessment scheme does not provide the LEA or its schools with reliable or comparative value-added data. However, schools make appropriate use of baseline information to set targets for individual pupils.

55. The LEA's provision of data is improving, but there are weaknesses in the availability and use of value-added data and in the provision of data to secondary schools. Activities outlined in the EDP for 2001/2002 are appropriate in addressing the areas of weakness and are rightly targeted at an improved framework for the assessment and analysis of pupils' performance. Detailed planning is clear, and the capacity for improvement is greatly assisted by full LEA staffing for the first time in two years.

#### **Recommendations**

- prioritise the production of primary value-added data to enable comparisons between schools to be made; and
- improve data provision to secondary schools in line with planned developments.

56. In 2000, for the first time, schools received profiles detailing key performance indicators over the last three years. These include budget and attendance comparisons and pupil characteristics such as gender and ethnicity. This information contains local and national comparative data, but a lack of analytical commentary and guidance limits its use.

57. When it was first established, the LEA acted swiftly to set up a pupil-level data base, and an analysis of performance between Key Stages 1 and 2 has identified a reasonable expectation for progress. As a result, target-setting meetings in primary schools are focused sharply on target-setting for individual pupils based on prior attainment, and on the identification of highly attaining pupils. Schools rate these meetings highly for their supportive challenge, and for good guidance from quality development officers on strategies for achieving targets. In two schools visited insufficiently challenging targets were raised following visits by quality development officers. In secondary schools, target-setting is based mainly on cohort attainment. One-third of secondary schools rated target-setting as poor in the school survey; school visits confirmed that secondary schools are rightly critical of the lack of challenge posed by quality development officers, and an unsophisticated use of data by the LEA. As schools, overall, perform consistently above national expectations at

all Key Stages, the LEA, rightly, sets targets for higher level performance in English, mathematics and science.

58. Systems for the electronic transfer of data are developing satisfactorily, and there has been recent training on the use of 'assessment manager'. In 2000, spreadsheets, detailing the performance of individual Year 6 pupils, were sent electronically to secondary schools. Significantly, these included results for pupils from two neighbouring authorities.

### **Support for literacy**

59. The LEA's strategy for raising standards of literacy is good. Actions in the Education Development Plan are well targeted and include good provision for underachieving schools, professional development, and the dissemination of good practice. Differentiated support for secondary schools has a strong and appropriate emphasis on target-setting. Special schools have been included appropriately and important links have been made with the Traveller education service and neighbouring LEAs.

60. Despite some staffing difficulties, support for literacy is good. The LEA's literacy consultant provides a good level of expert guidance to schools and the literacy in action team, which includes a demonstration school and three advanced skills teachers, is used effectively. Good use is also made of the LEA's Beacon primary school. Grammar for writing training has been particularly useful, and good guidance on planning and assessing reading and writing is used effectively by the schools visited. Termly meetings for co-ordinators are well attended and highly rated.

61. Schools in need of intensive support are appropriately identified and receive good support. In 2000, only one school out of the ten identified as requiring substantial improvement under-performed against its Level 4 target. Overall in intensive schools, there was an aggregated increase of nine percentage points from 1999-2000 compared with an overall LEA increase of three percentage points. The progress of all schools is monitored appropriately. In particular, good literacy reviews of primary schools have contributed significantly to schools' procedures for self-review and have been very well received. Communication between consultants and quality development officers is good, and paired lesson observations have assured consistent judgements.

62. In 2000, Key Stage 2 results were well above the national average with 84 per cent of pupils attaining Level 4 and above, compared with a national figure of 75 per cent. This was in line with the LEA's target. Level 5 results were also above the national average, and have increased significantly from 25 per cent to 41 per cent in the last three years. Girls marginally outperform boys at Level 4 and above, but this gap increases significantly at the higher levels. Appropriately, a newly formed 'raising boys' attainment working group' comprising teachers, headteachers and officers is working on guidance materials for raising standards of boys' attainment in reading and writing in all key stages. The LEA's target for 2002, 90 per cent, remains a significant challenge and is one of the highest in the country. The schools' aggregate target stands at 86 per cent and exceeding this will require further improvements in over 30 per cent of schools with Key Stage 2 pupils. Nevertheless, given recent

improvements and good quality support for schools, the LEA is rightly confident that this target can be achieved.

63. At Key Stage 3, results were also well above the national figure. However, 88 per cent of girls attained Level 5, compared with only 72 per cent of boys. At Level 6 and above this gap is even more pronounced. Plans for Key Stage 3 are well in hand; a consultant has recently been appointed and leading literacy teachers have been identified. Secondary schools are overall very satisfied with support from the LEA; teachers have observed Key Stage 2 demonstration lessons, heads of English departments are trained in the strategy materials and some are piloting starter activities.

### **Support for numeracy**

64. The LEA's support for numeracy is very good, and highly rated by primary schools. Leadership is strong and planning, which is strategically aligned to literacy, is very good. The EDP details a well-targeted range of appropriate activities, which are focused sharply on support for underachieving schools, professional development, extending the work of leading mathematics teachers and the dissemination of good practice. Planning for Key Stage 3 is thorough and includes differentiated support for schools.

65. The LEA's numeracy consultant provides expert guidance and is very highly rated by primary schools. Without exceptions, the schools visited attributed improvements in subject leadership and teaching to this effective support. The brief of six leading mathematics teachers, now less in demand for demonstration lessons, will be sensibly extended to work alongside teachers. Support for schools has also included very highly rated training for co-ordinators and teachers, parents' evening workshops, mathematics challenges for able pupils, and a very useful and informative newsletter. A significantly good development is materials for the teaching of mathematical investigations to assist progression across key stages. Effective use has been made of the LEA's Beacon school, and a very good directory enables easy contact with leading mathematics teachers in Wokingham and a neighbouring authority.

66. Schools in need of intensive support are accurately identified and receive good support. Between 1999-2000 aggregated Key Stage 2 results for these 12 schools increased by ten percentage points, compared with the LEA's overall increase of four percentage points.

67. The LEA's Key Stage 2 target for 2002, revised from 85 per cent to 88 per cent, is among the highest in the country and the LEA is securely placed to achieve this. In 2000, 81 per cent of pupils attained Level 4 and above, exceeding the LEA's target of 80 per cent, and well above the national figure of 72 per cent. However, although good progress has been made recently, results have only increased by nine per cent since 1998, compared with 13 per cent nationally.

68. The strategy for support to secondary schools is planned well, and advice and support are highly valued by the schools visited. A Key Stage 3 consultant has recently been appointed; conferences have been successful; effective practitioners

identified and trained as leading mathematics teachers; and good work has been done by advanced skills teachers. An audit of secondary schools, currently being completed, will identify schools and mathematics departments in need of additional support in order to raise standards. In 2000, Key Stage 3 results of 79 per cent Level 5 and above were well above the national average of 65 per cent. Level 6 results were also well above national averages.

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

69. Support for information and communication technology has now reached a position where strengths outweigh weaknesses. In particular, there has been significant and rapid improvement during the last year.

70. The recent draft information and communication technology strategy for education identifies appropriate strategic objectives. Strategic principles clearly outline appropriate support for schools in line with these objectives; principles are well matched with detailed and well-targeted activities within the 2001/2002 EDP. Good consideration has been given to the use of information and communication technology for management and administration, and to electronic communications. However, the vision statement for information and communication technology is insufficiently focused on the use of information and communication technology in teaching and learning. There is too little emphasis on supporting schools to make judgements on standards, and success criteria do not identify the impact of provision as improved standards. Performance indicators for information and communication technology have been identified, but these focus too exclusively on provision. This is a weakness, given the LEA has identified attainment at Key Stage 2 as only broadly in line with that found nationally and that standards are below expectation in about one-third of schools. Year 9 teacher assessment data from eight schools indicates that in 2000, attainment at Levels 5 and 6 was above national standards.

#### **Recommendation**

- work with information and communication technology co-ordinators in primary schools to develop approaches to the assessment of pupils' information and communication technology.

71. The newly appointed consultant has quickly established high credibility in schools. There is a secure focus on advice and support for individual schools and for information and communication technology co-ordinators, close targeting of resources where information and communication technology is unsatisfactory, and generally good training on weaker areas of the information and communication technology curriculum. Schools have been given good advice on revised development planning and good support to implement QCA schemes of work. Innovative projects have included a web-site designer working with pupils and adults. Good practitioners from within schools have been used well and this will be formalised into a leading information and communication technology teacher team. The level of expertise available to support primary schools is now very high and plans are in hand to increase support for secondary schools. The school survey, as

well as visits to schools, indicates three quarters of primary and two thirds of secondary schools now rate provision as at least satisfactory.

72. Arrangements for the implementation of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) have improved considerably from Phase 1, when technical problems with newly installed equipment restricted use. Installation and connections to the Internet, Intranet and e-mail access are complete in all but three primary schools, where they have been delayed by building work. The LEA is reasonably confident of meeting baseline targets for 2002, subject to satisfactory funding. Pupil:computer ratios vary considerably between schools, and NGfL funding has been appropriately targeted to those furthest away from this baseline. The New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training is fully supported by the LEA and complemented by additional training for teachers and support staff. Monitoring indicates an increased use of computers in classrooms. Owing to the range of providers, technical support remains inconsistent, but there are plans for improvement.

### **Support for schools causing concern**

73. Support for schools causing concern is satisfactory. The proportion of schools identified as requiring some or significant improvement is low. Since 1998, OFSTED inspections have found that one primary school requires special measures and one other primary school has serious weaknesses. The school identified as needing special measures, a recently amalgamated school with a new headteacher, was already identified as a cause for concern. In addition there are four other schools, three primary and one special school designated by the LEA as a cause for concern.

74. Systems of identification and procedures for supporting schools causing concern have been tightened considerably over the last twelve months. There is now an effective system in place for the early identification of schools starting to cause concern which makes good use of performance data and which draws upon information from services across the LEA. Co-ordination of support has also been strengthened. In three of the schools visited, well co-ordinated support across literacy, numeracy and the behaviour support team has been a major factor leading to accelerated and sustained progress. The LEA has also drawn appropriately upon the expertise within its primary Beacon school to support the schools. For each school causing concern there is a clear intent for a staged reduction of support once improvement has been secured.

75. There is a well-planned and suitably differentiated programme of support for schools causing most concern. However, the LEA's strategic statement does not systematically identify the support that schools within the different categories can expect to receive, and as such is insufficiently open and transparent. For each school, clear action plans have been drawn up which are used appropriately to monitor and review progress. Action plans also help determine any additional support and resources that are needed to secure rapid improvement. However, insufficient attention is given to specifying the intended purpose of additional resources or identifying clear success criteria against which the LEA can judge their effectiveness and value for money. LEA reviews of progress result in clear and detailed written reports and oral feedback to the headteacher and governing body.

The LEA has appropriate systems in place to monitor the impact of its own support and the actions taken by the school. This involves elected members, who take keen interest in the progress of schools causing concern through the work of the education standards working group. In the case of schools currently causing serious concern, the LEA has appropriately used its statutory powers to issue formal warnings.

#### **Recommendation**

- formalise systems of allocation of additional resources by identifying clearly:
  - the different levels of support schools within the different categories can expect to receive; and for each school causing concern:-
  - the intended purpose of the use of additional resources; and
  - success criteria against which the effectiveness and value for money of the support can be judged.

#### **Support for governors**

76. Support for governors is good. Schools' OFSTED inspection reports indicate the quality of governance as improving, although there is some variation in the effectiveness of governing bodies, evidenced from visits to schools. The LEA has good knowledge of where this is the case, and targets resources appropriately. A managed clerking service is available for schools wishing to purchase this. Clerks receive regular briefings and good support.

77. The LEA is clear about the need to promote the autonomy of governors and has been largely successful in doing so. Good systems for communication and consultation include a successful annual conference, well attended termly briefing meetings for chairs of governors with the director and chair of education, and a termly special educational needs (SEN) forum for designated governors. Information provided to governors is helpful and accessible. This includes a very informative newsletter and useful documentation. Chairs of governors rate the director's termly report as particularly useful in identifying priorities for action. Governors receive timely and good quality advice from staff operating a helpdesk. Over the last three years a 40 per cent turnover of headteachers has resulted in considerable joint working between officers and governors. The governors interviewed value the good support provided for headteacher appointments. Governors were offered information on the role of the school quality development officer at a recent annual conference, but do not receive written notes of officers' visits to assist their monitoring role, except in schools causing concern.

78. The LEA's comprehensive governor training programme is focused appropriately on improving governors' strategic and monitoring responsibilities. Priorities are carefully determined through termly meetings with link governors, a scrutiny of minutes from governors' meetings, external inspection reports and a training needs survey. Provision includes access to courses from neighbouring authorities and accredited BTEC training. Governors rate training on performance

management, and whole governing body training highly, but those interviewed report variation in the generally high quality of centrally-managed courses.

79. The LEA has been active and successful in recruiting governors and the number of unfilled vacancies is very low. A recruitment strategy includes a good range of activities, including information in Braille. New governors are well supported through good induction training. The LEA has good knowledge of experienced governors available to support schools in difficulties.

### **Support for school management**

80. Support for school management is good overall; it is more effective in primary than in secondary and special schools. Primary schools' most recent OFSTED inspection reports indicate a considerable improvement in the quality of leadership and management, although there are still schools where management and leadership need improvement.

81. From a thorough audit of need, the education development plan rightly identifies support for strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and senior and middle management development as the keys to school improvement. Actions are appropriate and well targeted. The LEA is now clear about its brokerage role in providing high quality management support. This is rapidly developing to include a good directory of providers, welcomed by primary and secondary schools, externally contracted support, and good use of a Beacon school to establish management links with two other schools.

82. Training for headteachers and deputies has been very well received in primary schools, but secondary schools are less positive about provision and quality, preferring instead to use external providers. Quality development officers provide good management support to headteachers in both phases. The LEA actively supports attendance on national training programmes for headteachers and deputy headteachers. The successful annual residential conference is well attended; headteachers value opportunities for joint working with senior officers, and schools visited cited numerous examples of follow-on work. Schools report leadership training for officers and headteachers through an 'investing in excellence programme' as excellent. Induction arrangements for newly appointed headteachers and deputies are very good; the professional development team is effective in supporting personal development plans, and mentoring has been good.

83. There are good professional development opportunities for primary subject co-ordinators, teachers and support staff in the core subjects and information and communication technology. The LEA realises that centrally-managed courses are not appropriate to meet the diverse needs of middle managers in secondary schools, and is currently looking to improve provision through links with other LEAs. A recent register of good secondary subject specialists, quality assured by the LEA, is available to secondary schools, and plans to identify expert departments are in hand.

84. The LEA provides good support for school self-review. An annual school improvement review programme, built into quality development officers' monitoring visits, provides a helpful framework, and plans for aligning this more closely to the

needs of secondary schools are well underway. A programme of self-evaluation training has been very well received by primary schools, but less so by secondaries; in response, modularised versions will be produced for individual secondary schools. Joint officer-school reviews in primary and secondary schools further support school self-review and are highly rated by headteachers.

85. The LEA's responsibilities for newly qualified teachers are discharged effectively; newly qualified teachers and induction tutors in primary and secondary schools are supported well. Monitoring arrangements are appropriate, a useful handbook outlines the responsibilities of newly qualified teachers, schools and the LEA, and a good programme of professional development complements school-based induction. However, newly qualified teachers in two schools visited report some variation in the quality of training providers.

86. Schools are experiencing increasing difficulties in recruiting teachers, and headteachers are rightly concerned over the potential negative impact on standards. The LEA monitors the situation well. Following an unsuccessful bid with a neighbouring authority for a recruitment strategy manager, a buy-back arrangement with schools has enabled a seconded officer to take forward a good range of strategies. These include the establishment of a pool system for newly qualified teachers and attendance at recruitment fairs. The high cost of housing in the local area is also having a negative effect on retention. There are productive joint education and housing department initiatives to address issues facing key workers, including teachers, in trying to find suitable, affordable accommodation.

### **Support for improving standards in the early years**

87. Support for improving standards in the early years is satisfactory overall; Wokingham is making an increasingly positive commitment to early years education. One of the major constraints to developments has been the difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified staff. However, key appointments have recently been made and these contribute significantly to the LEA's capacity to secure further improvements.

88. The early years development and childcare partnership provides good oversight and co-ordination of the improvement and expansion of childcare and early years' education. Strategic and implementation plans, which have had full approval, support the council's equal opportunities policy and include appropriate activities to strengthen the strategy and practice for early intervention and support for children with special educational needs. Links between plans for the early years and the education development plan are strong. There is an appropriate diversity of provision across the private, voluntary and maintained sectors providing a suitable range of choices and options for parents. The LEA has secured free part-time places for all four-year-old children and is making steady progress towards meeting a target of 85 per cent of free places for three year-olds by 2004. Lunchtime supervision and out-of-school and holiday care are sensibly being increased to meet the demand for such provision.

89. Data gathered by OFSTED from inspections of mainstream schools indicate strengths in the quality of teaching of under-fives and provision in reception and nursery classes for pupils with special educational needs. However, planning for

progression in learning during the foundation stage and selecting appropriate activities are not as good as seen nationally or in similar authorities. Improvements have been deemed necessary in about a fifth of schools. Data from the inspection of nursery education settings indicates a need to improve knowledge and understanding of the early learning goals. Networks are being established between public and private providers and joint training has been secured on the planning and implementation of the foundation curriculum. The schools visited, however, reported variability in its quality and effectiveness. The LEA's own monitoring shows that, although improvements are being secured, there is considerable variability in headteachers' capacity to monitor and evaluate provision in the early years.

#### **Recommendations**

- as a priority take action to improve the quality of training for planning and implementing the foundation curriculum; and
- provide the support necessary for headteachers to enable them to monitor and evaluate the quality of education and standards within the early years.

#### **Support for post-16 education**

90. The support by the LEA for education post-16 has weaknesses. Although since 1998 the rate of improvement at A-level has exceeded the national trend, the average points score per pupil has remained broadly in line with the national averages and no school has had results consistently above average. A high proportion of pupils remains in full-time education post-16. Of these, about a quarter of pupils opt for a college rather than school environment. All of the nine secondary schools have sixth forms. The majority of sixth forms are, on average, smaller than those found nationally, bringing into sharp relief issues of viability and cost-effectiveness of provision. The LEA is well aware of the key issues for attention, many of which have been identified in a useful survey of sixth form provision. For example, the number of students taking vocational courses has doubled since 1996, but there are considerable differences between the schools in the proportion of students taking such courses, and three schools have no provision. The LEA rightly recognises that improvements are necessary, but has yet to work with schools to facilitate more rational local arrangements by bringing sixth forms together. Improvement activities, including those in the education development plan, have been slow to impact on improving standards.

#### **Recommendation**

- help to facilitate rational cost-effective local provision for post-16 by encouraging more links and consortium arrangements.

91. An active post-16 working group of heads of sixth forms and other teachers, well supported by the quality development team, has helped inform the debate about post-16 provision. The working group has also proved a useful forum for sharing good teaching practice and discussing different courses and approaches.

### **Support for gifted and talented pupils**

92. Support for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory. The LEA has given good attention to the performance of higher attaining pupils in setting and supporting Level 5 targets for English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2, and there has been some useful training for schools. An advanced skills teacher has undertaken useful work in two secondary schools, good links have been made with a local university, and two successful summer schools have taken place. However, these developments have lacked co-ordination, and despite widespread extension activities in primary and secondary schools, OFSTED inspection reports identify an overall lack of challenge in lessons.

93. Recent and rapid progress has taken place. Leadership in this area is now strong, an additional advanced skills teacher has been appointed to work in primary schools, a good plan of action expands on activities outlined in the Education Development Plan (EDP), a working party is focusing on the identification and sharing of good practice and innovative planning is further developing summer school provision.

## **SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

### **Corporate planning**

94. Corporate planning is coherent, with a good system of integrating service, business and Best Value plans and planning processes. Seven core values together with six key themes are at the heart of the council strategy. These guide policy direction and strategic objectives. Education is implicitly involved in all six themes but the third: 'aiming for the highest possible standards in education', is directly related to educational priorities and is elaborated upon within the LEA vision statement. Principles that underlie the work of the education department are reflected in a newly formulated strategic overview and business plan that provides a secure operational framework incorporating individual team business plans and which brings together all strands of national and local government policy. For education this represents a major step forward in strategic planning within the last 12 months. Sound progress is being made in ensuring that corporate plans represent a shared vision and common values, and that the strategic plans for education are understood by schools.

95. Corporate plans are implemented well. The leadership provided by senior officers is good. Procedures to co-ordinate work of different departments are satisfactory. Within education, a new management structure is establishing a co-ordinated and joined up approach to education and cultural services. In particular, the change has been productive in helping to secure improvements in the support for children in public care, in strengthening procedures for child protection and in establishing more effective systems for the allocation of support for pre-school children with special educational needs. There is a good system of performance

review. Management units set objectives, targets and performance measures which fit well into business plans. Monitoring and review processes are developing strongly and these form a secure basis for service reviews, individual target-setting and appraisal.

96. The speed, openness and transparency of decision-making are satisfactory. In order to increase democratic accountability the council is moving from a committee system of decision-making, which is recognised as being overly bureaucratic, towards a modernised agenda. Decisions are increasingly well informed and taken in a timely way; for instance, in amending the admissions policy for early years and in showing appreciation of the importance of an independent view in setting up a secondary commission to look at the provision of school places.

97. The LEA's scope and flexibility in financial decision-making are limited by its tight funding position. The authority inherited a £10 million funding gap, which meant that from the outset there was a need to make hard choices and formulate clear concerted policy. The sensible long-term aim is to produce a more stable budget position through continuing to make efficiencies and developing the potential for greater income generation. The LEA is moving towards improved medium-term financial planning and a sound start has been made to longer term planning through the establishment of a three-year capital programme. However, corporate budget making decisions are insufficiently transparent to schools. Financial decisions relating to education are made well and reflect the high priority given to raising standards and improving the quality of education. In particular, members agreed to pass on increases in education SSA despite the potential of needing to make cuts in other service areas.

98. The leadership provided by elected members is satisfactory overall and increasingly becoming stronger. Members have a clear sense of the importance of education and are committed to the provision of high quality education services. There is broad agreement across the different political parties on the majority of educational matters. Strengths of the role of members lie in the effective work undertaken by the education standards working group and in providing a strong lead on corporate parenting responsibilities in relation to children in public care. All statutory plans have been approved and are revised as appropriate. As yet, members have not given a strong lead in the development of policies to combat social exclusion. The timely development of policies in combating social exclusion has been prevented because the council has been slow to reach agreement on all of the measures necessary. Senior officers provide members with good quality briefing notes and clear, succinct and timely advice. Regular seminars and conferences for members have enhanced their understanding of educational priorities.

99. The new director has been in post for about 18 months. He has been instrumental in developing a climate of mutual respect and trust with schools and other stakeholders. Structures for consultation are now effective and a new consultative framework and a communication strategy have been developed around twice termly meetings with headteachers and, increasingly, more contact with governors. Rapid and accelerated progress has been secured in a short space of time in areas such as strategic planning and policy development. Staffing difficulties, especially recruitment and retention of LEA officers in a context of high cost of

housing and low unemployment, continue to be an inhibiting factor to development. The LEA is increasingly finding ways to deal with vacancies through re-grading posts, secondments and job sharing.

## **Partnership**

100. Partnership work between education and other corporate departments and outside agencies is satisfactory. Moves towards improved co-ordinated action across services within and beyond the authority are seen as a corporate priority and a key component in the formulation of a community plan. This strong corporate drive is helping to strengthen and accelerate links at the strategic level between education and, for example, the police and health. There are particularly productive relationships with health in relation to the children's strategy group and for supporting pupils with complex emotional and behavioural difficulties. Difficulties in establishing child and adolescent mental health services are being overcome through a new structure and increased staffing. Purposeful relationships leading to positive action have also been secured with the dioceses. At a strategic level, links with education business partnerships and for supporting family literacy and numeracy are underdeveloped.

101. Visits to schools confirm that there is strong support for children and their families from the child and family counsellor service, especially where children have complex emotional problems. In other areas, improvements at the strategic level have not always been reflected on the ground. A fifth of the schools visited reported a less than prompt response by social services for families at risk. Improvements in child and adolescent mental health services are slow to impact in school. Two of the schools visited reported difficulties in securing psychiatric support, even where this is a strong recommendation within statements.

## **Management services**

### **Summary**

102. Wokingham provides satisfactory management services to schools, with some significant strengths. As a small unitary authority in an area of high employment, the LEA is clear that it is unable to secure all services to schools effectively and has rightly prioritised the procurement of services. It offers a restricted range of management services directly to schools, but provides a number of others through external contracts. Financial support is good, while property services, personnel support, catering and support for information and communication technology in administration are satisfactory. Although day-to-day support for schools is satisfactory, lack of capacity within the authority has constrained strategic development in personnel and information and communication technology.

103. The LEA organises a useful and well-received annual trade fair which allows schools to compare the services offered by a range of external providers against those offered by the LEA. There is an effective education contracts team that manages the external contracts for catering, cleaning, waste collection, grounds maintenance and advises schools on tendering for services and negotiates expertly on their behalf. The LEA's willingness to help tailor services to schools' needs is a strength. The authority is also participating in a Department for Education and Skills

(DfES)-funded pilot project, 'new models of service delivery', looking at the scope for regional co-operation in school improvement services and functions such as personnel/payroll, finance, student support, admissions and information and communication technology, which has good potential to broaden both purchasing power and service capacity.

104. The amounts delegated for the different services are realistic and generally allocated on the basis of need; schools purchase from a range of providers, including good take-up of LEA services. Consultation on the delegation process was effective, and the schools visited were clear about the options available to them. Although many schools still seek the reassurance of purchasing services through the LEA, they are rapidly developing their capacity to seek value for money. The LEA 'Services to schools' brochure clearly delineates the centrally resourced services from those offered for purchase and feedback is invited through termly bursars' meetings. The existing services to schools group with headteacher and bursar representatives has rightly been set up to oversee the services offered to schools.

## Evaluation

105. **Financial advice services:** financial advice and monitoring by the LEA is good. All but one school buys into the financial advice service. The service, provided through a helpline and school visits, is responsive and expert. School budget plans and spending are monitored closely by the team. Most schools plan their budgets cautiously on an annual basis and there was only one with a deficit at the end of 1999/2000. The team provides schools with a booklet of detailed spreadsheets of financial benchmarking information but this is not accompanied by a commentary or graphics to aid its interpretation.

106. Schools are well informed about the budget-setting process and budget information is both clear and timely. In the school survey, schools rated the LEA in the top 25 per cent and between satisfactory and good, in relation to support on the planning and control of the school budget, the accuracy of financial information systems, the arrangements for schools to make financial transactions, and arrangements for schools with deficit budgets. All the schools visited valued the financial advice service highly.

107. **Personnel Services:** personnel support for schools is satisfactory, but the strategic personnel service provided by the LEA is unsatisfactory. Difficulty in recruiting specialist personnel staff led to the LEA deciding not to continue to offer personnel advice to schools. Since April 2000 the support for most schools has been provided by Surrey LEA through contracts with schools brokered by Wokingham. Initial problems deriving from differences in personnel procedures and from the reluctance of some schools to take on the administration of contracts have been successfully overcome. In the school survey, carried out in February, personnel advice and guidance and casework support was rated in the bottom 25 per cent of all LEAs surveyed. However, the schools visited in June reported that the Surrey service was now satisfactory, and some described good casework support.

108. Strategic support for schools from the corporate personnel service in Wokingham is weak. There has been no education expertise within the team since

September 2000. There is no personnel manual for schools to guide them on Wokingham procedures, the single status agreement has not yet been fully implemented and there is no policy on managing attendance of staff. The LEA is unable to provide statistics on teacher turnover or absences and has little information on whether schools are discharging their employers' responsibilities appropriately. Despite this inadequate support, the recharges to the education budget in 2000/2001 were high. The personnel service is currently the subject of a Best Value review and the outcome is likely to lead sensibly to the devolution of funding to education for a personnel consultant.

#### **Recommendation**

- strengthen the LEA's professional education personnel capacity.

109. **Payroll:** The payroll service for schools is good. It is provided through an LEA contract with an external provider, and all schools buy into this. The contract is effectively managed by corporate financial services, and error rates are very low. The schools visited rated the service positively and reported that the change to direct contact with the provider for queries had greatly improved communication. The service is responsive to the views of schools, canvassed through bursars' meetings and customer surveys.

110. **Premises support:** provision for a helpdesk which gives schools access to a managed repairs and maintenance service to cover primarily emergency work in schools, servicing and energy procurement, is sound. The repairs and maintenance service level agreement requires schools to pool their payments and the service is provided by a three year contract with an external contractor to maximise economies of scale. The quality of work is effectively monitored by surveyors from Wokingham property services which also offers advice and project management on a fee-paying basis.

111. Schools are clear about their premises responsibilities and those visited were in reasonable condition and had appropriate rolling maintenance programmes in place. The majority of schools (92 per cent) buy into the reactive maintenance service and they rated building maintenance as average (satisfactory) in the school survey. Schools reported the arrangements were fair and that the service is responsive and of reasonable quality.

112. **Information and communication technology (ICT):** support for ICT in administration is satisfactory. The education department has now developed a clear strategy for information and communication technology which addresses effectively the weaknesses in electronic information exchange between the LEA and schools that were highlighted in the response to the school survey. Systems for the electronic transfer of information are developing satisfactorily. The authority outsourced its corporate information and communication technology support in November 2000 and no longer provides direct technical support to schools. Support for information and communication technology in administration is now offered through the corporate provider but details of the service were provided very late; consequently very few schools have bought into this. Most schools have opted to purchase support from the

provider of their information and communication technology software, which, in those schools visited, was rated satisfactory. The LEA rightly intends to monitor the quality of services provided to schools.

113. **Catering:** the provision of school meals is satisfactory, but the external contractor has had difficulty recruiting staff. School meals funding is delegated to secondary schools, one-third of which buy into the LEA contract. The education contracts team monitors the service effectively and schools can negotiate their own arrangements with the contractor. In the school survey, catering was rated as satisfactory, close to the average for all LEAs.

## **SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

### **Strategy**

114. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs (SEN) is good. The SEN policy and vision, produced after consultation with the full range of stakeholders, is comprehensive and has been shared effectively with members, schools and other partners. The schools visited have understanding of the relevance of the policy in relation to the government's agenda for SEN and inclusion, and to the local provision in Wokingham schools. In no school visited during the inspection was the LEA's strategy rated less than satisfactory, in fact, in half it was rated good.

115. Detailed development plans and annual action plans describe clearly the strategic response in the short and medium-term and include a well-conceived multi-disciplinary approach to inclusion. There is a strong and effective focus on activities that maintain the momentum towards enabling schools to provide support which is timely and focused from an early stage. Plans are carefully monitored and reviewed to assess progress and effectiveness; progress is good. Longer-term plans are not formulated fully, but consultancy and feasibility studies into increased inclusion, early intervention and other aspects of the strategy have taken place. Discussions with elected members, key partners and interested parties about the plans provide an appropriate opportunity for the LEA to secure continued consensus on the pace and direction of change in the longer term.

#### **Recommendation**

- formalise, through consultation, the long-term aims for special educational needs, including the further development of inclusion and early intervention.

116. Budgetary control is strong and resources are increasingly used efficiently and effectively. At a strategic level, monitoring of the special educational needs budget and prediction of needs have improved and are now good. Funding for most pupils with statements has been delegated to schools, and in proportion to the total education budget, the LEA spends less than the national average on meeting special

educational needs. Expenditure on maintaining statements, delegated funds to special schools, SEN transport costs and fees for independent schools are comparatively high. The strategy seeks to make appropriate staged and paced reductions to cost. Expenditure for non-statemented special educational needs pupils is comparatively low. The delegation of funds for SEN to schools through additional educational need weighting has been increased; however, it remains limited in amount and is under review. Arrangements to monitor the use of delegated and devolved funding have not kept pace with changes, but systems are developing. A recently completed review in six pilot schools has helped improve the capacity of schools to meet the needs of all pupils with special educational needs, a finding confirmed in two of the schools visited. The review is being implemented cyclically in all schools, as part of the LEA's strategy to formalise monitoring.

#### **Recommendation**

- Complete and implement the results of the LEA's review of funding for special educational needs.

117. The LEA is conducting a timely and sensibly phased review of SEN provision. The ultimate aims, which are clearly understood by schools, are to design comprehensive local provision for special educational needs and to develop an outreach role for special schools. A positive start has been made through developing provision for hearing-impaired pupils in three designated mainstream schools. There is also effective resource provision for those junior-aged pupils within the autistic spectrum. The authority acknowledges the gaps in local provision for mainstream pre-school, nursery and secondary pupils within the autistic spectrum and for girls with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Where forecasts of needs in these areas indicate that there are likely to be viable groups of children, there are plans to establish specialist local bases, subject to resources being available.

118. Appropriate attention is given within plans to the development of effective partnerships. The parent/partnership service is successful. Parents and schools take advantage of the well-trained individual parental support workers and of the advocacy of the two part-time parent/partnership officers. Regional conciliation services are in the process of development. The open and consultative liaison between parents, officers and the parent/partnership service has helped to reduce significantly the number of contentious cases requiring appeal to an SEN tribunal, with no referrals in the last year. Links within the council and with health services are good at a strategic level and are developing satisfactorily elsewhere. A positive start has been made with early intervention work for pre-school children with special educational needs.

#### **Statutory obligations**

119. Statutory obligations are securely met and their discharge is regularly monitored. A multi-agency moderating panel meets weekly to review requests for assessments; it ensures a fair and transparent response to the statementing process across the authority. Evidence indicates a clear and appropriate emphasis on the

assessment of need in the early years with increasingly more children assessed in good time for entry to school.

120. The administration of statements is good, meeting improved targets each year since the inception of the authority. The administration team works effectively in liaison with schools, social services and health. Figures for completion of the statutory assessment procedures are very good with 97 per cent processed within 18 weeks. If those delayed for reasons beyond the LEA's direct control are included, the rate of completion remains high at 80 per cent compared to the national average of 58 per cent. The quality of statements is good, with evidence of significant improvement over time, so that they now exhibit the necessary qualities of detail, quantification and specificity. Annual reviews are consistently monitored and amendments made wherever necessary. Representation by LEA staff at reviews, including for those pupils in independent schools, is also appropriate.

### **SEN school improvement and Best Value**

121. The provision of support services to schools is generally good with few significant weaknesses. In nearly four-fifths of the schools visited, support for improvement was justifiably rated good. The work of education psychologists and the behaviour and emotional support team (BEST) is a clear strength of LEA support for school improvement. The schools visited value the specialist intervention work completed with pupils at risk, and they are encouraged by the open consultative approach employed by support services. The schools visited also value the learning support and sensory impaired services. There are good training and effective networks for special educational needs co-ordinators and good documentary advice is provided for schools. Criteria have been developed for the different stages of the new Code of Practice across a spectrum of need. A moderated system of use of the criteria is being established which is enabling practice to be increasingly consistent across the district.

122. Nevertheless, the LEA recognises that there are gaps in some areas of support, and work is in hand to tackle them. There is insufficient specialist SEN advisory expertise to inform evaluation, planning and development at a detailed level. Progress of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools is monitored appropriately through individual education programmes and annual review procedures. Slowness in providing a target-setting process has inhibited the development of school self-review programmes.

123. Aims of the SEN policy and strategy are challenging, effective plans are clearly understood by schools and other partners, and management systems are good. Lines of accountability are clear and staff performance is monitored closely. The LEA exercises its functions in support of pupils with SEN with a clear focus on raising standards. Expenditure is below the average; targeting of funding is improving; appropriate attention is being given to early intervention; and prevention and monitoring systems are developing steadily. Value for money is sound.

## **SECTION 5: ACCESS**

### **The supply of school places**

124. Planning of school places in Wokingham is satisfactory with significant strengths. There are below average proportions of surplus places in the authority's primary schools and none at secondary level. The provision of additional classrooms means sufficient secondary places are available to meet demands. There is uncertainty about the location of planned future housing development since a recent development proposal was turned down. The authority inherited a situation with many planning anomalies, which it is beginning to address effectively through a careful strategic approach.

125. The LEA roll forecasts are accurate, but do not currently include an allowance for new housing development. Overall, they show a gradual decrease in the primary school population and a continuing increase at secondary level but there are pockets of both under and over subscription. The LEA is rightly developing more detailed local projections, and is involved in research with the other ex-Berkshire unitary authorities to improve the estimation of numbers of pupils from new housing.

126. Wokingham's school organisation plan is clear with improved links to the asset management plan and the admissions process. Schools are consulted well on the plan and links with the dioceses and neighbouring authorities are good. The LEA has made sound progress in a number of areas: it has identified six primary planning areas, reviewed school capacities; is updating its site plans; and has commissioned an independent review of its secondary schools. It has rightly delayed its planned review of schools' designated catchment areas until the secondary review is complete, and the location of new housing development is clearer. The LEA has effectively reduced the capacity of undersubscribed primary schools through changes in standard number and amalgamations.

127. The school organisation committee has been set up as required and operates effectively. The class size plan will be fully implemented by September 2001, although the standard numbers for some schools make class organisation difficult.

### **Asset management planning**

128. Asset management planning in Wokingham is good. The local policy statement is clear and comprehensive and has a strong focus on raising standards through its objectives and the ranking of priorities. The LEA has successfully met DfES deadlines and was graded as satisfactory, overall, in the DfES appraisal process. Condition and suitability information is complete and all schools have copies of their surveys in a useful handbook. Council surveyors visit schools annually to update these. The asset management plan is reviewed annually in consultation with schools and with the headteacher, governor, member and diocesan representatives on the asset management planning forum.

129. Despite relatively low levels of capital funding and the high cost of building work locally, the authority has reasonable planned maintenance arrangements in place and expects to cover about half its priority 1 and 2 need this year. The LEA is

creative in collaborating with schools to combine different sources of funding for building works in order to use the scarce funds most effectively. It has been successful in bidding for new deal for schools funding, particularly through standards-related bids. It also raises money from housing developers and effectively supports schools in bidding for seed challenge monies. The schools visited were clear about the priorities in the asset management plan and about their responsibility to fund priority projects out of their own devolved capital. Guidance and training provided to schools and governors on the different sources of premises funding are good, and the LEA gives schools useful advice.

130. The capital programme in education is well managed with schools being effectively involved in the planning of works on their premises and few projects overrunning once they begin. The property services team provides good project management.

### **Admissions**

131. Arrangements for admissions to Wokingham schools are sound with some clear strengths. Most schools are community schools, and primary schools organise their own admissions, while the LEA co-ordinates secondary admissions. The LEA has recently established an admissions forum which offers an important opportunity for stakeholders to contribute to the planned reviews of schools' designated areas and of secondary provision.

132. The admissions brochures are clear and comprehensive with good information on secondary schools' allocations over the last four years. They comply with the admissions Code of Practice. The criteria for admissions to schools have been revised since Wokingham took over from Berkshire. They are primarily based on residence in the school's designated area, followed by sibling links and medical or social reasons, while the criterion of other strong family links to the school has rightly been dropped. However, some school brochures have not been amended to reflect the revisions to the criteria. There is a common secondary admissions timetable and application form across the ex-Berkshire LEAs, organised through the useful inter-unitary planning group. Applications are processed electronically, and the LEA has good arrangements to pass transfer information to secondary schools.

133. Variation between schools in the time of admission to primary reception classes rightly prompted a review, and all schools will begin to take rising five pupils part-time from September 2001. From 2002, there will be a single date for application for a reception place, monitored by the LEA, in order to improve planning by reducing multiple applications. The schools visited were in favour of both of these amendments and had received good support from the LEA for any necessary changes in accommodation.

134. The LEA has a target of meeting 95 per cent of first preferences at secondary transfer, and in September 2000 94 per cent were met. The LEA has good collaborative arrangements with schools which often agree to accept first preferences above their standard number. Despite the limited number of secondary places, the number of appeals at secondary transfer is not increasing from year to year. The appeals process was delayed by the election this year and will be

completed by mid-July 2002, rather late for secondary pupils to be inducted into their new schools.

## **Social exclusion**

135. Wokingham's work so far in combating social exclusion is satisfactory. A key strength is the strong corporate drive for improvement, which culminated in the adoption, in November 2000, of a corporate policy for equalities including a separate policy statement on racial issues. The authority has sensibly adopted the race equality standards. Corporate plans include challenging targets for advancement but these are obviously recent. An important element in sustaining momentum for improvement is the corporate working group on inclusion attended by senior managers. Effective partnerships with other departments and other agencies are developing. This has led to much-improved provision and practice for children in public care and for child protection.

136. Within education, there is a strengthened focus on improving the educational and welfare needs of vulnerable children. Well-targeted initiatives are securing better access to education for a range of disaffected or vulnerable youngsters. For instance, in supporting successful Year 6 and Year 7 transfer of Travellers; through reducing exclusions to ensure that pupils increasingly stay in school, and in improving rates of return where they do not; through well focused action to improve attendance and behaviour in schools.

137. The council and its members have taken some time to tackle social inclusion and from the perspective of its schools has been slow to acknowledge overtly the diversity that exists within the district. There remains an absence of a specific, committee-endorsed policy and plan for promoting social inclusion. Visits to schools indicate broad support for greater social inclusion, but scepticism about the extent of political commitment, especially in relation to the provision of sufficient resources to effect change. Improvements are also necessary in supporting children with English as an additional language, addressing racial and cultural diversity in a district where schools are largely mono-cultural, and in providing fully effective alternative education for those out of school.

### **Recommendations**

- as a priority develop an agreed over-arching policy and strategy for increased social inclusion; and
- improve support and challenge to schools so that they can confidently tackle issues of diversity and cultural harmony in the curriculum.

138. Expenditure on access is lower than national averages and performance is sound overall. Not all of the different access services fully meet Best Value requirements; however, there is no doubt that individual strategic plans are clear, that aims are challenging and that management systems are good.

## Provision of education otherwise than at school

139. The amount, quality and flexibility of support overall for pupils out of school are satisfactory. The LEA's procedures for registering and monitoring the welfare and educational progress of these pupils are also sound. Children in public care who are permanently excluded have full-time provision. Alternative provision for other permanently excluded pupils, twelve hours a week on average, is inadequate. All pupils have a thorough educational assessment when they start alternative education which informs individually tailored programmes. Provision is well-structured; individual timetables show appropriate concentration on the core subjects of the national curriculum, supplemented by work on information and communication technology and other subjects, accompanied by a focus on personal and social development. For pupils at Key Stage 4, there is an appropriate range of opportunities to achieve success in accredited courses in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, as well as those leading to GCSE and GNVQ awards. Although the current quality of provision is satisfactory, arrangements lack the coherence and sufficiency to meet future requirements, especially that of attaining appropriate full-time educational provision by September 2002.

### Recommendation

- as a priority take action to provide detailed and costed plans for delivery of coherent and effective full-time provision.

140. Referral systems and liaison arrangements with other departments and agencies are sound. Analysis of details of permanently excluded pupils over the last two years indicates that preparation and arrangements for re-admission to mainstream schools are rarely (about five per cent) unsatisfactory and often good. Over three-fifths of permanently excluded pupils are returned to mainstream schools and in three-quarters of those cases the placement has held. The LEA works well to secure early re-entry, and on average primary age pupils secure re-entry within half a term, and Key Stage 3 pupils within just over a term. There is no explicit protocol between the LEA and schools about the re-entry of permanently excluded pupils, but there is an understanding which, in all but the most complex cases, operates satisfactorily, despite the relative shortage of spare places. The tracking of pupils who are out of school is sound, with appropriate use of other departments and agencies, as well as internal monitoring through the education welfare service.

### Recommendation

- formalise current practice through the development with schools of a protocol for early re-entry of excluded pupils to full-time education in school.

141. Arrangements for educating pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers are good. Supervision of the welfare and educational progress of children educated at

home by their parents are satisfactory and there are good arrangements for educating pupils who are ill.

## **Attendance**

142. Support for improving attendance is highly effective. Attendance rates in primary and secondary schools are well above national averages. Unauthorised absence is below the national average for primary and well below the national average for secondary. The education welfare service (EWS) has good links with other teams, both inside and outside the education service. The service makes a particularly important and effective contribution to work on exclusions, support for Traveller children and in supporting children in public care.

143. The LEA meets all statutory and legal responsibilities. Resort to legal powers is carefully judged and evaluated to secure optimum impact from its use. In appropriate cases, the LEA with its partners in social services is increasingly using education supervision orders. Visits to schools are systematic, clearly timetabled, appropriately differentiated according to need, and based on an effective audit. Education welfare service plans and documentation, including its handbook, provide a secure framework which identifies clearly the responsibilities of the different partners for securing improved attendance. Good practice and projects focusing on the needs of individual schools are well established and cover the early years to the later years of secondary school. The education welfare service provides good support to schools in helping to reduce the negative impact of extended holidays upon pupils' attendance.

144. The education welfare service sets clear, challenging targets for improvement and staff management is good. Expenditure is above that of similar LEAs and national averages, but the effectiveness of the education welfare service's contribution to school improvement, its undoubted impact in securing challenge and support for schools, and the justifiably high regard in which it is held by the schools, secure good value for money.

## **Behaviour support**

145. The LEA provides good support for improving behaviour in schools. The work of two services, the behaviour and emotional support team (BEST) and the education psychology service (EPS), are strengths of the LEA. Effective work takes place within a strategy and framework delineated by a comprehensive behaviour support plan, recently revised after extensive consultation. In all schools visited, behaviour support was judged to be at least satisfactory and good in about four out of five schools.

146. The behaviour and emotional support team, consisting of a small team of teachers, support workers and child and family counsellors, was created by the LEA during its first year of operation. As well as developing schools' own strategic capability to handle behavioural issues, it also provides effective models of parental counselling and other provision as part of a spectrum of support for pupils with difficulties. Schools justifiably welcome the expertise and effectiveness of the behaviour and emotional support team, as well as the promptness and directness of

its interventions. The education psychology service and the behaviour and emotional support team use a wide range of strategies to help schools analyse the complexities of individual pupil difficulties and then develop with staff an equally wide range of strategies to manage and modify pupil behaviour. Termly planning meetings, involving the behaviour and emotional support team, the education psychology service, the education welfare service, child and family counsellors and school staff, have been especially helpful in identifying strategies to support pupils and their families.

147. The revised behaviour support plan sets appropriately challenging behaviour targets and the means of achieving them. When the targets were originally set, the 2002 target (24 permanent exclusions) was regarded as demanding. Between 1998/1999 and 1999/2000 the schools and LEA worked successfully together to reduce permanent exclusions by a half. As a result the 2002 target has already been exceeded (19 last year, 18 this). The LEA is now exploring additional ways of capping these figures and further reducing them. Such work does not guarantee popularity with the schools, but it has been carried out with a firmness of purpose and genuine understanding of the difficulties faced by schools. The LEA does not maintain a pupil referral unit and officers argue sensibly that the absence of a pupil referral unit leads to faster readmission to mainstream, a view supported by the good rate of reintegration of permanently excluded pupils. The LEA is also successfully tackling a lower than average increase in fixed term exclusions in primary and secondary schools despite an absence of systematic provision of learning support units or similar to provide useful, temporary or short term provision for those at risk from exclusion. Fixed term exclusions in special schools, although reducing, remain higher than the national median and are too high.

### **Health, safety, welfare and child protection**

148. Support for health and safety in schools is satisfactory. The policies, plans and documentation for health and safety are clear, well formulated and accessible. Since the inception of the LEA there has been a programme of risk assessment visits and interviews undertaken by consultants engaged by the LEA. The programme of visits has now covered 70 per cent of the schools. All aspects of health and safety are covered in a good manual. Responsibilities in schools are allocated to manual-holders, who are responsible for completing and returning accident and incident reports which are routinely considered by officers, elected members and unions. Effective training is secured for manual holders. There are also sound documents for the emergency plan and the emergency/disaster recovery plan.

149. Arrangements for child protection are satisfactory. There is a regularly updated list of teachers with designated responsibility for child protection. The LEA has completed a total review leading to the replacement of outdated inherited documentation; new guidance and documentation are good. The schools visited welcome the briefings and training for designated teachers on child protection procedures. In no school visited during the inspection were the LEA arrangements judged less than satisfactory, but in two there was some concern about the accessibility and speed of response from social services.

## **Children in public care**

150. Provision for children in public care is good and support continues to improve steadily. The council has actively taken corporate responsibility to promote the educational achievement as well as the welfare of children in their care. There are regular and informative reports to members. Children and young people have attended committee meetings to express views, and members are not only tracking a cohort of children through their school lives but also take pains to ensure that success at school is celebrated. There is effective officer involvement and an appropriate steering group with representatives from social services, education and health authorities. An assigned education welfare officer, an educational psychologist and a teacher provide additional support.

151. There is an effective database of all children in public care, provided and used jointly by the education and social services departments to track pupils, to analyse prior attainment, and to set appropriate educational targets. Target-setting is thorough, based on good pupil-level information and has led to the appropriate adoption of national targets. There is a detailed list of all designated teachers and education and social services are jointly providing effective training for carers, teachers and officers. Partnership between the two departments and with health agencies is effective at strategic level and within schools. The LEA has developed with social services an effective 20-day protocol for securing full-time education for all children in care. A sound interim Best Value review of services for all children in public care, confirms that aims are challenging, plans are well formulated and communicated to those involved, and that management systems are sound or better.

## **Minority ethnic children**

152. Provision for the education of Traveller children (where the LEA is responsible for running the Berkshire wide consortium) is good. The Traveller education service is a flexible, multi-skilled service which swiftly assesses and places individual pupils. The service has clear targets for development. Efforts have resulted in a steady improvement in both registration and attendance of Traveller pupils. Latest figures indicate nearly 80 per cent attendance in primary schools and about 50 per cent attendance in secondary schools. Support from education welfare service in securing improvements has been significant. As well as offering appropriate support for individual children, the Traveller education service is also improving the strategic capacity of school staff to respond to Traveller needs and development.

153. There are few pupils from other minority ethnic heritages. These pupils are generally dispersed with only a few schools in parts of the west of the district having relatively higher percentages of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The LEA now has detailed statistics of individual attainment at all key stages and these are starting to be used appropriately to inform target-setting for individual pupils. There is no evidence of underachievement within specific ethnic groups. Nevertheless, there are weaknesses in the LEA support for minority ethnic pupils. There is insufficient reference within the education development plan to ethnicity, minority ethnic attainment and to the setting of targets for pupils from minority ethnic heritages. Support for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) is inadequate and until recently investment of resources in this area was limited. In about a fifth of

schools visited support for EAL was unsatisfactory, specifically where the needs were for European language EAL support. More generally, EAL provision is too focused on individuals and insufficiently related to developing whole school curriculum strategies and building teacher skills.

#### **Recommendation**

- devise strategies to support schools in meeting the needs of pupils with English as an additional language.

#### **Measures to combat racism**

154. Provision for combating racism in this area is now satisfactory, but impact, as yet, is limited. The new LEA inherited no tradition of reporting racial incidents. In light of the findings of the Macpherson report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, the LEA has taken a range of appropriate steps. For instance, it has informed schools of the implications of the report, has issued procedures for reporting details of harassment and racial incidents and has secured well-regarded training to raise school awareness of a range of appropriate measures for combating racism. There are now clear procedures for reporting racial incidents and a secure monitoring system for analysing the reports submitted by schools and for ensuring appropriate action is taken. The schools visited were aware of the requirements for racist incidents to be reported and had done so. Links between the education department, housing, planning, social services and police on action against racism are patchy, but improving. Newly developed educational policies on equality of opportunity and racial harassment are sound.

## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **To improve the implementation, review and evaluation of the improvement strategy:**

- strengthen the success criteria in the Education Development Plan and other strategic plans so that they are sharply focused on improving the quality of education and raising standards.

### **To improve the understanding of how resources are allocated to priorities:**

- make corporate budget decision-making processes more open and transparent to schools.

### **To ensure the Best Value review programme is deliverable:**

- urgently appraise the number of Best Value reviews programmed and make them more strategic in order to seek genuine step changes in performance and to ensure manageability within the authority's capacity to complete reviews.

### **To improve the effectiveness of monitoring, challenge support and intervention:**

- design the new system of categorisation of schools so that it is manageable, focused appropriately on the identification and categorisation of schools causing concern and leads to suitably differentiated provision of monitoring;
- clarify the function and purpose of monitoring by the LEA and ensure that headteachers and governors understand the deployment of quality development officers and are clear about time allocations;
- follow up monitoring visits to all schools with written feedback that provides sharp and clear judgements and focused action points, and make the reports available to the chair of governors as well as the headteacher; and
- as a priority take action to produce better performance data. Ensure it is integrated with and used alongside other data already available, including financial data, to produce a comprehensive and useable package with clear analytical commentaries and overviews so that the information can be used by schools in assessing their performance. Ensure that the quality development officers are enabled to make use of the full range of data in monitoring school development.

### **To make more efficient and effective use of school improvement services:**

- use the opportunity afforded by current vacancies to:
  - review the composition and size of the quality development team;
  - ensure a good match between expertise and strategic priorities and in particular to find ways to strengthen challenge and support for the early years, special and secondary schools; and

- reduce the number of monitoring visits made routinely to schools capable of carrying out school improvement effectively.

**To improve support for the collection and analysis of data:**

- prioritise the production of primary value-added data to enable comparisons between schools to be made; and
- improve data provision to secondary schools in line with planned developments.

**To improve support for information and communication technology:**

- work with information and communication technology co-ordinators in primary schools to develop approaches to the assessment of pupils' information and communication technology.

**To improve systems and evaluation of support for schools causing concern:**

- formalise systems of allocation of additional resources by identifying clearly:
  - the different levels of support schools within the different categories can expect to receive; and, for each school causing concern:
    - the intended purpose of the use of additional resources; and
    - success criteria against which the effectiveness and value for money of the support can be judged.

**To improve support for raising standards in the early years:**

- as a priority take action to improve the quality of training for planning and implementing the foundation curriculum; and
- provide the support necessary for headteachers to enable them to monitor and evaluate the quality of education and standards within the early years.

**To improve post-16 provision:**

- help to facilitate rational cost-effective local provision for post-16 by encouraging more links and consortium arrangements.

**To ensure the LEA is meeting its strategic responsibilities as an employer of staff in schools:**

- strengthen the LEA's professional education personnel capacity.

**In order to improve the implementation of policy and support for pupils with special educational needs:**

- formalise, through consultation, the long-term aims for special educational needs, including the further development of inclusion and early intervention; and

- complete and implement the results of the LEA's review of funding for special educational needs.

**To improve arrangements for tackling social exclusion:**

- as a priority develop an agreed over-arching policy and strategy for increased social inclusion; and
- improve support and challenge to schools so that they can confidently tackle issues of diversity and cultural harmony in the curriculum.

**To meet the requirement for full-time education for excluded pupils from 2002:**

- as a priority take action to provide detailed and costed plans for delivery of coherent and effective full-time provision.

**To improve further the return of excluded pupils to full-time education in school:**

- formalise current practice through the development with schools of a protocol for early re-entry of excluded pupils to full time education in school.

**To improve the attainment of pupils from minority ethnic heritages:**

- devise strategies to support schools in meeting the needs of pupils with English as an additional language.

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