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IN EDUCATION**

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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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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* which focuses on the effectiveness of the local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with 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 90 schools. The response rate was 77 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to six secondary, five special and 11 primary schools, and a nursery school. 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. Waltham Forest is an outer London borough with many of the features of its inner-city London neighbours: significant deprivation, unemployment and ethnic diversity. Although levels of achievement in schools have improved markedly (albeit from a low base) since 1995, results remain significantly below national averages and those for similar authorities across all Key Stages.

5. Strategic management of education in Waltham Forest is weak. Recent appointments at senior level are beginning to have an impact on the effectiveness of the LEA as an organisation, but major shortcomings remain. The LEA has only recently begun to develop strategic planning and management. That development has much further to go and is yet to have a substantial impact in the schools.

6. The requirement to produce an education development plan (EDP) has provided the Authority with a framework for planning school improvement. The EDP has weaknesses, but is an improvement on the planning vacuum which preceded it. A working partnership with schools is beginning to be established. In particular, the role of the schools' general adviser (SGA) is now suitably defined though not consistently performed. Even this degree of improvement is more apparent in primary than in secondary or special schools. Overall, there is still a lack of an agreed and unambiguous set of responsibilities and accountabilities for schools and the LEA in the joint promotion of improved standards, and a majority of schools have justifiably little confidence in the LEA.

7. The following strengths exist:

- support from SGAs in an increasing number of schools;
- support for schools in special measures;
- support for literacy;
- support to governors;
- client support for grounds maintenance, caretaking and cleaning.

8. The LEA is also performing these functions satisfactorily:

- support for numeracy in primary schools;
- support for ethnic minority pupils;
- provision of financial advice;
- supply of school places;
- school transport;
- school meals.

9. Weaknesses, however, significantly outweigh the strengths. The provision of sufficient primary school places in certain local areas is problematic. Budget estimation and financial control, and the administration of admissions are weak. Transition arrangements between Key Stage 2 and 3 are less than adequate and liaison between primary and secondary schools is under-developed. The number of secondary schools identified as 'causing concern' is worryingly high. The LEA is not meeting its statutory requirements as it does not have comprehensive records of the educational arrangements or even the whereabouts of all its excluded and out of school pupils. In addition to these inadequacies, the following functions are currently less than satisfactory, or poor:

- support to raise standards in secondary schools;
- the collection, analysis and use of data including tracking of attendance;
- the strategy and support for inclusion and special educational needs (SEN);
- support for improving behaviour;
- monitoring and evaluation strategies across the system including those used by elected members.

10. The Authority is in the process of introducing a new political decision-making structure in response to the government's agenda for modernising local government. A restructuring of the Council's departments has taken effect as of 1 April 2000. The Chief Education Officer (CEO) left the LEA before that date and his deputy had already gone. The Council has not yet made an appointment of a replacement CEO.

11. No agreed vision and strategy for education exists within the borough. Many aspects of strategic management and relationships between members and schools and members and officers are poor. Whilst there are competent individuals, the LEA currently lacks professional leadership at the highest level, and members have consistently failed to provide an effective steer. We do not believe that Waltham Forest will improve significantly without external assistance. Perhaps most significantly, we believe the LEA is in some respects failing its most vulnerable pupils. This is a position that needs to be addressed urgently.

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

### **Context**

12. Waltham Forest serves a growing population to the east of London. Almost 50 per cent of pupils come from minority ethnic communities. One third of children attending the Authority's schools are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is similar to the national average.

13. There are 34,107 pupils on roll in mainstream primary and secondary schools. The LEA provides four nursery schools, 65 primary schools, 16 secondary schools, six special schools, and a primary-age pupil referral unit. Of the secondary schools, two former grant maintained and a voluntary aided school have sixth forms and four are single-sex. The LEA is a participant in the government's Excellence in Cities initiative.

### **Performance**

14. All schools in Waltham Forest were inspected under an accelerated inspection programme by the end of 1996, after early inspections indicated the possibility of substantial numbers of failing schools. Following this, seven schools were made subject to special measures. Although none of these now remain subject to special measures, a further three have subsequently been placed in this category.

15. OFSTED inspection data show that the proportion of primary and secondary schools where the quality of education and school management requires some or much improvement is above that of statistical neighbours and national figures. The quality of education, management and teaching in both phases has improved from the first inspection round but remains below the national average.

16. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A\*-C is well below statistical neighbours and national averages, although the proportion achieving one A\*-G and five A\*-G passes is only marginally below. Attendance levels are below national rates and the number of exclusions is well above.

### **Funding**

17. The Council's recent budgets have avoided both capping and substantial rises in council tax. The level of corporate balances has been low, raising some concerns about the ability to meet unanticipated expenditure needs.

18. Education spending is, at £109m., currently below (98.2 per cent) the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), having been above for the three previous years. Restricting council tax increases to the Council's target figure required overall cuts in services of between 3 and 4 per cent. A cut of 3 per cent was applied, initially across the board, to schools' delegated budgets. It was then decided, however, to use these savings to improve delegated funding for primary age pupils, to secure in full the enhanced entitlement to Standards Fund grant, and to provide funding for capital works. Whilst the increase in SSA has not been passed on in full and there

have been reductions in delegated budgets, spending on schools has been given a degree of protection. The Council has recently committed itself to restoring education spending to the level of SSA for the coming year.

19. The Council has an overall expenditure plan covering three years which is beginning to be reflected in the Education Department's own financial planning. However, the LEA has not taken the opportunity afforded by this extension of the planning period to give schools an indication of the likely level of delegated budgets.

20. The Council has had success in securing grants to supplement its spending on schools. Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) projects and the Excellence in Cities (EiC) Programme have been of particular importance, mainly benefiting the secondary sector. There are sound arrangements for informing service managers of bidding opportunities, supporting the bidding process, and co-ordinating submissions. The absence of support for individual schools' bidding is a weakness.

21. The Council has supplemented its capital borrowing and grant income over the years by the sale of assets and by regularly diverting significant sums from its revenue budget. The opportunities to raise further funds from the sale of assets are now limited. The Council has obtained approval for a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme to provide a new secondary school in Leyton.

### **Council Structure**

22. Since May 1998, there has been a majority Labour administration following a period of four years when there was no overall majority. A decision has been made to modernise the Council and to have new structures in place by April 2000. A Cabinet system with scrutiny committees of members will replace the existing five Council Committees; four Executive Directorates will replace the present 12 Council Departments. The Education Department will be absorbed into the Lifelong Learning Directorate. The Council did not appoint an Executive Director for Lifelong Learning in a recent trawl.

23. The co-ordination of the Council's policies and priorities is the responsibility of the Policy and Resources Committee. Responsibilities for financial, personnel and property management are devolved to service departments. The Education Committee consists of 12 elected members. It has no sub committees. Monitoring, evaluation and scrutiny responsibilities within the Education Committee are currently shared in an informal arrangement between the Chair, Vice Chairs and Lead Member, but are inadequate. A formal meeting of these five people with senior officers takes place at least once within the six weekly committee cycle and often more frequently. It is at this meeting that policy matters are discussed and reviews take place. The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council usually attend.

### **The Education Development Plan**

24. The plan has approval for three years subject to general requirements and a specific condition that monitoring visits to schools be reduced from four to three each year from April 2000.

25. The priorities defined in the EDP further develop those outlined in the 'Towards Employability' Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) Project 1997-2003. The EDP priorities are to:

- improve the standards of literacy;
- improve the standards of numeracy;
- improve the quality of teaching;
- improve the leadership, management and governance;
- identify and support schools causing concern;
- raise the achievement of underachieving groups;
- reduce the level of exclusions;
- enhance learning through the use of ICT.

26. The LEA did not begin detailed planning for the EDP until September 1998 with the appointment of the Chief Adviser. A reasonable level of consultation took place on the draft EDP, and the views of schools are generally reflected in the final version. The school survey and visits to schools indicated that primary schools considered the consultation procedure to be satisfactory but that secondary and special schools considered it unsatisfactory. Similarly, primary schools felt that the priorities and associated actions matched their needs more closely than did secondary or special schools.

27. The overarching objective of the priorities and activities of the EDP is to raise achievement, but also to enhance the skills of governors, headteachers, senior and middle managers to develop self-managing, self-evaluating schools in Waltham Forest. This is not a vision of the service that has been effectively communicated or demonstrated by the LEA in the past. Nevertheless there is a mood of cautious optimism abroad among headteachers and governors that the recent appointments at senior levels of the Education service signal a clearer understanding of the government's contention that the drive for school improvement should be spearheaded by schools.

28. In general, the EDP does not constitute a satisfactory basis for school improvement. The priorities generally reflect the national agenda, but local issues are not adequately represented. Whilst minority ethnic issues are satisfactorily covered, special educational needs and matters relating to inclusion and attendance are not sufficiently developed. Furthermore, overlaps have resulted in an absence of clarity in the first three and the last of the EDP's priorities.

29. Whilst performance data on particular groups of pupils are now available, other forms of data are not so comprehensive. Actions to support priorities are sometimes less than specific, with success criteria which will be difficult to measure. In addition, there is considerable variation in the quality of the action plans underpinning the priorities. ICT is logically sequenced over the life of the Plan; other priorities lack an adequate sequencing, with most activities concentrated on the first year. None of the schools visited sufficiently reflected the EDP in their development planning.

30. The LEA has allocated sufficient resources to implement the Plan and has cross-referenced actions to other statutory and non-statutory plans. The LEA has also begun to develop a strategy for 2000/2001 planned activities through its draft Education Service Plan. There is the professional expertise to support the main

areas of school improvement, although very considerable demands are made upon a few key people.

31. The strategies proposed for the monitoring and evaluation of progress of the plan are extensive, but most are not actually in place. The strategies envisage a pivotal role for the Education Management Team, the membership of which will be subject to considerable change under the re-organisation of the Education Department currently taking place [see paragraph 91].

32. Some aspects of target setting are unsatisfactory. For example the EDP indicates that 16 primary schools (36 per cent of those which have pupils in Key Stage 2) have failed to set challenging targets. Individual school results for 1999 show that progress in meeting targets is uneven and that the targets set were often either insufficiently challenging or too optimistic.

33. The schools are not fully committed to the implementation of the EDP. When the LEA comes to revise the document, it will be necessary to work with schools and other stakeholders to agree an overall vision and strategy for education in the Borough. In this way, local issues can be developed and a suitable time-scale agreed for the implementation of priorities so that schools can reflect them in their own development planning.

34. Waltham Forest is one of the 25 LEAs invited to participate in the government's Excellence In Cities initiative. The Borough's plan has been developed in close partnership with local secondary schools and has been favourably received by the DfEE. The plan has been instrumental in providing a long overdue framework for developing strategies to raise standards and reduce exclusions and disaffection in secondary schools in Waltham Forest. One secondary school has reviewed its staffing structure and created a Head of Inclusion whose role is to manage special educational needs, Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant (EMAG) and the strands funded under the auspices of the EiC programme.

35. The Borough's EiC initiative is well grounded and incorporates primary as well as secondary schools, for example, in the authority's two mini-Education Action Zone (EAZ) proposals. However, it has not been without cost. Schools do query whether the disproportionate impact of the initiative on the workload of advisers at the expense of time in schools is justified. On the whole, secondary schools recognise that the initial investment in time should prove worthwhile in the longer term. However, the schools on the LEA's 'causing concern' list rightly feel they are operating to a more urgent timescale and feel the LEA will not be able to meet its promises of support.

## The Allocation of Resources to Priorities

36. Overall spending on schools is higher than the averages for comparable authorities<sup>1</sup>.

	Primary LSB / pupil	Secondary LSB / pupil
Waltham Forest	£2717	£3072
Outer London Boroughs	£2367	£3180
All English LEAs	£2235	£3006

[LSB=Local Schools Budget]

37. The LEA delegates a significantly higher proportion of spending on schools (82.6 per cent of the LSB) than the average for both outer London boroughs and all LEAs nationally (81.1 per cent and 80.8 per cent). Compared with the outer London borough average, spending is high on statutory and regulatory duties (117 per cent) and on school improvement (171 per cent). However, a substantial part of the school improvement figure is represented by funding to supplement Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) expenditure and is devolved to schools, giving them some control over how the money is spent.

38. Delegated funding for Waltham Forest schools is also higher than average for comparable authorities<sup>1</sup>.

	Primary ISB / pupil	Secondary ISB / pupil
Waltham Forest	£1936	£2725
Outer London Boroughs	£1841	£2641
All English LEAs	£1691	£2449

[ISB=Individual Schools Budget]

39. The LEA's funding formula is not appropriately based on a detailed model of spending needs at school level. Work is under way with a headteacher working group on a review of the non pupil-related elements of the formula. The LEA should review in particular its unusually high funding of small secondary schools.

40. The LEA intends to review the constituent elements of the pupil-related funding on a rolling programme in years to come. Whilst this may spread the workload, such a piecemeal approach is likely to prove difficult to sustain politically and practically.

41. The LEA has been gradually extending delegation over a number of years. Good progress has been made and relatively little remains to be done to meet the requirements of the Fair Funding legislation. Schools are generally content with the range of responsibilities delegated. However, greater transparency over costing is needed. Schools cannot see whether appropriate sums have been delegated and retained.

42. Expenditure on special educational needs (SEN) represents a smaller proportion of the LEA's schools budget than in comparable authorities. However, the

<sup>1</sup> Care needs to be taken with the interpretation of the secondary figures, as Waltham Forest has relatively few post-16 pupils in its schools and will hence tend to have a lower funding average.

budget for stated support has grown steadily and there have been budgetary control difficulties. Estimates for recoupment income from SEN provision have been seriously in error, leading to overspends of around £½m. in each of the last two years. Appropriate steps are now being taken both to improve budget preparation and to control spending.

43. A similar error in budget estimation concerned redundancy and premature retirement costs associated with the devolution of EMAG funding. Provision fell short of expenditure by some £½m. This, together with the recoupment income shortfall, has put the education budget in significant difficulty this year. The shortfall will in the main be met from corporate funds, but a spending freeze on all but essential items has had to be imposed within the education budget and the original budget for repairs and maintenance expenditure cut by £400,000. This kind of short term reaction is the result of poor long term financial planning. It is essential that both planning and control improve to avoid dislocation of service provision in the future.

44. The Council does not have an overarching performance monitoring and review framework apart from the reporting of statutory Performance Indicators (PI) and its own "Service Promise" indicators to committee. Much reliance is placed on the budget preparation process to review service purpose and cost. Schools do not feel that they are able to play a significant part in this process.

45. This weakness will need to be tackled to fulfil the requirements of Best Value. However, the Council is taking appropriate steps to prepare for the introduction of formal Best Value Reviews. Within the Education Service it has already embarked on reviews of home to school transport and SEN administration.

## **Recommendations**

46. ***In order to improve the quality of the EDP, the LEA should:***

- agree with schools and other stakeholders an overall vision and strategy for education in the Borough;
- ensure that actions to support all priorities have a proper sequence of development and that related success criteria are sharper and more easily quantifiable;
- ensure that the monitoring and evaluation strategies are in place;
- ensure that a consensus on education results; the local issues of SEN, inclusion, attendance and the need to raise standards at all key stages are addressed; and the priorities relating to the raising of standards are consolidated into a single priority through the process of review.

47. ***In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities, the LEA should:***

- make improvements to long term financial planning, budget estimation and control, to avoid disruption to service provision arising from in-year cuts and spending freezes;
- provide schools with better information on the costs of LEA services and involve them more closely in their monitoring and review.

## **SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Implications of other functions**

48. The EDP sets out the strategy for school improvement. The strengths and weaknesses of the EDP are analysed elsewhere. However, not all the LEA's support for school improvement comes within the scope of the EDP. There is also a range of services such as finance, personnel and property which should support the management of schools and thereby contribute to school improvement. In Waltham Forest that contribution is not consistently effective. Personnel support, for example, is weak and schools' planning is not assisted by the LEA's dilatoriness in providing budget information.

49. There are strengths in the LEA's support for school improvement. A new Chief Adviser has identified a number of deficiencies and set in train some necessary changes. In particular, the role of SGAs in working with primary schools is better defined and improvements are noticeable in the setting of targets with these schools. Led by the senior adviser, good working relationships have been established with secondary headteachers. The LEA now intervenes more swiftly in the post-OFSTED inspection planning process. Co-ordination and support for literacy are very good and for numeracy, good. The plans for enhancing ICT in the curriculum are appropriate. The EiC initiative has been instrumental in providing a long overdue framework for developing strategies to raise standards and reduce exclusions and disaffection in secondary schools. Support for governors is an increasing strength.

50. There are also weaknesses which militate against effective LEA provision and are developed elsewhere in this section. There is no clear and agreed set of responsibilities and accountabilities for both parties in the joint promotion of improved standards. The vision of self-managing and self-evaluating schools needs to be promoted with greater determination, alongside the introduction of a more differentiated approach to the allocation of support to successfully managed schools. The high number of secondary schools included in the list of schools causing concern is worrying and if maintained would require a considerable realignment of the EDP to take more account of the differential needs of primary and secondary schools.

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

51. The Evaluation and Advisory Service (EAS) takes the lead in ensuring that the priorities within the EDP are delivered. A draft service plan has been prepared which has the aim of integrating all of the LEA's areas of work including the EDP priorities so as to provide a comprehensive framework for school improvement.

52. In the past eighteen months, the work of the EAS has been refocused. This has clarified the role of the SGAs and has begun to give their work a greater emphasis on supporting headteachers and governors to become more self-managing. Though clear, their role is not consistently well performed. A few advisers lack credibility, whereas the work of others is valued. This does not suggest that performance management arrangements for the service are effective. Under the arrangements for the current year, the LEA provides all schools with a minimum of four visits in the year from their SGA. The LEA is required by the DfEE to reduce this to three in forthcoming years, but should rigorously reconsider the utility of visiting all schools, irrespective of need. The relatively high number of schools on the LEA's 'causing concern' list receive more than the minimum but the support provided is not always in line with the priorities outlined in the school's post-OFSTED inspection plan.

53. The evidence from primary school visits showed that there was a more general consistency in the pattern of monitoring and support by SGAs. In secondary and special schools the pattern of support was uneven. The supportive yet challenging relationships in evidence in one, and the suitably 'light touch' in another, was not replicated in all the schools visited. In both phases, the work of the SGAs is not yet aligned closely enough to priorities identified by the schools in their development plans and there is variation in the effectiveness with which performance is challenged. Different support services have not yet effectively co-ordinated their activities and secondary schools, in particular, do not always receive the level of support that is intended.

54. Following consultation with headteachers in 1998, the LEA published its strategy for intervention in line with the requirements of the *Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations*. While the levels of intervention are clearly identified, the triggers for intervention are not. This lack of clarity serves to undermine partnership by creating a perception of arbitrariness.

55. A system of annual reviews was introduced in 1997 and involves a dialogue between the school's senior management team and the SGA, accompanied by a senior officer. A report is produced and shared with the Governing Body. This system needs a much stronger link to the LEA strategy for increasing self-evaluation. Intelligence from these reviews and from other visits and services, however, is increasingly informing the planning of the work of advisory personnel.

56. If the Authority's own *Code of Practice* is to be met, a clear and agreed set of responsibilities and accountabilities for both parties in the joint promotion of improved standards is required. At present, the LEA is not targeting its EAS resources sufficiently effectively, and there are no mechanisms in place for schools to assess the value for money of the services provided.

## **Collection and Analysis of Data**

57. The LEA's performance in the collection of data is unsatisfactory. Schools have a poor regard for the LEA's ability to manage the collection of data efficiently and effectively. Although the LEA provides a comprehensive range of performance and benchmark data on pupils' academic performance, this is undermined by inefficiencies in the way that the LEA manages the exchange of information between the authority and its schools. Visits to schools confirm the generally negative views expressed in the school survey. The credibility of the authority is undermined on three counts: the failure to manage the transfer of primary school data to secondary schools; the inability of the Education service to minimise the number of requests made to schools for the same data from different sections of the authority; and the poor quality of the data, which has to be checked each time because inaccuracies and omissions are so frequent.

58. The LEA has recently produced a data collection and management information strategy which it hopes to implement by Spring 2000. However, this document does not adequately address the concerns raised above, but merely reiterates the principles outlined in the Authority's own *Code of Practice*. A more systematic approach is required if the very real concerns expressed by schools are to be tackled. Plans were in hand to establish a comprehensive pupil tracking system across the Education service. However, owing to problems experienced by the contractor, the target date for implementation has been delayed.

59. Support for target setting is improving in primary schools, but not in secondary schools. Performance data are analysed according to a range of pupil background factors to enable schools to focus on underachieving groups. Recent analyses by the Ethnic Minority Pupil Achievement team have been welcomed by schools. The annual target-setting visit to primary schools by the SGAs has become more robust and challenging and builds on the lessons learned from the process in 1998. A similar approach has not been achieved with secondary schools; at this late stage in the academic year, most have yet to have the agreed visit from their SGA. If the borough's secondary schools are to meet the challenging performance targets set as a consequence of their participation in the EiC initiative, a significant number of them will need to agree and implement a more systematic and rigorous approach.

## **Support for Literacy**

60. The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has been effectively introduced in Key Stages 1 and 2. Raising of standards of literacy in all key stages is a priority within the EDP. The 1999 Key Stage 2 figures of 62% level 4 and above in English missed the LEA's literacy target by only 1%. A further 13% improvement is required to reach the 2002 target of 75%. In 1999, the gap between the LEA and national averages in the National Curriculum tests in all aspects of English at Key Stages 1 and 2 widened compared to 1998. Of the 20 primary schools in the earliest phases for support, 17 have improved their literacy results since the commencement of their involvement, 10 of them by 14 percentage points or more.

61. Primary schools are well supported. The LEA was a pilot authority for the National Literacy Project and the introduction of the NLS was well founded in the

project. From the outset, the decision was made to include high achieving schools, as well as schools needing intensive support in the first cohort. This has usefully served to illustrate the value of the literacy framework for all schools. In six of the eight primary schools visited where literacy was a focus, standards were improving and in seven, the support provided by the LEA was judged to have been either sound or better.

62. Special schools also receive good support. The two schools visited where literacy was a focus commented very favourably on the quality of the training provided for teachers and reported improvements in teachers' awareness. Teachers attended training alongside mainstream teachers; sufficient attention was paid to the needs of pupils with SEN and the needs of teachers in special schools.

63. Secondary schools rated the support for the teaching of literacy between satisfactory and good and well above average for the LEAs surveyed so far. Five secondary schools have benefited from the LEA's Key Stage 3 pilot project; other schools have benefited from three years additional funding for resources and INSET under an SRB Literacy Project. In the school visited where literacy was a focus, the good quality of the LEA support had been a significant contributory factor in the consistently improved standards in English at Key Stage 3 and in GCSE in recent years. The emphasis placed on the continuity of educational experience in literacy in the transfer between Year 6 and Year 7 has been of particular value in raising standards.

### **Support for Numeracy**

64. Although standards in numeracy are improving in Key Stage 2, overall attainment in mathematics in Waltham Forest schools is below the national average in each key stage. Like many authorities nationally, Waltham Forest LEA has already met its Key Stage 2 target for 2001 (67 per cent), despite the fact that only two-thirds of the borough's schools met or exceeded their 1999 target and that there was a slowing of the rate of improvement in 1999 over 1998.

65. Support for numeracy in primary schools is satisfactory. The implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy began in September 1999 with a 5-day training course for teachers in schools receiving intensive support. The training was well received by schools. The headteacher training in the summer term of 1999 was particularly valuable in setting the tone for the strategy. Equally, the appointment of experienced practitioners from authorities involved in the pilot Numeracy Project as numeracy consultants has enhanced the credibility of the strategy among primary schools.

66. More intensive support was initially given to 13 primary schools and was effective. It included demonstration lessons by the consultants and a team of leading maths teachers, and also consultants undertaking joint observations with co-ordinators and leading in-service training sessions. This range of support is now being offered to a wider group of schools, which is welcome and in some cases overdue. A number of co-ordinators in non-intensive schools require more practical guidance, for example, on helping teachers to make the transition from using commercial mathematics schemes to the very different approach required by the

numeracy strategy. The LEA has also secured funding for Family Numeracy projects in four nursery schools.

67. Standards of mathematics in secondary schools give cause for concern. The LEA is rightly beginning to include secondary schools in its numeracy strategy but it is too early to discern any of the effects of this. There is a significant drop in maths attainment through Key Stage 3 and 4. The gap between the Authority's schools and national averages is only 3 per cent at Key Stage 1 but rises to almost 20 per cent by the end of Key Stage 4. Two secondary schools ran Numeracy Summer Schools in 1999, which were well attended, and plans are in hand to extend the provision this summer to involve all the borough's secondary schools in either a Numeracy and/or Literacy summer project. The LEA has recently advertised for a Key Stage 3 Numeracy Consultant.

### **Support for ICT in the Curriculum**

68. Standards in curriculum Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are improving, but not quickly enough. In both primary and secondary schools achievement levels have improved markedly between old framework inspections and new. However, OFSTED data shows that pupils in Waltham Forest schools still make slower progress in ICT than pupils nationally or in similar LEAs.

69. An ICT Development Plan has been developed which effectively supplements and complements the ICT priority in the EDP. Activities have been identified as the result of a comprehensive audit and actions have been carefully sequenced. The establishment of a Business Technology Centre in each of the secondary schools through an SRB Project is a development of particular note. A small support team for ICT is in place, led by an adviser. Whilst the plans and time scale for the implementation of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) and the related curricular and equipment initiatives are appropriate, this team is likely to be too stretched to meet all the demands of the current work load.

70. In the school survey, it was apparent that many schools were dissatisfied with the support for the use of ICT in the curriculum, although there was optimism about the introduction of the NGfL initiative. Curriculum ICT was a focus in three primary and one secondary school visit. In the primary schools, pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding were below the desired levels but there was an increased level of confidence on the part of the teaching staff and a more positive approach to delivering the curriculum. ICT co-ordinators have received good support. This includes training courses, advice about hardware, software, and the curriculum, and opportunities for them to network. The schools making use of the School Computer Support Unit for the repair and maintenance of equipment valued the service provided.

### **Support for Schools Causing Concern**

71. Support to schools in special measures is generally good and the support to schools with serious weaknesses is improving; more so in primary than in secondary schools. By the end of the accelerated inspection programme in December 1996, a total of seven schools required special measures and a further 25 were judged to

require significant improvement in one or more of the four categories of standards, quality, ethos and management. None of the seven schools remain subject to special measures.

72. Headteachers and governors appreciate the fact that the LEA now intervenes more swiftly in the post-inspection planning process, prior to the publication of the report. A school support group is convened, which includes officers from across the Education Service according to need. Typically the Chief Adviser and members of her team facilitate a 24-hour residential for the governing body and senior management team of the school to construct a plan of action. Targets are then agreed with the headteacher and governors and a support plan is initiated. If required, a headteacher-consultant is allocated to the school, but more usually the SGA takes on a more substantial role, acting as mentor and broker for other services. A similar process is in place for schools with serious weaknesses. However, more work needs to be done on the distinction between the particular work of the SGA for schools 'causing concern' and routine monitoring and evaluation visits. Schools were unclear about the value of the former, particularly when not all the interventions promised by the LEA had taken place.

73. In addition to the six schools defined by OFSTED as having major shortcomings, the LEA had identified a further 29 schools as requiring, in varying degree, additional support from officers as well as advisers. This figure is too high realistically to provide an adequate level of support without spreading the available resource too thinly. The allocation of 10 secondary schools to one SGA has proved an unmanageable workload once the EiC brief was included. A more developed strategy for support in secondary schools is needed in which EiC is but one strand.

### **Support for Governors**

74. Support for governors is an increasing strength of the LEA. The Governing Body Service is responsive and well regarded. The LEA provides a comprehensive clerking service and training programme which over 90 per cent of schools buy from their delegated budgets. Communication with governors is effective via termly briefings and the recently re-established Waltham Forest Governor's Council. A small minority of governors reported a view that the LEA had adopted a heavy-handed attitude in the past and did not fully understand that partnership meant working to the school's improvement agenda, not necessarily imposing one of their own. Governors feel regularly consulted about their training needs and also informed about external providers.

75. The management and delivery of the service are effective. The officers have been instrumental in raising governors' awareness of their changing role in school improvement. The service has also increased the number and involvement of black and ethnic minority governors in local schools, particularly from the business community.

### **Support for School Management**

76. The accelerated inspection programme in 1996 identified the need to improve the quality of leadership and management in Waltham Forest schools. The LEA

supports a well planned professional development programme for headteachers based on strong links recently established with the London Leadership Centre, together with a range of other HE providers. In addition, the borough has secured SRB funding to support the development of middle and senior managers.

77. In both phases, however, the main means of support for school management is the work of the SGA [see paragraphs 51-56]. Each school is scheduled to receive four visits in the current year which focus on target-setting, an audit of teaching and learning, an annual review of services and their effectiveness and the newly devised leadership and management audit. These visits are not always helpful. For example, the value of the teaching and learning audit to a secondary school whose recent inspection report judged a high proportion of the teaching to be satisfactory or better was questionable, particularly when there are more pressing priorities on which a number of schools require practical expert advice – for example in improving attendance or the development of alternative pathways in Key Stage 4.

78. The professional development of headteachers has some good features. Induction arrangements generally work well particularly for primary headteachers. Headteacher appraisal has been re-established; the LEA is currently piloting the shorter Nottinghamshire model. Take-up of centralised training events is variable, as increasingly the demand is for school-based bespoke courses. The delegation of NQT training has been welcomed by schools although they envisage a continuing role for the LEA in providing a corporate view of working in Waltham Forest as part of an overall strategy to retain staff.

## **Recommendations**

79. ***In order to improve support for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention, the LEA should:***

- promote a partnership with schools based on an agreed set of responsibilities and accountabilities for the joint promotion of higher standards;
- ensure that the work of the SGAs is aligned to schools' priorities identified in development plans;
- establish challenging performance targets, particularly with secondary schools;
- target resources on identified need and stop wasting resources on universal provision.

80. ***In order to improve support for collection and analysis of data, the LEA should:***

- manage adequately the transfer of data from Key Stage 2 to 3;
- ensure that multiple requests for the same data are avoided;
- initiate effective quality assurance;

- provide effective guidance and training for secondary schools on the use of data.

81. ***In order to improve support for numeracy, the LEA should:***

- give urgent attention to the raising of standards in numeracy and mathematics in Key Stages 2 and 4.

82. ***In order to improve support for governors, the LEA should:***

- develop more school-based training to promote self-evaluating and self-managing roles;

83. ***In order to improve support for schools causing concern, the LEA should:***

- re-evaluate the suitability of the criteria which have resulted in more than a third of schools in the Authority being categorised as 'causing concern'.

84. ***In order to improve support for school management:***

- ensure that the work of the SGA is sufficiently differentiated in inverse proportion to need and more closely aligned to needs identified in schools' development plans.

## SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

### Corporate Planning

85. Strategic management of education in Waltham Forest has been weak and continues to have major shortcomings. The evidence from visits to schools and responses to the schools' survey points to ineffective leadership by the LEA in the past. The variability in progress towards raising achievement being made by schools across the Authority is indicative of the absence of a locally derived strategic plan for school improvement over a period of years.

86. Interviews with headteachers and chairpersons of governing bodies provided examples of a lack of strategic management and decision making at LEA level. Arrangements for SEN, alternative placements for pupils in danger of exclusion, and the management of casual admissions by schools were amongst the examples quoted where planning or decision-making were lacking. The instances reported by headteachers of their serving on strategic working parties which came to nothing were further evidence of inadequacies. It was reported at a meeting with representative headteachers that they had sought access to elected members in response to a lack of confidence in dealings with senior officers and the absence of dialogue on matters of importance. These approaches had proved futile.

87. Senior officers and members must share the responsibility for the inadequacies of the past. The quality of the information provided to members by senior officers is obviously dependent upon the accuracy of the management information, which has been variable. The willingness of members to listen, has also been variable. The decisions that have been made as a result have too often been poor. Having made decisions, members have not always given officers the freedom to act on them. The scrutiny arrangements by the Education Committee for OFSTED inspection reports and information on standards of achievement in schools are not satisfactorily developed.

88. The new administration defined 12 corporate strategies in July 1999 including the commitment 'to improve the educational attainment of our children'. Four key priorities adopted by the Education Committee are described in the *Education Service Plan 1999-2000*. They are: raising achievement; services and access to them; relationships, communication and accountability; and best use of resources. It was, however, evident in the visits made that these priorities were adopted without having first identified with schools what their needs were. The result is that senior managers in schools and governing bodies remain largely unaware of the priorities. A document called *A Vision for the LEA*, which includes the key priorities and a mission statement, has been in gestation since 1997 and remains unpublished.

89. The LEA has provided opportunities for consultation with schools and governing bodies about educational initiatives. Primary schools consider the consultation arrangements to be just satisfactory; secondary and special schools consider them unsatisfactory. All schools expressed a large measure of dissatisfaction regarding consultation on the planning of the education budget. The Authority's Chief Executive and one of the Education Department's two second tier officers are also shortly to retire. Given the inadequacies highlighted in this report,

the lack of a permanent chief officer to lead the LEA even for a comparatively short time could serve to delay necessary improvements.

90. The LEA has successfully promoted some good links with other partners and agencies and consultation does take place. Consultation and liaison arrangements with the Diocesan Authorities are good. The Education Business Partnership of the LEA, sometimes in partnership with the TEC, has established strong links with local employers to support work-related aspects of the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools. The Youth Service is targeting disaffected pupils with a view to keeping them in mainstream schooling. Co-operation with the privatised careers provision is good. Education is co-operating with the Community Services in the provision of a Child Health in a Community Setting (CHIC) project. A useful joint protocol has been established with the local police covering truancy. An effective link has been established with the University of East London. At present, 40 of the Authority's staff are studying for an MSc/PGDip in Leadership and Management in Schools. LEA personnel have contributed to the lecturing on this course.

91. From 1 April 2000, the Education Department has been absorbed into one of four Executive Directorates, that of Lifelong Learning. The post of Executive Director Lifelong Learning has been advertised but no appointment was made and a new advertisement is to be placed. A decision has been made to employ a consultant to act as Chief Officer of the LEA in the interim following the early retirement of the Chief Education Officer in March 2000 and the earlier departure of his deputy.

### **The speed, openness and effectiveness of decision making, particularly financial decision making**

92. Schools are not adequately consulted on the preparation of the Council's budget. Suitable opportunities have not been provided for genuine dialogue with members at formative stages of the budget process. Although meetings with leading members have increased in the recent past, schools continue to lack confidence in their ability to influence the decisions taken.

93. The decision to cut school delegated budgets for the current year was taken late in the budget making process and had a significantly damaging effect on the already poor relationships with members. Schools are not confident that budget decisions have been based on adequate knowledge of the Education Service or that members are committed to a positive dialogue with them.

94. Schools are also not adequately consulted about the deployment of income from specific grants. There is a sense that the LEA still seeks to be relatively 'directive' in the use of grants, both in deciding the proportion to be used for central LEA activities and in seeking to oversee the use of funds devolved to schools.

### **Management Services**

95. The LEA is not sufficiently committed to helping schools develop as self managing institutions. Although it has taken a number of steps to support the local management process, there is a reluctance to move away from deciding for schools what support they should receive and how it should be delivered. Insufficient

information is provided on centrally funded services. There is no common approach to involving schools in service review, although a very basic questionnaire seeking views on each service is now in use. The use of more detailed surveys and working groups is developing but has yet to convince schools of a fundamental change in attitude. Where services are offered to schools on a buy back basis, the marketing emphasis is less on customer satisfaction than on the 'risks' of not purchasing.

96. The LEA's payroll service is well regarded. The casework and recruitment support provided by the Human Resources Service, however, is unsatisfactory. A manual of guidance is provided, but some of its sections are out-of-date. There are significant delays in the issue of advice following legislative and other changes. Support provided on individual casework is slow, with schools feeling that they have to 'push all the time' to get results. They are also not always confident that advice has been appropriate.

97. Support for financial management is generally sound. Reservations expressed by schools focused mainly on temporary difficulties caused by staff turnover, although there are some doubts about the capability of all staff to provide the full range of services. Annual budget planning workshops for heads and governors are appreciated. The financial benchmarking data provided are of good quality. Appropriate contact is maintained with schools with financial difficulties. Very few schools have current deficits giving significant cause for concern.

98. Schools are notified of their delegated budgets too close to the start of the financial year. Indicative budgets are not provided at an earlier stage. Accounting arrangements are generally satisfactory, although there are difficulties with the late, and sometimes inaccurate, allocation of funds for stated purposes.

99. Basic ICT provision made by the LEA to support school administration is satisfactory, at least in terms of hardware and software for accounting and pupil data purposes. User support and advice on other applications is less satisfactory. Responses from the helpline can often take some days and the staff involved, whilst helpful, are overstretched.

100. Development and implementation of a strategy to create a unified LEA/school management information system are incomplete. At present schools experience a myriad of uncoordinated requests for information from the LEA, often overlapping or duplicating each other. They also lack confidence in the LEA's ability to record and reproduce the information they supply accurately. The LEA is taking a number of steps in consultation with headteacher representatives to address these difficulties, including the long overdue establishment of electronic links with schools.

101. Support for schools in the areas of grounds maintenance, cleaning and caretaking is of high quality. This support is provided by the LEA's Client Division. The Division was singled out by schools for high praise, both in respect of quality of its services and its clear, supportive customer focus.

102. Both the take-up of school meals and the cost of provision are broadly comparable with other LEAs. Transport provision for SEN pupils is reliable and reasonably punctual, but there are concerns about the length of some journey times.

The LEA should review route planning and the types of vehicles used. The SEN transport budget is, rightly, held by the SEN managers, thus ensuring that placement and transport costs are considered together. The service is currently the subject of a Best Value review.

## **Recommendations**

### **103. *In order to improve strategic management, the LEA should:***

- take urgent steps should be taken to fill staff vacancies at senior level;
- give high priority should be given to establishing a dialogue with schools at a formative stage of the budget making process and to developing mutual trust and confidence;
- provide details should be provided to schools of the range and level of service they can expect to receive 'free of charge' from each of the LEA's sections;
- review with schools its approach to the provision of services to ensure an appropriate focus on supporting and developing school self management.

## **SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION**

### **Strategy**

104. The overall LEA provision for pupils with special educational needs is poor, as is the management of this area. There has been a history of poor strategic planning and management, an absence of coherence in provision and inefficient administration. There is evidence of failure to establish a clear rationale for the development of special schools in the past and their future role remains unclear. This, together with a lack of effective co-ordination, has led to the present legacy.

105. Since September 1999, the Senior Education Officer (SEO) has taken interim responsibility for the publication of the draft SEN development plan, prior to the appointment of a new post-holder under the restructuring proposals. Improving provision for special educational needs is not identified as a separate priority within the EDP, although there are three specific activities within the priority 'To raise achievement of underachieving groups of pupils' that seek to define how this will be achieved. Insufficient progress has been made in two out of the three activities, the exception being the work in literacy and numeracy.

106. The LEA's record on consultation for special educational needs is poor. Most schools visited had either only recently received the draft development plan or were surprised to hear of its existence. Many were either unaware of the LEA's strategy or believed that the LEA had no strategy. Many schools supported the principle of inclusion, but had major reservations about the practice. In particular, the view was expressed that the LEA's admissions procedures hampered inclusion. Schools are unable to work in partnership with special schools to secure the most appropriate provision for individual pupils. The special educational needs/disaffected working group was seen as putting forward a counsel of despair and frustration. One headteacher rightly expressed the view that the government was driving the policy for inclusion, with the LEA failing to articulate policy in the local context. It is essential that the consultation process is used to return to first principles and that strategy should reflect local, as well as national, priorities.

107. School visits confirmed the lack of strategy and provided evidence of the LEA's inability to communicate with schools clearly and unambiguously over SEN. Schools supported the principle of inclusion but two voiced a belief that the LEA had no strong commitment and one school felt their present policies amounted to 'inclusion by the back door'. When interviewed, four out of six special school headteachers expressed concern about the planned reorganisation as they did not know who is threatened with closure or when it will take place. This uncertainty is causing low morale.

### **Statutory Obligations**

108. The evidence of LEA documentation and analysis of performance indicators show that the LEA has failed to take reasonable steps to fulfil its all of statutory responsibilities to pupils with special educational needs. The production of statements was poor until July 1999, with as few as 30 per cent of statements

meeting the target time. Recent improvements in assessment procedures mean that the LEA is now meeting the scheduled statement time in 86 per cent of cases.

### **Improvement and Value for Money**

109. Statements are generally of a satisfactory quality, although schools reported examples of inaccuracies. Reviews are now held on time and where possible a statement reviewing officer attends, but amendments can take up to a year and so do not impact on provision quickly enough. Excluded pupils who are on the SEN register are out of school for an unacceptable amount of time because of inadequate levels of provision. The fragmented provision for all pupils with EBD, including too few special school places and supported places in mainstream and education otherwise is a direct result of poor planning. School transport for special education is well managed.

110. The LEA has virtually no credibility even when aspects of the service are performing well. The lack of a senior post has not helped the situation. Insufficient advice is provided at KS3 and 4 and many schools rely too heavily on the educational psychology service (EPS) to provide advice, support and training, because other services are considered either too expensive or lack credibility.

111. The EPS stood out as responsive and effective. One head justified its effectiveness by explaining that 'the child always comes first'. Although the EPS is well led and managed, its effectiveness is limited by the absence of cross-service planning and management.

112. The support by specialist teachers for hearing impairment, visual impairment and speech therapy was valued. Special educational needs special services (SENS) is seen as an expensive, poorly organised service. A significant proportion of schools visited found provision elsewhere. Overall, HMI judged the contribution of the LEA to improving provision for pupils with special educational needs to have been valuable in only one-fifth of schools visited.

### **Recommendations**

113. ***In order to urgently improve provision for SEN, the LEA should:***

- develop an inclusion strategy that is based on a comprehensive review of SEN in which schools and a range of local agencies and other stakeholders are actively consulted;
- ensure the proposals for reorganisation are based on a clear rationale that includes the planned provision of special schools and takes full account of the needs of local children;
- ensure that the SEN provision is effectively managed across services;
- improve the quality of the SENS provision.

## **SECTION 5: ACCESS**

### **The Supply of School Places**

114. Waltham Forest has experienced significant increases in both primary and secondary school rolls over recent years. New primary schools have been built and existing primary and secondary schools have been increased in size. No additional primary school places are now thought to be needed but a new 6 Forms of Entry secondary school is planned to open in 2001. The proportion of surplus places in both sectors is below the average for comparable authorities.

115. At primary level this overall picture masks significant differences between local areas. The position in some parts of the south of the Borough is such that significant numbers of children are unable, at least initially, to secure places in a school close to home.

116. The LEA has a good record of predicting the overall future need for school places in the Borough. However, the narrow margins between supply and demand for primary provision in the south of the Borough mean that it needs to be highly accurate at local level also. This is not easy to achieve, particularly with significant influxes of migrant families to the Borough. Liaison with schools and other relevant bodies in the past has not been satisfactory.

117. Appropriate consultation took place on the draft School Organisation Plan. The Plan needs further development (for example, in its coverage of SEN and post-16 provision). However, it fulfils the most basic requirement to compare the projected need for places in the main intake years for primary and secondary schools with the available provision and to indicate where any adjustments in provision are proposed.

### **Admissions**

118. The first meeting of the Local Admissions Forum took place in March 1999. Co-operation between the constituent bodies is good. The LEA's information booklets for parents on admissions for 2000/2001 comply in most respects with the recommended practice in the Admission's Code of Practice. The distribution of written information and advice to parents operates effectively.

119. However, the administration of admissions requires improvement. The pressure on primary school places leads to significant numbers of children being allocated places some distance from home. Because of the high turnover of pupils, this can be followed soon after by an offer of a place closer by. The first allocated school is not kept in the picture which means firstly that the school has no idea whether and when the child might leave and secondly that there is very limited opportunity for the headteacher to discuss with parents the advisability of a move.

120. Secondary admissions are also problematic. The updating of application/allocation lists during the 11+ transfer exercise and the provision of information about children allocated to schools are unsatisfactory. They also relate to the maintenance of waiting lists throughout each year group's school life. This can lead to parents being made offers of transfer some years after their child has started their secondary

schooling. The LEA has recently made some amendments to its practices and has embarked on a series of meetings with school administrative officers in both primary and secondary schools with the aim of improving liaison and working relationships generally. This is a positive first step.

121. The LEA has recently taken steps to enable counselling to be provided to parents whose application for a school place has been refused, with a view to reducing the number of appeals submitted. It should also consider introducing a parental interview with primary heads as part of the 11+ transfer exercise, to reduce the number of applications which have no realistic chance of success and to offer support to parents who have difficulty understanding the process.

### **Property Management**

122. The LEA has made good progress and is on schedule to meet all the asset management planning deadlines set by the Government. A comparatively early start was made on a programme of full condition surveys of school buildings and on the collection of basic premises data. Whilst there have been significant delays in the submission of survey reports to schools, they are generally felt to be both accurate and helpful to schools in planning their own maintenance programmes.

123. Much of the LEA's capital expenditure in recent years has been on increasing the number of school places. This means that, although expenditure has been high by comparison with most other LEAs, the investment in existing premises has not been as substantial as the overall figures might suggest. Revenue expenditure by the LEA on structural repairs and maintenance in 1998/9, the year prior to delegation, was significantly higher than the average for outer London boroughs. However, schools are generally dissatisfied with the LEA's fulfilment of its landlord responsibilities.

124. In the past the LEA did not carry out regular surveys of building condition. Hence, it cannot be sure what progress has been made in dealing with the backlog of repairs. It estimates, however, that the condition of buildings has declined slightly in recent years. Budgets are in the region of 60% in real terms of what they were 10 years ago. The percentage of central repairs and maintenance money spent on planned rather than responsive work has remained well short of recommended levels and mid year spending freezes have disrupted the programmes of work in each of the last three years.

125. Schools consider the funding now delegated for building maintenance to be inadequate. They are well equipped to make judgements on this, given that they now have costed recommendations in the condition survey reports for the work needing to be done over the coming five years. The LEA has not routinely consulted with schools on priorities for the use of the available central funding and it is a weakness of its AMP Local Policy Statement that it does not make it clear how this will be done in the future.

126. Consultation with schools on the design of major projects is good, as is their management on site, although there are concerns about the subsequent resolution of defects and snagging. There is a feeling that sufficiently firm action is often not

taken in such respects. The LEA needs to take steps to satisfy itself that the level of professional fees charged by the Property Services Department is reasonable. Appropriate action is already taken by that department to ensure value for money in the cost of projects themselves.

127. Property Services offers a design, commissioning, and contract supervision service to schools. All contracts are let in the private sector. Whilst buy-back rates are high and some schools speak very positively about their surveyor's support, there is general dissatisfaction with the service provided by Property Services, particularly concerning the accuracy of estimates, delays in the submission of bills, and contract supervision.

## **Attendance**

128. Overall support for attendance is generally satisfactory although attendance levels remain below national averages. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) enables the LEA to fulfil its statutory duties with the exception of the requirements regarding excluded and other pupils out of school. [see paragraph 133] It has established procedures, is well managed and provides generally satisfactory support to schools in raising levels of attendance. Communication with schools is regular and provides good guidance. Education Welfare Officers (EWO) maintain regular contact with schools in order to monitor attendance and to promote strategies to increase levels year-on-year. There is some evidence that work with individual families has been effective. Prosecutions are used sparingly but to good effect. In the schools visited, the good support from the EWO had made a marked contribution to raised levels of attendance. A valid observation was made by two secondary schools with a hard core of absentees who felt that there was a need for more concerted strategies by the EWS in tackling a problem that is seen as endemic.

129. The LEA provides unambiguous guidance on arrangements for granting extended leave of absence in accordance with the 1995 Regulations. However, there is little evidence to indicate that the LEA is working with community groups to emphasise the importance of good attendance.

130. In some respects, the LEA hampers efforts to raise levels of attendance. Its admissions policy places children in a school whilst they wait for a vacancy in the school of their choice and this is too frequently a disincentive to attend regularly [see paragraphs 120 and 121]. The LEA also does not routinely check that pupils allocated a place in a school take it up. This is unacceptable.

131. Although there has been a gradual improvement in attendance over the last four years, attendance remains well below national averages. In primary schools the discrepancy is diminishing and is now 0.9 per cent. In secondary schools, although the levels are now closer to the national average, the rate of increase has been slower over the four-year period. Levels of attendance need to improve at a faster rate in primary schools and a significantly faster rate in secondary schools if the LEA is to achieve its targets of 95 per cent and 93 per cent respectively.

132. The omission of attendance from the EDP is an error. To have included it would have given additional impetus to some secondary schools to address the

underlying reasons for poor attendance. Reducing disaffection and improving attendance is, however, a priority in the EiC initiative. The EWS is helping schools to tackle poor attendance at the point of transition between schools, but more work needs to be done.

### **Behaviour support and exclusions**

133. Exclusions are almost double the national average and show no sign of a downward trend. Levels of exclusion among African-Caribbean boys are even higher. The current level of provision for excluded pupils is inadequate and no headway has been made in reducing the number of exclusions. Overall, the provision is poor. The LEA does not have adequate records of the whereabouts of excluded and other children out of school. In this it is failing to meet its statutory duties. There is inadequate co-ordination of provision for behaviour support and managing exclusions and no one is driving the strategy at a senior level. Many initiatives have been developed in a fragmentary manner by individual services when they have identified a need, but there is no clear picture of a continuum of provision.

134. The Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) has a number of strengths but it is not prioritised or costed and it does not make it clear how partnership with schools and other services will be developed. There has been a lack of urgency in identifying performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of schools and support services in meeting the needs of pupils with behaviour difficulties.

135. Although the reduction of levels of exclusion is a priority within the EDP, the LEA has not provided a clear enough steer to schools in developing a policy of social inclusion or in promoting a positive approach to behaviour management. Insufficiently clear links have been established with the priority within the EDP to improve the quality of teaching. The LEA has made insufficient impact on the culture and practice of those schools with high rates of fixed-term and/or permanent exclusions. Because of the heavy workload of the senior secondary adviser, no meetings took place with secondary schools in the autumn term to agree targets for improvement. This is unsatisfactory.

136. The prolonged absence of key personnel has left the LEA without the necessary information to monitor the provision for individual pupils or to ensure that statutory requirements are met in providing them with alternative education. The failure of the LEA to appoint a social inclusion co-ordinator of sufficient seniority has exacerbated matters. Until January 2000, records were held by many different services. The BSP acknowledged the need to collect better data but little has been achieved. Evidence provided to HMI confirmed that although the LEA holds records on all excluded pupils, these are incomplete in many instances and, on occasions, data has been entered incorrectly. More seriously, these records indicate unacceptable delays of up to and over a year before pupils receive alternative provision. In the case of pupils referred to special services, there are no records to show what has happened to them. It should be of great concern to the LEA that it is failing these pupils so badly.

137. The Governor Training Unit has taken the initiative in drawing together data as a result of its work with governing bodies in establishing pupil disciplinary panels.

The imminent introduction of a robust monitoring form should resolve the problems in data generation. It remains unclear who retains the strategic overview for ensuring that this data is used to drive down exclusion rates and to improve significantly the provision for excluded pupils. The welfare of all children who are out of school for reasons other than exclusion cannot at present be assured, because the information that the LEA holds on their whereabouts is woefully inadequate.

138. This grim picture is consistent with the school survey which shows that support for improving pupils' behaviour is considered less than satisfactory in primary and poor in secondary and, in both cases, rated less good than in similar LEAs. Alternative provision for excluded pupils is rated poor in primary and very poor in secondary. Provision for pupils out of school for reasons other than exclusion is also considered less than satisfactory. School visits confirmed these views. Overall, the LEA provision to support behaviour and exclusions has had little impact in schools.

### **Health, Safety, Welfare, Child Protection**

139. Links with health and social services are satisfactory. Child protection is well managed and considered an effective service by schools. The Quality Protects Management Action Plan has been amended to give more attention to work with children in need. There has been a large increase in numbers of unaccompanied minors with refugee status (rising from fewer than 10 a month in July 1999 to more than 40 a month by September of the same year). This places LEA services and admitting schools under considerable additional pressure and underlines the need for the introduction of the promised database to aid the location of vacancies and the appropriate placing of children.

### **Looked After Children**

140. The LEA has a full record of children who are looked after by the Authority who are also educated in the LEA, but too little is known about pupils who are placed in other authorities or in residential settings. Up-to-date records are maintained but they are not matched with data on attainment to allow the LEA to monitor performance and target support. Individual targets have not been set for all these pupils and communication with schools and governors regarding policies and strategies is less than satisfactory.

### **Ethnic Minority Children**

141. The support for raising achievement of ethnic minority pupils is satisfactory. The transition from the Multicultural Support Service to the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), although a number of schools reported difficulties at the time, was managed relatively well in terms of provision at school level. The onus is now on schools to demonstrate a more systematic approach to tackling the underachievement of pupils from all ethnic minority groups; this is all the more important given the strong commitment demonstrated by the Council in supplementing the EMAG funding by £891,000.

142. The EMAG action plan is good with cross-referencing between the plan and the EDP. Strategies are appropriate and, in the provision of advanced skills teachers to

act as role models, innovative. The service holds data of high quality, which it uses well to identify needs and devise appropriate strategies. It also gives the schools useful assistance in setting targets. The involvement of the EMAG advisers in the yearly target setting meeting with schools has enabled schools to focus on the needs of ethnic minority pupils.

143. The EDP is well constructed from the point of view of minority ethnic issues. The need to reduce exclusions for African-Caribbean pupils is identified, although exclusion rates remain high and there is significant underachievement among these pupils. Data systems do not enable individual pupils to be tracked in order to establish early intervention. The introduction of learning support units and learning mentors is at a very early stage of development.

144. 1999 results show that at the end of Key Stage 2 all ethnic groups have improved in terms of the percentage gaining level four or better in maths. There have been similar gains in English. Bangladeshi heritage pupils have improved their Key Stage 2 and 4 results in all categories. The Traveller Education Service (TES) only came into being in September 1999. A baseline and monitoring system have been established that will enable individual progress to be monitored and the impact of the service to be measured.

145. School visits support the view that the provision for ethnic bilingual pupils is improving. Although the Ethnic Minority Pupil Achievement (EMPA) team has only been operating for just over a term, it has quickly established credibility, particularly in primary schools. It is too early to gauge impact on pupil outcomes but schools are encouraged by the levels of professionalism demonstrated by the new team.

## **Social Exclusion**

146. The Social Justice Unit of the Chief Executive's Office takes the corporate lead on equalities issues but has only recently begun to co-ordinate the Council's response to the Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. The Council agreed at a meeting on the 29 September 1999 to accept the Inquiry's definition of institutional racism. The meeting charged the Education Department with the remit to develop a plan to deal with racist attacks in schools and to produce regular statistics on racist attacks and bullying in schools. While this meets an important recommendation of the Inquiry, it barely does justice to the report's expectation in relation to the responsibility of schools and by implication the LEA. The Education Service Plan addresses social exclusion under its section on post-16 and talks essentially about 'government plans' to combat social exclusion. The CEO's statement produced for this inspection linked social inclusion with SEN and the need to reduce the number of under-achieving black African-Caribbean boys.

147. The recent appointment of an experienced senior adviser and a new team with responsibility for ethnic minority achievement has provided some welcome leadership and momentum. Coherence is emerging as to how the Ethnic Minority Achievement team might support schools in contributing to the corporate goal of social inclusion for black and ethnic minority children and their families. Schools already see evidence of a more energetic approach to raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils.

## Recommendations

148. ***In order to improve the supply of school places and admissions, the LEA should:***

- maintain close scrutiny of the balance between the supply and demand for primary school provision in local areas within the Borough, to ensure that places can be offered within reasonable proximity of families' homes;
- improve collaboration with headteachers on the administration of admissions, with the aim of striking a better balance between parental rights, individual pupil interests, and the smooth running of schools.

149. ***In order to improve support for premises, the LEA's Property Services Department should:***

- review the support provided to schools.

150. ***In order to raise levels of attendance, particularly in secondary schools, the LEA should:***

- promote the value of continuous education in local communities;
- take steps to ensure that attendance is tracked systematically across the LEA.

151. ***In order to meet statutory requirements and to reduce exclusion rates significantly, the LEA should:***

- Identify the whereabouts of all pupils who are out of school other than for exclusion as a matter of extreme urgency;
- take steps to establish whether all excluded pupils are receiving alternative provision;
- reduce significantly the length of time that excluded pupils remain at home;
- put in place strategies to ensure that intervention in matters of poor behaviour leading towards exclusion takes place as early as possible.

## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***In order to improve the quality of the EDP, the LEA should:***

- agree with schools and other stakeholders an overall vision and strategy for education in the Borough;
- ensure that actions to support all priorities have a proper sequence of development and that related success criteria are sharper and more easily quantifiable;
- ensure that the monitoring and evaluation strategies are in place;
- ensure that a consensus on education results; the local issues of SEN, inclusion, attendance and the need to raise standards at all key stages are addressed; and the priorities relating to the raising of standards are consolidated into a single priority through the process of review.

### ***In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities, the LEA should:***

- make improvements to long term financial planning, budget estimation and control to avoid disruption to service provision arising from in-year cuts and spending freezes;
- provide schools with better information on the costs of LEA services and to involve them more closely in their monitoring and review.

### ***In order to improve support for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention, the LEA should:***

- promote a partnership with schools based on an agreed set of responsibilities and accountabilities for the joint promotion of higher standards;
- ensure that the work of the SGAs is aligned to schools' priorities identified in development plans;
- establish challenging performance targets, particularly with secondary schools;
- target resources on identified need and stop wasting resources on universal provision.

### ***In order to improve support for collection and analysis of data, the LEA should:***

- manage adequately the transfer of data from Key Stage 2 to 3;
- ensure that multiple requests for the same data are avoided;
- initiate effective quality assurance;

- provide effective guidance and training for secondary schools on the use of data.

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

- give urgent attention to the raising of standards in numeracy and mathematics in Key Stages 2 and 4.

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

- develop more school-based training to promote self-evaluating and self-managing roles;

***In order to improve support for schools causing concern, the LEA should:***

- re-evaluate the suitability of the criteria which have resulted in more than a third of schools in the Authority being categorised as 'causing concern'.

***In order to improve support for school management, the LEA should:***

- ensure that the work of the SGA is sufficiently differentiated in inverse proportion to need and more closely aligned to needs identified in schools' development plans.

***In order to improve strategic management, the LEA should:***

- urgent steps should be taken to fill staff vacancies at senior level;
- high priority should be given to establishing a dialogue with schools at a formative stage of the budget making process and to developing mutual trust and confidence;
- details should be provided to schools of the range and level of service they can expect to receive 'free of charge' from each of the LEA's sections;
- the LEA should review with schools its approach to the provision of services to ensure an appropriate focus on supporting and developing school self management.

***In order to urgently improve provision for SEN, the LEA should:***

- develop an inclusion strategy that is based on a comprehensive review of SEN in which schools and a range of local agencies and other stakeholders are actively consulted;
- ensure the proposals for reorganisation are based on a clear rationale that includes the planned provision of special schools and takes full account of the needs of local children;
- ensure that the SEN provision is effectively managed across services;
- improve the quality of the SENSS provision.

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