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IN EDUCATION**

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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 (July 1999)* which focuses on the effectiveness of the local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, focus groups of headteachers, governors and parents, 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 80 schools. The response rate was 69 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one nursery school, ten primary schools, five secondary schools, three special schools and two Pupil Referral Units. A further ten schools were visited as part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy monitoring. 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 that 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. Wandsworth LEA serves an area of South London which includes some very affluent areas but which overall is significantly more disadvantaged than most areas of England. The proportion of ethnic minority pupils in the schools (53 per cent) is very high, as is the number of pupils who have English as a second language. Schools in Wandsworth are generally well managed. Attainment, both on entry to schools and later, is generally high for London. Although below national averages in tests for 11-year-olds and higher grade passes in examinations for 16-year-olds, pupils' attainment in the tests for seven and 14-year-olds in Wandsworth is in line with the national average.

5. The LEA has benefited from stable political leadership which has been (and remains) both clear as to principle and appropriately pragmatic in application. The "Wandsworth way" represents a distinctive style and ethos and in detail includes several of the strategies, piloted in Wandsworth, which are now embedded in the national standards agenda. Challenging schools to raise standards, whilst promoting their autonomy in an education service that encourages diversity and increases parental choice, are key objectives for education in Wandsworth.

6. The LEA performs almost all of its functions satisfactorily, and the great majority well. There is a consistently high quality of performance across all major aspects that is clear testimony to highly effective management over a number of years. Strategic planning and performance management are strengths of the authority and it is adept at aligning resources to priorities. Above all, perhaps, Wandsworth has been successful in enhancing, particularly through effective guidance in the use of management information, the capacity of its headteachers and senior managers to manage the improvement of their schools.

7. We found no areas of major concern. There are, however, some areas where performance could be improved. The Education Development Plan (EDP) is not an effective document, although this seems to be an anomaly. The LEA's capacity to plan, prioritise and monitor its educational support is otherwise well-established and strong. A lack of surplus capacity in secondary schools, combined with the pressure of demand on some very popular secondary schools, limits the LEA's success in meeting the Council's objective to provide choice for residents. The operation of complex local admissions arrangements is not cost-effective at school or LEA level, and causes anxiety for some pupils and parents. Support for information and communication technology (ICT), although improving, is less than satisfactory; so too is support for attendance in some schools. In these areas the weakness is not pronounced.

8. In some respects, Wandsworth pays a price for its own success. It moved towards a more modern relationship with its schools well before most LEAs, a move that was not universally popular. The headteachers we met – more than half of those in the borough – were highly capable and independent, and by no means uniformly sympathetic to the political stance of the Council. Debate between schools and the LEA is clearly often robust, but it is informed by mutual respect so that it is also constructive. Schools rightly feel that they are adequately consulted and trust the LEA to respond to their concerns swiftly and competently.

9. This report makes a number of recommendations, directed for the most part to the improvement of what is already satisfactory or good. The LEA is in good shape to implement these recommendations, and needs to make no major changes. The parents, pupils and schools in Wandsworth are well served.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

10. Wandsworth is the second largest of the 12 Inner London Boroughs and serves an inner city community in which the extremes of wealth and poverty are represented. Overall, the area is significantly more disadvantaged than most areas of England. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (31.4 per cent in primary schools and 26.8 per cent in secondary schools) is also well above the national average, although in line with similar London boroughs. A very high proportion of the borough's population of 270,550 is of ethnic minority heritage; pupils from ethnic minority groups make up 53 per cent of the current school population. The percentage of children (age 0-19) for whom a statement of special educational need (SEN) is maintained is 1.9 per cent, below the national average of 2.1 per cent.

11. The Council offers nursery education provision for all four year olds and for three-quarters of three year olds in maintained and non-maintained settings. Forty-eight schools have nursery classes. Transfer to secondary schools is at age eleven, although 34.1 per cent of pupils from Wandsworth primary schools choose out of borough or independent schools and do not transfer into LEA maintained secondary schools. There is also a pronounced movement of pupils in the secondary phase with pupils from Lambeth and Merton moving into Wandsworth schools, and pupils moving out of Wandsworth to schools in Richmond and neighbouring boroughs. In 1999 9.7 per cent of the primary school population arrived in schools outside the normal reception time. For secondary schools the percentage had fallen to 4.6 per cent of pupils in 1999 from a high of 7.5 per cent in 1995.

12. The Council maintains 80 schools. There are three nursery schools, 58 primary schools (of which 18 are voluntary schools, 34 community schools and six foundation schools), nine secondary schools (of which four are foundation schools and two are voluntary aided Roman Catholic schools) and ten special schools. In addition there are two pupil referral units. Four schools have been awarded Beacon status and six secondary schools have specialist college status. There are 17,800 pupils in nursery and primary schools and 9,600 pupils in secondary schools.

Performance

13. A detailed analysis of the performance of schools in Wandsworth has been supplied to the LEA in the form of the LEA statistical profile, from which some of the following information has been extracted. Further information has been supplied directly by the LEA:

- data collected by the LEA indicate that the attainment of pupils who entered Wandsworth schools in 1998-9 was below the national average. Over the seven years during which the LEA has collected data, the performance of pupils on entry to school has declined, slightly but steadily;
- results in 1999 in the national tests for seven and 14-year-olds are above those in similar authorities and are in line with the national average, except in mathematics for seven year olds which are lower than the average;

- results for eleven year olds in English, mathematics and science are in line with those in similar authorities but below the national average;
- the GCSE results at higher grades are below the national average, although attainment in terms of pupils achieving one A*-G is well above the national average;
- the rate of improvement in results for seven year olds since 1995 has reflected the national trend. The improvement in results for eleven-year-olds, and at GCSE and A-level, have also shadowed the national trend although, in general, attainment is below average. The results for fourteen year olds in mathematics and science have improved at a greater rate than nationally;
- the percentage of primary schools judged to require improvements by OFSTED inspections is lower than that found in similar authorities but above that found nationally. The rate of progress made by primary schools between inspections is greater than the national picture;
- the percentage of secondary schools judged to require improvements is lower than that found in similar authorities and nationally. Schools are also making good progress between inspections;
- the quality of teaching in recent inspections was judged to be better than the national average and had improved at a greater rate than that seen nationally;
- the rate of permanent exclusions in primary schools was above the national rate in 1998 and was well above this in secondary schools;
- attendance in primary schools is below average, although unauthorised absence has fallen in recent years. Attendance and absence in secondary schools are broadly in line with national figures.

Funding

14. Although Wandsworth has the lowest SSA per pupil of any Inner London borough, at around £3500 per pupil, it is still about £1000 per pupil above the average across the country. One of the council's key policies is to keep the Council Tax as low as possible, and as part of this strategy overall expenditure for 1999 was set at £30 million below SSA. It is, therefore, an indication of the Council's commitment to education that over recent years expenditure on this service has been above SSA. The aim, however, has been to move to spending on schools at SSA, a position which was achieved by April 2000.

Table 1. Expenditure against Education SSA for Wandsworth

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>SSA (£M)</u>	<u>SPEND (£M)</u>	<u>DIFFERENCE (%)</u>
1996/97	86.3	89.6	+3.8
1997/98	89.1	90.6	+1.7
1998/99	93.7	97.3	+3.8
1999/00	98.2	98.7	+0.5
2000/01	101.9	101.5	-0.3

15. Over recent years, compared to notional allocations, expenditure on Under-5s and post-16 has been consistently and significantly higher than SSA. Mainstream

expenditure has oscillated around the SSA, and other non-school elements e.g. adult/youth have been consistently below SSA.

16. Compared to the inner London borough (ILB) average, Wandsworth delegates a higher percentage of its Local Schools Budget (LSB), because spending in all Fair Funding categories is at or below the average for comparator LEAs. When compared to national figures, however, most costs are relatively high and the level of delegation to schools at 79.8 per cent is below the national average of 80.8 per cent. Although not counted as delegation, part of the school improvement holdback is also available for devolution to schools. Wandsworth's secondary pupils are the lowest funded and primary pupils the second lowest of any ILB, whilst being funded above the average for the nation as a whole. The result at school level can be seen in Table 2:

Table 2. Delegated amounts per pupil, Wandsworth v National

Sector	National (per pupil)	Wandsworth (per pupil)	Difference
Primary	£1,691	£2,088	+23.5%
Secondary	£2,449	£2,773	+13.2%
Special *	£9,569	£12,966	+35.5%

*Averages in Special schools are dependent on the types of provision and simple comparisons can be misleading.

17. Fair Funding has not been a major issue in Wandsworth because budgets for most relevant services were already delegated. Changes, where needed, have been dealt with efficiently. However, it would have helped headteachers to plan for new expenditure if, in the first year at least, they were given some indication of how much new money had been delegated for these service changes. As further budgets are delegated to schools for 2000/01 the percentage delegated will increase. The budget put before the education committee during the inspection sets out plans to meet the government's statutory targets for delegation and controlling administrative costs.

Council Structure

18. The Council comprises 61 elected Members (50 Conservative and 11 Labour), representing 22 wards. The Education Committee has 18 members, with 16 councillors and two co-opted members: one from the Anglican diocese, the other from the Roman Catholic archdiocese. It is one of eight committees of the Council. The performance and standards monitoring group of seven members, which has been in existence since 1990, scrutinises OFSTED reports and the chief inspector's reports on standards. It is an effective means of monitoring service performance and informing Committee decisions.

The Education Development Plan

19. In addition to the LEA and school targets, the EDP includes targets for the borough relating to Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 3. The EDP was approved by the Secretary of State for three years, subject to the general conditions applicable to all

LEAs. However, the section of the plan relating to LEA policy for schools causing concern was approved for one year only, subject to the LEA submitting a more detailed statement of its procedures. This has been drawn up, in consultation with schools, and has been resubmitted. The SEN action plan drawn up following the SEN review in 1997-98 is updated periodically, and there has been some revision of the original target dates. As a result of this a revised SEN Appendix (4) has been submitted to the DfEE. The LEA strategy for school improvement and guidance for schools has also been revised in the light of the EDP.

20. The priorities identified in the plan are:

- (i) improving standards and opportunities for pupils in literacy and numeracy;
- (ii) extending learning opportunities;
- (iii) recruitment, induction and professional development of staff to ensure the best teaching and support for pupils;
- (iv) giving pupils the best start to their education at all ages and stages;
- (v) identifying and recruiting the best headteachers, senior managers and school governors and supporting them through high quality development and training;
- (vi) improving provision for pupils with special educational needs.

21. The EDP contains a detailed audit of need based on OFSTED data and LEA data for pupils with SEN. Although drawing on performance data held by the LEA, the audit does not include sufficient data to justify either the establishment of the priorities or the rationale for the activities within them. There is a lack of clarity about issues of ethnicity and disadvantage which means that the activities in priorities (ii) and (iv) lack coherence and appear undifferentiated to meet the real needs. The relationship between activities, and the relative priority of activities, is not clear and success criteria are vague.

22. The process by which the statutory targets for literacy and numeracy were set built upon schools' forecasts, and depended upon LEA intervention in some schools to challenge the schools to raise their targets. The extent to which this was a realistic process is questionable, given that attainment in 1999 was 18 per cent below the literacy target for 2002, whilst the mathematics target for 2000 was achieved in 1999.

23. Consultation on the EDP appears to have been very good with partners and other stakeholders, including frontline staff, and was good with primary schools. Secondary schools have less ownership of the plan, with foundation schools finding that the concurrent consultation on the devolution of Standards Fund grants difficult to link to the proposals for funding the EDP's priorities.

24. Despite its weaknesses, the EDP is being implemented successfully. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are well set out. Detailed reports are made on progress in the activities. Although the EDP is not a convincing plan for school improvement, the links made to other corporate plans are good and these are much more coherent and carefully drafted plans. Plans for SEN, behaviour support, ethnic minority achievement and the Quality Protects management action plan, for example, give good detail on how the needs identified by the LEA lead to the priorities in the plans and determine the actions to be taken.

25. The council has a well-established tradition of strategic and annual planning and performance monitoring based on an annual programme of quality and performance review (QPR). This clearly links the objectives for individual officers to corporate and departmental priorities and targets. The education department operational plan is central to the process and links service plans to the QPRs. The Charter Mark Initiative is a key component in the council's quality assurance process and a high proportion of council departments and schools have gained the award.

The Allocation of Resources to Priorities

26. Wandsworth has good mechanisms in place to identify and cost its priorities as well as a good performance management system to ensure these are delivered. The many examples of effective prioritised action include Early Years development, investment in property and improvements in the efficiency of statutory assessments. Members are kept well informed and the director of finance has a representative dedicated to the education department. The result is that budgetary allocation, monitoring and control are a strength of the borough and most areas of operation can demonstrate at least sound value for money. Some external contracts have not been good value and, where this is also the case for any LEA-provided service, comment has been made in the relevant section of this report. For non-traded services, schools have no formal mechanisms to comment on service delivery or to play a role in service planning.

27. There is a climate of openness and schools are consulted about areas for possible delegation, although unanimity of view is seldom the outcome. The LEA has taken a lead and is delegating more than the required elements for 2000/01, and plans to continue working with schools to establish the most constructive balance of traded and centrally held services.

28. Most of the principles of Best Value are evident in the workings of the LEA although the involvement of citizens and those who receive services is not yet fully established. Although the need for formal adoption of the scheme is not fully accepted by the Council, members have adopted a pragmatic approach. A 5-year review plan, implementation budgets, pilot reviews and a manager's 'toolkit' have all been put in place.

Recommendation

In order to improve the Education Development Plan, the LEA should ensure that future versions of the plan:

- link more directly to the departmental operational plan;
- draw more extensively on the detailed audits of need contained in other plans;
- use the performance data available, especially with regard to ethnic minorities, to shape priorities and determine actions.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

29. The EDP is the key statutory document setting out the strategy for school improvement. Its strengths and weaknesses are outlined in section one of this report. However, the LEA has a comprehensive departmental operational plan that draws together a wide range of initiatives focused on school improvement. School improvement action points are set out annually in the chief inspector's report on performance and standards in schools. The thirty thousand futures initiative provides an overarching framework for educational debate and community involvement in the development of the education service. It is regarded highly by schools, governors and the authority's partners as an effective medium for prioritising support and influencing LEA policy. The Early Years and child care development partnership is well served by LEA officers and nursery school headteachers and is thus linked closely with the LEA.

30. Considerable expertise is available to the authority through the education business partnership, which has been re-launched as business and education succeeding together (BEST). This response to local needs, managed through a company limited by guarantee, has enabled the LEA effectively to take a lead on the 14-19 curriculum, leveraging in additional resources, especially through the Single Regeneration Budget. BEST acts as the facilitator for the Excellence in Cities (EiC) partnership steering group comprising headteachers, principals of further education colleges and the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). There is a high emphasis on pupil inclusion within all activities related to EiC in Wandsworth and those involved are looking to attract an additional £10million into the schools and the LEA through this approach. The LEA is using the opportunity not only to focus upon existing priorities such as inclusion, but also to promote, through BEST, school improvement and development. It is too early to evaluate EiC outcomes, but arrangements and systems are developing quickly and the framework established by the LEA and its partners is effective.

31. LEA management services are aligned well to the school improvement agenda, the personnel and finance sections, particularly, providing speedy and expert advice to schools on request.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

32. The LEA has a clear understanding of, and performs effectively, these key functions. Since its inception, the LEA has always undertaken extensive monitoring, first through inspection and latterly through the annual school review (ASR). It now accepts that the ASR is not necessary for all schools, and has rightly moved to accreditation, followed by "light touch" monitoring, of the more robust schools. Its extensive data collection and analysis place it in an excellent position to ensure that it undertakes visiting of schools not for its own sake, but only for specific purposes.

33. Inspectors, particularly in relation to the ASR, exercise the monitoring function. Performance management of the inspectors is very tight (as is true throughout the council's work) and effective in ensuring consistency of approach. The quality and

evaluation division works within a clearly defined strategic planning framework, is well led and deploys appropriately trained and experienced inspectors to good effect. The LEA services to support school improvement are effectively managed and offer good value for money.

34. The LEA has a reputation for being 'hard-nosed' in its dealings with schools, and this is not altogether undeserved. The school visits provided many examples of rigorous analysis underpinning challenging targets. The approach to target setting is not especially well described in the EDP. In practice, the nature of target setting is well understood, and the notion of challenge well defined. Schools are not only urged to have high aspirations, but are also helped to find realistic strategies for attaining them.

35. The LEA has not exercised its new powers of intervention under the School Standards and Framework Act, although it has set out clearly the criteria for doing so – clearly but not, perhaps, fully, since significant disorder in a school or statutory non-compliance would, in practice, trigger intervention. Its principal means of intervention is the monitoring and support programme, on which 14 schools are currently placed. This is an intensified level of monitoring, with monthly monitoring against targets. Arguably, this is too frequent to be able to identify progress, although reports to governors are made on a termly basis.

36. It was evident that there was some disjunction of view between the LEA and its schools as to the nature of support. The LEA takes seriously the proposition that the schools are autonomous, and does not provide forms of support that might undermine their capacity to support themselves. It makes no attempt to run the schools but provides them with the management information they need to run themselves, through the dissemination of performance data and the accredited school self-review and evaluation (ASSRE) process. The chief inspector's annual report has an important planning function, alerting schools, as it does, to issues of common concern across the authority. This is an eminently realistic role for a LEA to play, and one that is consistent with current national policy and legislation. However, there is some way to go before all the headteachers are persuaded that it is the right role. Some display nostalgia for the support provided by the Inner London Education Authority. The history of education in Wandsworth since 1990 suggests that they are wrong.

Collection and Analysis of Data

37. The intensive use of performance data to support school management and inform accountability has a relatively long history in Wandsworth. It is as clearly reflected in the management of the council as it is in the LEA's approach to school improvement. The insistence on quantifiable indicators, not as an end in themselves but as one of many evaluative tools, is not universally well-regarded in the schools. "If it's not measurable, it's not worth knowing", was one headteacher's comment. Our view is that the LEA's use of performance data is a key element in a well-conceived information and management strategy.

38. Baseline assessment has been established in Wandsworth since 1992, when the LEA, through a working group of primary headteachers, devised its own scheme.

The assessment criteria are somewhat broadly drawn, and could usefully be supported by more extensive written exemplification than is currently available. Nevertheless, appropriate attention is given to moderation, and the assessment is well established as a predictor of performance at Key Stage 1.

39. Unusually, the LEA has the capacity to track individual pupils from baseline through the key stages and, therefore, to assess the value added at all points in a child's education. This has clear implications, not all of which are welcomed by heads, for the performance management of teachers. Schools regard the LEA's methodology for the assessment of added value as over-complex. This objection has some validity. In particular, the practice of assessing added value at Key Stage 2 against an abstract reasoning test taken in Year 6, in the absence hitherto of sufficient data on prior attainment, is one the authority defends, not implausibly. However, it gives misleading results for schools with large numbers of ethnic minority pupils who have English as an additional language and, on balance, should probably be abandoned.

40. Overall, the LEA supplies schools with sufficient, or more than sufficient, data in a clear format, with effective guidance. The use of data to assess school performance against relevant comparators is better understood in Wandsworth than in most LEAs and this, particularly in the primary schools, is due to the work of the LEA over a long period. The schools are now well equipped to take on more responsibility for further developing these data. As part of the Best Value review the LEA should examine the scope for delegating part of the funding for this work. Performance is analysed by gender, ethnicity, disadvantage and mobility between schools. However, monitoring the attainment of ethnic minority pupils is a recent development and, surprisingly, not sufficiently embedded in the planning of the LEA. There is insufficient attention to under-performing groups in the audit included in the EDP.

41. Target setting is well understood by the LEA, and well explained in the guidance (although not in the EDP). However, the number of schools which in 1999 overshot, or failed to achieve, their literacy and numeracy targets suggests that, in addition to dealing with fluctuations in the pupil cohort, a clear theoretical understanding has not been translated into effective practice everywhere.

Support for Literacy

42. Improving standards in literacy is identified, along with numeracy, as a priority in the Wandsworth EDP. The LEA has set a target for 2002 of 85 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 in the Key Stage 2 tests. Currently performance is below the national average and, although it improved at a greater rate than that nationally between 1996 and 1998, the 1999 results suggest that the target will not be met. Fewer than half of all primary schools met their target in 1999, although a few overshot, and the schools receiving intensive support registered an improvement of 8 per cent.

43. The main vehicle for providing support for literacy is, of course, the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) although that is supported by a large number of other activities. These include catch-up classes and additional literacy support for pupils

who do not make the anticipated progress; Saturday classes; a small family literacy pilot and a reading supporters' scheme. In spite of the disappointing results in 1999, schools take a positive view of the LEA's support for the NLS. The great majority (87 per cent) of primary schools regard it as at least satisfactory or good (56 per cent), although visits to schools and discussions with headteachers suggested that there may have been some initial antipathy among teachers to the allegedly prescriptive nature of the strategy itself. Three-quarters of secondary schools also regarded support for literacy as satisfactory.

44. The chief inspector and a broadly representative steering group manage support for literacy with clarity. The work of the consultant, both in INSET provision and in more targeted work in schools, has been well received, and the schools visited were able to provide evidence of its effectiveness. A range of guidance was inspected, which provided sound advice on word, sentence and text-level work, on spelling and phonics and on a variety of pedagogical issues. The implications of the NLS for pupils with SEN or those with English as an additional language had been thought through, and there was clear evidence of thorough joint planning. As in other LEAs, there is substantial concern about boys' writing. The school visits provided evidence that attempts to raise standards in this area were also well supported.

45. There is, therefore, every reason to think that the provision is of at least satisfactory quality, but the fact remains that the results in 1999 were disappointing. The LEA must ask itself, and is asking itself, why a strategy that is working elsewhere is working less well in Wandsworth. The LEA is conducting discussions with headteachers of schools that missed their targets, and has already decided to appoint an additional consultant in the belief that the current postholder, though good, is over-stretched. The evidence supports that belief. The discussions have led to the tentative conclusion that schools in 1998-9 gave too little attention to writing. That balance is currently being redressed.

Support for Numeracy

46. The LEA has set a target of 75 per cent of Key Stage 2 pupils achieving Level 4 by 2002. That would require a 12 per cent increase over three years: a rate of progress that seems achievable, given the 7 per cent increase achieved between 1998 and 1999.

47. The actions set out in support of numeracy in the EDP and the numeracy action plan are clear, achievable and differentiated to take account of the needs of potentially under-performing groups. In relation to both literacy and numeracy, the LEA has a long experience of target setting on which to draw, and established monitoring procedures (the ASR) which are well understood by schools. Most primary schools (87 per cent) regard support for numeracy as at least satisfactory or good (52 per cent). Little support has been provided for secondary schools, which are predominantly dissatisfied.

48. Nevertheless, the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) made an uncertain start. After a change in line management, the NNS is now well managed by the inspector for assessment who has, however, extensive other duties. Various expedients have

needed to be resorted to, in order to compensate for the LEA's difficulty in appointing a permanent full-time consultant. For example, the three day training was given by two seconded headteachers, and was, partly no doubt for that very reason, favourably received, as was the five-day training. From September 1999, three part-time (0.5) postholders have been in place. Although not, on the face of it ideal, these arrangements have worked. Leading mathematics teachers have been appointed and are working effectively. The school visits, including those undertaken by specialist HMI, suggested that the LEA is providing effective support for data analysis and target setting and in enlarging the repertoire of skills available to teachers. The consultants work well together; and in liaison with other support agencies. They have responded effectively to needs identified at initial training, by school visits, twilight and "surgery" arrangements. Their work is, and deserves to be, increasingly well regarded by primary schools. Arrangements are in hand for introducing the NNS into Key Stage 3.

Support for ICT

49. Using ICT to support learning is not a separate priority in the EDP, but it is central to several priorities, particularly priority (ii): extending learning opportunities. The LEA has undertaken a great deal of activity in this field, and it needs to continue to do so. The chief inspector's annual report continues to identify weaknesses in Wandsworth schools, both in curricular provision and in standards, most notably in aspects relating to modelling and control. These weaknesses are not peculiar to Wandsworth, but they are nonetheless serious.

50. At the time the schools were surveyed (September 1999) the LEA's activity in this field was not highly regarded by them. They perceived, with good reason at that stage, a lack of co-ordination between support for ICT for administration and for the curriculum. The schools were themselves (and still are) at very different stages in their developments, and needed a customised approach that was not, at that stage, readily apparent to them. The multiplicity of sources of funding, initiatives and projects was a cause of widespread and natural confusion.

51. Much has changed since then. In all but two cases, the schools visited had received support for ICT that was at least satisfactory. Support for the installation, maintenance, understanding and use of ICT for administration was particularly good and over 90 per cent of the schools, including foundation schools, buy into the traded service. The personal intervention of the director, and the work of the ICT steering group, has begun to provide a degree of co-ordination that was absent before. The development of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) is on target, and a TEC funded project, "The Learning Circuit" is beginning to enhance the curriculum across the three participating LEAs. Moreover, the work of a seconded headteacher has had a strong impact on the primary schools visited, with useful results that include effective training for non-teaching staff.

52. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the LEA has an ICT strategy that is linked to a management or information strategy, or to a clear view of the place of ICT in the whole curriculum. No specific outcomes for pupils' attainment are set out. Lacking that, the ICT plan is a menu of activities with no definite purpose. Documentation sent to schools is frequently over-complex, not because the content of it is arcane,

so much as because the underlying thinking is incomplete. For example, much reference is made to the development of teachers' ICT skills: rightly so, and that there is a need for development is acknowledged in schools' own planning. However, necessary distinctions are not clearly or specifically made between:

- teachers' personal ICT skills as users;
- teachers' skills in integrating ICT use into management;
- teachers' pedagogical skills for teaching ICT as a subject;
- teachers' capacity to support progression in ICT across the curriculum;
- teachers' ability to analyse the curriculum in order to find opportunities to enhance learning and raise standards through the use of ICT.

53. Furthermore, the development plan does not include much detail about how the systems could be further used to improve management processes and information sharing. The electronic flow of data is becoming better established and good communications between officers suggests that there is potential for greater integration of administrative and curriculum functions. The plan for a 'one-stop shop', a much needed facility, has recently been approved by the Education Committee but there remains a considerable amount of work to be done to implement the strategy.

Support for Schools Causing Concern

54. Two primary schools are deemed to require special measures. One of these is scheduled for closure in the summer of 2000 as part of an amalgamation proposal. Altogether since 1993, seven schools have been subject to special measures, two of which were closed and three others were brought out in an average of 30 months, with only one school being brought out in anything close to the target of 24 months. Seven schools are deemed to have serious weaknesses, including one secondary school that had previously been in the special measures category for five years. A further five schools are subject to the LEA monitoring and support programme (MSP), which provides an average of ten days per annum additional monitoring and support.

55. The LEA strategy for identifying, monitoring and supporting schools on the MSP has been revised. The strategy outlined in the EDP was imprecise; it did not give sufficient detail and was approved for one year only by the Secretary of State. The revised strategy is much improved. It has been widely consulted upon and is clearly understood by schools. The revision addresses previous weaknesses in the identification criteria used and the support mechanisms that are in place. The progress made by schools on the MSP is monitored very closely by an assigned inspector reporting to LEA management and task groups, and includes regular reviews by Members. This structure is effective in focusing attention on the schools with the greatest difficulties and provides a means of co-ordinating the LEA's response to the needs of these schools.

56. Five schools designated as causes for LEA concern were visited during the course of the inspection, and the LEA was judged to be providing effective support in all of these schools. The strengths of this support lie in the expertise of the assigned inspectors; the rigour of their monitoring and needs identification; and the flexible capacity of the LEA to identify and provide appropriate support. One of the

main obstacles to these schools making speedy progress has been the difficulty in recruiting high calibre managers and this has, rightly, been identified it as a priority in the EDP.

57. The relationship between the assigned inspector and the headteacher is a key one here, as in many LEAs. It is most effective when headteachers and governors base their action planning on the meticulous audits of need carried out by the inspectors and draw upon the advice and support available to them across the LEA. The task groups established for schools on the MSP play an important role in identifying and targeting LEA resources, although this is not yet a consistent feature of their work with all these schools.

58. The support provided by the LEA to schools on the MSP is appropriately differentiated according to need. It has also become more effective in the last eighteen months as the task groups have focused attention on the needs of schools. A wide range of strategies have been employed including: seconding additional governors to a school; placing LEA specialist staff in schools on a part-time basis; financial support to protect the curriculum; in-school training courses and support for individual teachers; and according schools priority inclusion in LEA initiatives. Personnel advice for these schools is well regarded by governors. The LEA has sought, appropriately, to link the schools with other, successful, schools.

59. In one school, the high level of surplus places (in contrast to the other secondary schools) means that staff are faced with a very high level of pupil mobility and casual admissions as a large proportion of the school population changes frequently. The school acts as an over-spill site for neighbouring authorities as well as for families that move into Wandsworth. This situation compounds the difficulty experienced by the school in making progress and the LEA in supporting it.

Support for Governors

60. Governors are well supported by the LEA. This is endorsed by both visits to schools and the school survey. The overall quality of service planning is good and there is a systematic identification of ways to achieve effective communications between the LEA and governing bodies. These include termly briefing sessions with chairs/vice chairs of governors and clerks; attendance of LEA clerks at governor meetings; consultative meetings between chairs of governors, chair of education committee and the director of education; the director's report to governors and training provided by the performance and standards division. The LEA meets its statutory duties in relation to governors, providing information, training and support appropriately.

61. There is a clear link between the governor support unit and the quality and evaluation division. They provide bespoke training for governing bodies related to the outcome of Section 10 inspections alongside a full programme of courses. Recruiting and training high calibre governors is a clear element of priority (v) of the EDP. Support to new governors, especially the governors' induction pack, training in general for all governors and the circulation of specific papers on particular issues are all competently arranged and well publicised, leaving governors feeling well informed and highly regarded. In discussions, a number of governors paid tribute to

the support they had on personnel issues – advice from personnel officers and inspectors on issues related to redundancy, competency, capability and appointment. The LEA actively promotes opportunities for governors to take full responsibility for the oversight of school development.

62. The turnover of governor vacancies is broadly average but the rate of filling vacancies is better than that. Overall, the service to governors is lean, highly rated and provides very good value for money.

Support for School Management

63. The main focus of inspectorial support for school management is the annual school review (ASR), which is in the process of being replaced by accredited school self review and evaluation (ASSRE). The purpose of the ASR is to enhance the management capacity of schools, by supporting heads, governors and other managers in rigorous self-evaluation, so that they become more reflective and self-critical and make better use of management information. The process is differentiated, in the sense that it is tailored to the particular needs of individual schools.

64. The focus is the right one, and ASRs are rigorously done. The LEA is certainly right to have resisted the move, urged by some headteachers, to something akin to the traditional, and questionable, “critical friend” approach. Nevertheless, the ASR is universally applied, and not all schools need it. Realising this, the LEA is moving towards accrediting, via ASSRE, those schools which can demonstrate, through joint LEA-school assessment, that they possess management systems robust enough to offer the prospect of continuous self-improvement. These schools will, rightly, subsequently receive a much lighter touch monitoring, largely through data collection. This is a highly promising way of disengaging from provision that is may not in all cases be needed. The more effective heads are naturally interested. The approach is in its first year, but it is clearly moving towards the right strategy. The main current omission is that the process gives insufficiently explicit attention to resource, and particularly financial, management.

65. This approach is supported by a broad programme of professional development for headteachers, less so for other senior managers. That programme includes: the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH), HEADLAMP and the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH); a mentoring programme for new and acting headteachers; regular seminars and a large number of other training and development events. Headteachers are also assisted by assigned financial advisers, personnel officers, and SEN case officers. Additional levels of support may be purchased.

66. The LEA also supports six cluster groups for primary and some special headteachers, and has recently responded to a suggestion from the groups that they should play a more prominent role in support for new heads. These are effective mechanisms for joint reflection and professional discussion, as are the policy development groups and *ad hoc* working groups that are a regular feature. The LEA also supports deputy heads in preparing for headship, both through the NPQH, through short courses provided by higher education and through advanced degrees.

67. The quality of school management and leadership in Wandsworth is good and, particularly in recent years, the LEA has done much effectively to support it. Like other London LEAs, Wandsworth has difficulties in recruiting teachers. That receives appropriate attention in the EDP. Induction procedures are well conceived and effective. More generally, the LEA has rightly concentrated its support for teaching on literacy and numeracy. However, it also provides a wide range of in-service courses, supported by effective needs identification. Secondary schools complain, with some justification, that the LEA provides relatively little that is subject-focused. It would not be reasonable to expect the LEA to cover all subjects of the curriculum. What it might (and should) do, however, is seek to inform schools better about the range of providers and provision otherwise available in the area. Overall, however, support for teaching has the right focus and features of quality, which include a well-equipped resource centre and effective use of advanced skills teachers (ASTs).

Other areas

68. Early years provision is well established and well organised. There is a thriving Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and an effective Early Years Development and Childcare Plan. The lead is taken by the LEA which met, ahead of time, its statutory obligation to secure free nursery provision for all four year olds; it has also secured similar provision for more than 78 per cent of three year olds. The quality of provision is enhanced by specialist support and oversight from the nursery schools, and by high quality training accessible to all providers. Links with social services, health authorities and local higher education institutions reinforce that quality and the provision represents good value for money.

Recommendations

In order to give a more accurate measurement of added value, the LEA should:

- base the calculation at Key Stage 2 upon prior attainment.

In order to give schools greater responsibility for the use of performance data, the LEA should:

- consider delegating part of the funding for these data to schools.

In order to raise standards of literacy, the LEA should:

- pursue its current intention to concentrate further support on the teaching of writing.

In order to improve support for ICT, the LEA should:

- redraft the ICT plan and link it to the LEA's strategy for school management support, specifying: clear outcomes for pupils; the detailed competencies needed by teachers in all relevant areas; and strategies for assessment, monitoring evaluation and review and detailed curricular objectives.

In order to target the work of the inspectorate more closely to need, the LEA should:

- accelerate the process of accredited school self-review and annual school reviews for accredited schools for schools only, on a buy-back basis.

In order to make ASSRE more comprehensive, the LEA should:

- include explicit evaluation of the management of resources.

In order to achieve more effective staff development, the LEA should:

- provide a brokering service which will assist schools to make informed choices of INSET providers outside the LEA.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

69. Wandsworth Council has made a strong commitment to serve the residents of the borough and improve the quality of their life by delivering high quality services that are responsive and represent the best value for money. The council has long taken an uncompromising line on raising standards in schools, focusing on academic performance and holding schools accountable for their educational achievements and for good budget management. This has not always been a popular line to take, although Government legislation has strengthened the council's position.

70. Corporate plans are of good quality, are based on detailed audits of need and contain clear performance measures and processes for monitoring and reporting on progress. There is a well established performance monitoring system that runs across the Council. Members require of officers a high level of information on service performance and costs, including those relating to schools and their performance. Consultation with schools used not to be a strong feature of council working practice; members saw their role as setting a local policy framework in which schools were expected to operate. This is changing as the Council seeks to improve decision making by involving schools more and improved arrangements for consultation have developed.

71. Decision making in the borough is speedy. The Council has reduced surplus places, improved the capital investment in school buildings and pursued its policies for specialist schools and partial selection with vigour. It is well placed to adapt its working practices to meet Best Value and services operate within a clear policy framework. Officers give clear and well structured advice to members. They prepare concise reports, with relevant factual information, which explore alternatives and provide helpful recommendations.

72. There is good co-ordination of plans within the borough; these are characterised by effective partnerships and some imaginative approaches. Two companies, limited by guarantee, have been formed, the learning circuit (ICT in schools, promoted through the SRB and the TEC) and BEST. The Council has been successful in bringing together education, social services and health professionals. Altogether, the council is very successfully managing links with statutory, voluntary and private sector organisations, drawing together a wide range of initiatives and projects with a clarity of purpose and direction.

73. A high proportion of pupils, estimated at 18 per cent in 1998, attend independent schools and partnerships have been formed with independent schools in the borough. In recognition of this, the admissions information published by the LEA appropriately includes information about places in these schools. This is all part of the Council's policy to offer choice and diversity in educational provision for borough residents. Although the Anglican diocese and the RC archdiocese are represented on the education committee, the involvement of the diocesan directors in strategic plans for the LEA is limited. Nevertheless, there are good examples of joint working over, for example, plans for the new secondary school, school amalgamations and a primary school project to reduce exclusions.

Management Services

74. Generally speaking, these services, which are mostly traded, provide an effective infrastructure for school managers and administrative staff. They are customer focused and provide good value for money. In schools most services were observed to be making a good contribution to school improvement. However, aspects of the sections dealing with property services, especially poor internal communications, result in inefficiency and, justifiably, lead to frustration in some schools.

75. All community schools, most voluntary aided schools and one foundation school buy into the finance service. Schools are provided with good guidance materials with which to plan their budgets and all new heads are visited as part of their induction. Schools likely to suffer reductions in funding owing to falling rolls are contacted early in September with the offer of budget planning advice. Although headteachers indicated, via the school survey, that they would like their budgets earlier, the service does follow good practice by sending out indicative figures early in the year with actual budgets in March. In 1999 schools also had their Standards Fund allocations notified at the same time as revenue budgets, an example of how the service continues to improve. Budget monitoring is a strength; schools are provided electronically with regular financial data, although this has suffered recently as a new system has yet to bed down. Any financial problems at school level are reported to the weekly education directorate meetings.

76. The net result is that the financial position of Wandsworth's schools is very healthy. Deficits are rare and the LEA licenses them when they occur. Balances are generally within acceptable limits with any above five per cent being identified when schools return their planned expenditure forms.

77. The school survey and school visits confirmed the high regard which headteachers have for the personnel service. Basic administrative functions were delegated to schools five years ago. There are now two areas of traded operation: advice and consultancy, and a range of client services relating to contracted-out areas such as school meals and cleaning. Most schools buy in some aspects of the service and the centrally provided work is carried out effectively, at modest cost. A user group of headteachers has been established, including colleagues who had complained about the service, with a view to ensuring that further improvements are made.

78. Some problems have been encountered with contracted services. The payroll service was taken back by the director of finance after poor service by an external provider, and the cleaning contract is currently giving cause for concern. Some headteachers expressed the view that obtaining the cheapest contract appeared to be the council's overriding aim. However, the cleaning contract was not the cheapest and all pre-contract specifications are designed to build in quality assurance. As part of the Best Value regime, the Council will need to demonstrate more clearly to stakeholders that cost is not the only criterion by which contracts are let.

79. Asset management - Wandsworth has good data on the state of its building stock, largely derived from a full condition survey carried out five years ago. Schools were provided with a ten year, costed, maintenance plan as a result. The state of school buildings is given a high priority, as outlined in the EDP, and the LEA is clear about the work still to be done. The Asset Management Plan is well thought out, fit for purpose, and includes a headteacher group for assessing priorities. It is rather late in production however, in that the contractor has not yet been established, although the work is to be completed by the end of the summer term 2000. Property management in the education department is part of an integrated approach by the council, with capital receipts being recycled into the general building stock. In 1999 the department had £14 million available for capital projects (of which £9 million related to the proposed new secondary school), compared to, on average, around £4 million per annum in the previous four years.

80. The planning and development service is not traded, although some of the design and direct labour services of the Council are. Headteachers are generally pleased with the level of investment in their buildings, but some are critical of aspects of project management. Complaints about communications between parts of the service and the slowness of responses suggest that the council should review arrangements to prevent the consequent waste of headteachers' time.

Recommendation

To develop systems to improve service delivery, the LEA should:

- establish a working group of headteachers and representatives from relevant sections of property services.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

81. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs is clear and effective. It is based on seven principles which have been the subject of detailed and widespread consultation over the last three years, and is linked directly to the EDP. The priorities that are derived from the strategy are based on a careful assessment of the circumstances faced by the LEA, and are informed by the work of the SEN policy group and the SEN panel which include representatives from schools.

82. The overall LEA strategy for special educational needs and its priority for inclusion are understood across the LEA. There are no problems with the principles of inclusion but, despite a steady increase in the proportion of children with special educational needs in the mainstream, there are, as in many LEAs, some difficulties with implementation. For example, the LEA acknowledges that it has a large number of special schools in proportion to its size, a result of the way in which schools were allocated when the ILEA was abolished; and the LEA has reduced the number of special schools from 13 to 10 since 1990. Three of the schools perform a regional function. For the remainder, the increase in numbers of statemented pupils assigned to primary and secondary schools is already leading to a reduction in roll in special schools, without detailed planning for the consequences. In addition, although there are some examples of special/primary school links that provide evidence of good practice in co-operation, the effective use of special school expertise in primary and secondary schools would benefit from a greater focus on, and support for, the mechanisms for promoting co-operation. Special schools expressed some unease about the process of inclusion. This would be addressed by greater precision in the costing and timetabling of the implementation of the strategy.

Statutory Obligations

83. The assessment and statementing processes are well managed. The LEA is successful in achieving 100 per cent statementing within the recommended 18 week period. It makes strenuous and successful efforts to maintain that level and to attain its challenging targets for the percentage of final statements issued within 26 weeks. Arrangements for annual and transitional reviews are equally good. The systems and processes are clear and accessible to parents, as well as being helpful to schools; they are operated competently and efficiently. The quality of statements examined was good, with a high degree of specificity and detail, if slightly less quantification of provision. Despite these strongly positive factors, there was evidence from special schools that, prior to the start of the assessment process, some parents have struggled to have their child's condition/difficulties acknowledged. The recent production of, and consultation about, the criteria for statutory assessment at stage 4 of the code of practice have since clarified the position. In general, parents are now well informed of their rights and the parent partnership arrangements (established since 1998), together with termly parents' forums and annual parents' conferences, have secured well publicised support for parents and carers and ensured that they are well informed of their rights. Overall, the LEA's arrangements for meeting its statutory obligations are good.

Improvement and Value for Money

84. The budget allocated to special educational needs is on the high side compared to other similar LEAs but income from inter-authority recoupment is similarly high. Both figures are, at least in part, related to the comparatively large number of special schools in the borough. Financial issues are well managed and expenditure is carefully monitored. The LEA carries out its functions effectively and the arrangements make a satisfactory contribution to school improvement. In addition, the quality of statements is good, securing support for individual pupils that provides value for money which is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Overall, value for money is never less than satisfactory, is improving, and is likely to do so more rapidly as elements of forward planning related to support at stage 3 of the code of practice are implemented.

Analysis

85. The percentage of pupils in the borough aged 0-19 years who have a statement of SEN has reduced from 2.0 per cent in 1997/98 to 1.9 per cent in 1998/99. This reduction arises from a slight increase in the number of statements discontinued and a decrease in the number of statements issued. The reduction, although small, is significant when set against the national trend, which is increasing. The percentage of pupils placed in special schools as a percentage of all pupils continues to be higher than the national average at 1.1 per cent (a decrease of 0.1 per cent on the previous year). Perhaps a more significant figure is the fact that in 1998/99 the percentage of pupils with a "first-time" statement and placed in mainstream provision rose to 59 per cent from 51 per cent in the previous year.

86. Criteria for the move from stage 3 to stage 4 of the code of practice are in place following consultation with schools and the final implementation of criteria relating to earlier stages is awaiting DfEE guidance on the revised code. The LEA has also produced and distributed a compendious SEN handbook to ensure that special educational needs co-ordinators and others are provided with full information about arrangements for meeting special educational needs. The LEA's policy to develop school autonomy is reflected in the quality of information, training and support it secures for special educational needs co-ordinators.

87. Special educational needs support services are well managed and resourced. Services for sensory impaired pupils and the learning support service are generally, and justifiably, well regarded. The provision they make is expert, sufficient and timely. This view was supported in all schools visited except two. The educational psychology service enjoys similar esteem. This too is merited, both for its contribution to the assessment/statementing processes and for the direct support to individual schools. There is a weakness in the slow, and sometimes unavailable, provision of speech and language therapy. The LEA has been making every effort to resolve the issue, which is not confined to Wandsworth, but has been able to make only slow progress.

Recommendation

In order to improve the management of Special Educational Needs, the LEA should:

- delineate the timetable and funding for the development of inclusion with greater precision, to improve planning for special school places and develop better links between teachers in special schools and those in primary and secondary schools.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The Supply of School Places

88. The LEA places great emphasis on the planning and provision of school places. It meets statutory requirements; its results are impressive and provide good value for money. Since 1997 the number of primary schools with more than twenty five per cent surplus capacity has been reduced from thirteen to three, and the balance of over- and under-occupied schools has been evened out. At secondary level there is only one significantly under-occupied school and one significantly over-occupied. The plan to reduce infant class sizes has been approved and Wandsworth is on target to meet the pledge for September 2000.

89. The approach to reducing surplus places is rigorous and well planned, based on an improving forecasting methodology. The School Organisation Plan clearly sets out how the strategy will develop and contribute to school improvement. The LEA has not shirked the need to close any school that fails to deliver. Such schools are openly challenged to improve, or be closed.

90. There remains an important challenge. As part of the strategy for secondary place provision and increasing diversity, Wandsworth laid plans for a Church of England secondary school several years ago. However, the Government Office for London (GOL) has to give permission for demolition in a conservation area. Following public meetings, the GOL has promised a final decision soon. In the meantime, it is proving increasingly difficult to find enough places for the growing secondary population within existing provision, with migration to and from neighbouring boroughs further complicating matters.

Admissions

91. Admissions, especially to secondary schools, are a major issue in Wandsworth. Over recent years, very good progress has been made. However, there are operational issues arising from 3000 applications (many from outside the Borough) for fewer than 2000 places that, although meeting statutory obligations, mean that the residents of the borough are not always served well.

92. The administration of admissions is managed by the schools and over time this has resulted in divergence in practice, a situation compounded by there being 33 admissions authorities operating in Wandsworth. LEA officers have made significant progress in co-ordinating activities. In January 2000, for the first time, all Year 6 pupils took the same test that is used by secondary schools for selection and ability banding purposes. In addition, the admissions forum working groups meet regularly to tackle relevant issues. Success thus far is a testament to their efforts in securing a high degree of partnership with schools. Information for parents is excellent, headteachers are provided with clear guidelines to help parents, appeals are held in May and June and these are handled efficiently.

93. Problems remain, however. Unusually for Wandsworth, the process takes a great deal of school staff time, thus giving poor value for money. The central costs of the LEA are comparatively high although the process is delegated. Primary

school staff are spending too much time helping parents work through an application process made unnecessarily complex by each secondary school having its own form. Once offers and rejections are sent to parents, school staff spend time supporting numbers of pupils for whom no place is initially offered. Meanwhile secondary schools, having processed the applications and contacted parents, are then faced with a protracted period of information exchange between schools, parents and the LEA as the allocation process unfolds.

94. Primary headteachers described the high levels of anxiety experienced by some pupils over a long period. Parents make multiple applications with the result that, initially, some pupils have several offers whilst others have only rejections. Places are allocated as those with offers make a final choice. It is unacceptable that some pupils have no confirmed place when they start the summer break.

95. A key aim of the council is to provide parents with choice and diversity. The latter is certainly evident within the maintained sector, and parents are also provided with information about independent schools. However, the LEA has no data by which it can measure its success in providing parents with their choice, or assure itself that all pupils are being treated fairly. Whilst it is undeniable that pupils with multiple offers have a real choice, the concept of choice to those with no offers will have little meaning in reality.

Provision of Education Otherwise Than At School

96. The LEA makes provision for education otherwise than at school on the basis of a clear analysis of need. The arrangements made are generally good and, in some cases, very good. Provision within and between centres is effectively differentiated to ensure an appropriate response. The head of the integrated support service oversees the service. Management is exercised in the primary sector by the headteacher of the primary PRU and, for the rest of the service, by the headteacher of the secondary PRU. He is responsible for the home and hospital tuition service, effective provision for pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers, as well as educational input into two jointly provided (with Social Services) centres for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 pupils. There are also appropriate arrangements for overseeing the small numbers of pupils educated at home by their parents. These services are supported by multidisciplinary provision at the child and adolescent mental health service. Access to provision is monitored by the pupil inclusion group chaired by the deputy director of education. This entire area of LEA activity is of high priority, well co-ordinated, contributes directly to school improvement and the raising of standards, and provides good value for money.

97. In the last year, 467 pupils received alternative tuition because of illness and 122 on account of permanent exclusion. The systems for identifying young people out of school are carefully constructed. They are characterised by close co-operation between education and social service departments as well as by careful attention to the detail and regularity of systems. The PRUs and associated services have effective plans, and clear targets are established to ensure that excluded pupils have access to alternative education and to the prospect of early reintegration. Good progress has been made in both primary and secondary phases in reintegrating pupils. Last year 94 per cent of Year 11 pupils obtained at least one

GCSE, or an equivalent qualification, and 82 per cent transferred to further education or work. Services, including those at both PRUs, are well resourced and very well managed. In both PRUs the resources are supplemented and good practice developed by judicious use of Standards Fund and, latterly, by EiC resources in the secondary phase. Intensive work in both phases is fully in line with the Government's social inclusion strategy and is focusing to good effect on pastoral support programmes and school re-integration plans. A key element of all work by these services is the development of strategies to help primary and secondary schools develop robust in-school practices that enable them to handle their own difficulties and problems. Services overall contribute effectively to the raising of standards and ensure that statutory requirements are met.

Attendance

98. Since 1996 attendance in primary schools has improved steadily to reach 93.5 per cent in 1999 (compared with a national average of 94.1 per cent). In the same period, unauthorised absence has decreased from 0.8 per cent to 0.6 per cent (compared with 0.5 per cent nationally). Attendance in secondary schools has been more variable but overall has improved from 90.4 per cent in 1996 to 90.7 per cent in 1999 (national figure 91.1 per cent); unauthorised absence has moved from 1.6 per cent to 1.2 per cent (national figure 1.1 per cent). Figures for both phases are on schedule to meet EDP targets. The education welfare service (EWS) has clear performance targets and has received a Charter Mark for the quality of its work. School entitlements and time allocation are set out with considerable clarity in the form of a charter for schools. The service priorities are related directly to the EDP and the EWS development plan identifies priorities, service activities and resources. The EWS provides a clear link between education and social services on a wide range of issues including looked-after children and child protection issues. It uses the threat, and actuality, of prosecution in appropriate proportions and has recently developed its own attendance panel that involves headteachers in the process and provides intensified attention to persuade families to prevent the need for court proceedings.

99. Nevertheless, the school survey indicated support for improving attendance from the LEA as poor in the secondary phase, satisfactory, or better, in the primary phase, and good in the special phase. In over half of the schools visited where attendance issues were discussed, the LEA provision for attendance, although meeting statutory requirements, was found to have shortcomings. Where these were found, they related to changes of personnel; the lack of a sufficiently rigorous and systematic process for following up absentees; long term absence of officers with no replacement; inadequate quantity of provision and individual officers being over-stretched. There was also evidence that where improvements had occurred in these schools, they often appeared to be the result of school initiative and independent action.

100. LEA expenditure on the service (£19.25 per pupil) is low compared with most Inner London Boroughs, but high when compared with Outer London and Metropolitan LEAs. The inputs to the service organisation compared with the outcome of improved attendance imply cause and effect, but the examination of the

process through school visits and the survey suggest otherwise. On this basis, the value for money is barely satisfactory.

Behaviour Support

101. The rate of permanent exclusions from secondary schools has reduced significantly to 0.6 per cent. This is significantly worse than national figures (0.33 per cent) but, along with the primary figure, indicates an important step towards meeting the EDP target. The primary figure for 1998 was 0.06 per cent compared to the national figure of 0.04 per cent.

102. The LEA's arrangements for tackling issues of behaviour are good. They are well conceived, effectively planned and include appropriate monitoring systems. The behaviour support plan and its associated action plan are linked appropriately to the relevant sections of the EDP. Together they outline an effective approach to improving behaviour and attendance in schools. The behaviour support plan clearly follows DfEE requirements and ensures that all areas of LEA policy link together. It also reflects local Wandsworth circumstances and policies, in particular the significant proportion of pupils from outside the borough in its schools and the need to recognise the local impact of pupil mobility. The plan provides a clear strategic overview and helpful models of good practice. It has been the subject of widespread and detailed consultation and schools visited indicated their understanding of its direction and intent. The targets for improvement are identified but there is perhaps insufficient differentiation in relation to the specific weakness of high exclusions from special schools.

Health, Safety, Welfare, Child Protection

103. The LEA fulfils its statutory duties with regard to health and safety. It responded promptly and positively to make suggested improvements arising out of a Health and Safety Executive inspection of a sample of schools in 1997. The principal education welfare officer is the immediate link with the social services department on issues related to child protection and the latter confirms that the education department takes reasonable steps to ensure the protection of children. The school survey and visits to schools confirm the picture in which arrangements, training and support for child protection were never less than satisfactory, and often good.

Looked-After Children

104. The education and social services departments have been working closely together to address the needs of looked-after children for some four years, and effective foundations for carrying out the responsibilities for educating them are well established. Updated guidelines for schools were issued in 1997 and have been revised since then, as occasion demanded. The departments' joint policy was revised last year and their plan provides appropriate links to the EDP, children's services plan and the Quality Protects management action plan. The partnership between the departments is well organised, contributes effectively to systems which support looked-after children and helps to ensure that statutory requirements are met.

105. The most recent joint report to both social services and education committees provided performance data about eligible pupils gathered from an education profile for each child. This is entered on a database derived from school reports, together with the development of personal education plans for all looked-after children in a format agreed between the two departments. It also announced the establishment of a team involving social work and teacher skills to champion looked-after children. Despite a few examples of improved attainment, the general picture is one of comparative under achievement and it is this area (among others) which is addressed in the joint action plan. Arrangements are effective and improving, as is the value for money.

Ethnic Minority Children

106. Ethnic minority pupils outnumber white indigenous children. It is therefore surprising both that the EDP contains little explicit reference to support for their attainment and that the analysis of attainment data by ethnicity is a recent innovation, although one that is now developing strongly.

107. In practice, the support given to these pupils is much better than a reading of the EDP would suggest. The pattern of attainment in the borough is, for reasons that are not clearly understood, relatively unusual. Black Caribbean pupils not only perform poorly throughout the key stages but, unusually, enter school with relatively low attainment. Other black pupils also achieve below average results at GCSE. By contrast, Pakistani and Bangladeshi children do better than elsewhere. Pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) who achieve full fluency outperform all other groups.

108. Support for ethnic minority pupils in a borough in which 65 languages are spoken in the schools is inevitably complex. In Wandsworth the support is multi-faceted but the two main thrusts, peripatetic support to Caribbean pupils and support for EAL, are well managed, well targeted and effective. The transition to funding under the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) has been managed in Wandsworth without the disruption and loss of resource that have been experienced elsewhere. Headteachers have accepted not only the delegation of the funding, but also accountability for sustaining provision of quality. That speaks well for them, and of the respect in which the service is held. The LEA has retained a small central team that provides guidance of excellent quality, training and advice, and also monitors carefully both expenditure and the standards achieved. EAL planning is also well and appropriately linked with pupils' SEN and with the management of the NLS and NNS. There are very few Traveller children in the LEA but all attend school. The LEA meets its statutory duties and provides good value for money in this area.

109. There is no lack of provision to celebrate ethnic diversity. For example, the LEA has a well established scheme of writers in residence which employs writers of Caribbean heritage (and others) to offer suitable role models and to encourage children to write through the experience of listening to literature. An annual "Life Chances" conference is also held for ethnic minority parents.

Social Exclusion

110. The LEA gives a high priority to promoting social inclusion and is providing a clear lead in developing strategies that are helpful to schools. The approach to social inclusion covers all aspects of LEA activity but particularly informs its policy for special educational needs and the provision made for the most vulnerable.

111. The approach to social inclusion underpins LEA and school activities in EiC. The LEA's work on tackling racial harassment and the guidance issued to schools is also a key and effective policy development area. The LEA responded promptly and effectively to the Macpherson report. Schools are well aware of the requirement to report all racially motivated incidents, and do so. The LEA's guidance on the prevention and handling of such incidents is of excellent quality.

112. Work with looked after children and co-operative activities with the social services department, as well as police and health authorities, make an effective contribution to improving performance in these areas. Provision is secured through a judicious mix of mainstream LEA resources and externally secured funds through SRB, EiC and the SF. In some areas (EiC) it is too early to expect demonstrable results but the other areas clearly demonstrate improvements in performance (increased inclusion) and provide good value for money.

Recommendations

In order to improve the value for money of the admissions process, the LEA should involve all stakeholders in detailed discussions on how:

- the efficiency and economy of the process can be improved;
- the effectiveness of the process can first be evaluated and, if necessary, improved.

In order to improve the service provided by the EWS, the LEA should:

- take steps to secure a more consistent level of service for all schools.

In order to improve the attainment of ethnic groups, the LEA should:

- undertake further analysis of the pattern of attainment by ethnicity, involving agencies outside the LEA, as necessary, in investigation of the underlying causes.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategy for School Improvement

To improve the Education Development Plan, the LEA should ensure that future versions of the plan:

- link more directly to the departmental operational plan;
- draw more extensively on the detailed audits of need contained in other plans;
- use the performance data available, especially with regard to ethnic minorities, to shape priorities and determine actions.

School Improvement

In order to give a more accurate measurement of added value, the LEA should:

- base the calculation at KS2 upon prior attainment.

In order to give schools greater responsibility for the use of performance data, the LEA should:

- consider delegating part of the funding for these data to schools.

In order to raise standards of literacy, the LEA should:

- pursue its current intention to concentrate further support on the teaching of writing.

In order to improve support for ICT, the LEA should:

- redraft the ICT plan and link it to the LEA's strategy for school management support, specifying: clear outcomes for pupils; the detailed competencies needed by teachers in all relevant areas; and strategies for assessment, monitoring evaluation and review and detailed curricular objectives.

In order to target the work of the Inspectorate more closely to need, the LEA should:

- accelerate the process of accredited school self-review and evaluation, and make available annual school reviews for accredited schools for schools only on a buy-back basis.

In order to make ASSRE more comprehensive, the LEA should:

- include explicit evaluation of the management of resources.

In order to achieve more effective staff development, the LEA should:

- provide a brokering service which will assist schools to make informed choices of INSET providers outside the LEA.

Strategic Management

To develop systems to improve service delivery, the LEA should:

- establish a working group of headteachers and representatives from relevant sections of property services.

Special Educational Needs

In order to improve the management of Special Educational Needs, the LEA should:

- delineate the timetable and funding for the development of inclusion with greater precision, to assist the development of better links between teachers in special schools and those in primary and secondary schools.

Admissions

In order to improve the value for money of the admissions process, the LEA should involve all stakeholders in detailed discussions on how:

- the efficiency and economy of the process can be improved;
- the effectiveness of the process can first be evaluated and, if necessary, improved.

Access

In order to improve the service provided by the EWS, the LEA should:

- take steps to secure a more consistent level of service for all schools.

In order to improve the attainment of ethnic groups, the LEA should:

- undertake further analysis of the pattern of attainment by ethnicity, involving agencies outside the LEA, as necessary, in investigation of the underlying causes.

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