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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 also took account of the Local Government Act 1999 insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the local authority (LEA) on Best Value. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority 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 50 schools. The response rate was 77 per cent.

3. The inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to eight primary schools, two junior schools, one infant school, one nursery school and an early years centre. The inspection team also visited three secondary schools and one grammar school, and a pupil referral unit (PRU). A telephone conversation was held with an additional primary school. The visits ascertained the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools within the LEA was also considered.

COMMENTARY

4. Slough local education authority (LEA) has significant strengths and few weaknesses. It operates in a setting that is both complex and challenging.

5. Slough lies on the M4 motorway corridor to the west of London. Its most notable characteristic is the multi-skilled, ethnically and socially diverse population that has a wide range of expectations and aspirations for education. Economic factors indicate that the extensive business community makes Slough a relatively prosperous borough, but many Slough residents work outside the town in low-paid employment. Seventy per cent of those employed in Slough are not local residents. Other social measures related to poor housing conditions, low levels of adult education and below average earnings confirm that sections of the town's population have considerable needs.

6. Education provision is complex. There are selective and non-selective secondary schools, and a range of foundation and community schools in both the primary and secondary phases. These schools display a wide diversity in the standards achieved and the quality of education provided. In the past three years improvements in schools have been marked.

7. When Slough became a unitary authority in 1998 there was a significant shortfall in the historic funding for education in relation to the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). The council has made great strides in raising the budget for education and is committed to maintaining this increase. In common with other LEAs, Slough has staff recruitment and retention difficulties, particularly in specialist areas of central services to schools.

8. Against this backdrop, Slough LEA has made good progress in the first three years. The education department has effectively established services to meet its statutory functions and built good relationships with nearly all its schools. There is a high degree of confidence and optimism for the future. This translates into a shared energy for innovation and improvement that is often turned into effective action for pupils. The standard of pupils' attainment has risen since 1998 and now exceeds the national average in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 4. These increases are attributable, in part, to the targeted work of the LEA in certain schools.

9. Good procedures for consultation and communication with schools are a hallmark of the council. The strong mutual commitment to equality and inclusion between community representatives and the council is tangible and articulated by many, although some in the community remain unconvinced of its sincerity. The quality of support developed over a short period of time for children in public care and those from minority ethnic groups is good. The LEA has interpreted and confidently developed the principles of the Code of Practice for LEA/school relations. This is now well demonstrated in its strategy of support for schools in inverse proportion to their success. However, senior officers have been less effective with the pace of development and planning for the brokerage of services to schools.

10. Slough has significant strengths. Overall, the LEA fulfils its school improvement functions well, and in particular, the following functions:

- the provision and use of performance data;
- the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the curriculum;
- the effectiveness of services to support improvement in schools; and
- the use of ICT in administration.

Other functions performed well by Slough are:

- its strategy for special educational needs (SEN);
- the pace of development as that strategy is introduced;
- support for pupils with SEN; and
- its links with community groups, local agencies and businesses for the benefit of pupils.

Slough fulfills many of its other functions well and most of them at least satisfactorily.

11. A corollary is that the LEA has few weaknesses:

- unsatisfactory progress has been made in developing performance management procedures to meet the requirements of Best Value;
- the arrangements for supporting schools' finance are poor; and
- elements of the support to governors are unsatisfactory.

Additionally, Slough gives unsatisfactory attention to:

- the guidance for and monitoring of health and safety in schools, and provision for the small number of pupils in Key Stages 2 and 3 who have no school place is inadequate.

12. The chief executive, leaders of the council and the commissioner for children and young people provide a clear lead for education in Slough. The leadership of the education department has proved its ability to establish an effective authority. The chief education officer (CEO) and three assistant chief education officers bring good management skills to the leadership, sensitivity to the complex needs of Slough and robust approaches that challenge existing practice. The LEA has a secure capacity to improve and address the recommendations of this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13. Slough local education authority was established in April 1998 following Local Government reorganisation (LGR). Slough is a small authority with a population of 111,000 and an above average birth rate. The ethnic range and diversity of the borough's population is a strong feature of Slough and a key factor in the work of the council's education department. The school population is approximately 19,000 and is expected to grow over the next five years.

14. Slough lies to the west of London in one of the largest commercial and industrial development areas in Europe. As a result, economic indicators suggest that Slough is relatively advantaged. Unemployment is below the national average. However, the town belongs to the group of the most deprived third of local authorities on a national scale of socio-economic measures and when social indicators alone are applied, the position is more severe. Many Slough residents are in low-paid employment, often outside the borough, whilst 70 per cent of those employed in Slough are not local residents. The community provides a multi-skilled workforce yet there is a shortage of resident young adults in Slough with the ICT skills to meet market requirements. In addition, the proportion of adults with higher education qualifications is below the national average. For schools and the education department difficulties exist in the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and experienced staff particularly in areas of finance and personnel expertise.

15. The proportion of the population from ethnic communities is growing. It includes about 300 children of asylum seekers. In the school population the proportion of minority ethnic heritage pupils is 43 per cent in primary schools, and 52 per cent in secondary schools, both of which are above the national average. Slough has a wide range of community and business partners working to support education, training and family learning in the town.

16. The authority maintains 50 schools of which ten are denominational. Almost half of the schools are part of the Education Action Zone (EAZ) established in 1999. There are 16 primary, six junior, eight infant and five nursery schools (including two early years centres). Of the 11 secondary schools seven are non-selective. The four selective schools have sixth forms. There are two schools for pupils with special educational needs and two pupil referral units (PRUs).

17. In primary and secondary schools the entitlement of pupils to free school meals is in line with the national average. Overall, Slough has a high proportion of pupils with statements of SEN, 2.9 per cent in primary schools and 4.4 per cent in secondary schools. Both of these figures are just above the national average.

Performance

18. Pupils' attainment on entry to primary school is close to that of similar authorities but below national averages. As they progress through school pupils reach standards in all key stages which are above those achieved in schools in

similar authorities, particularly in Key Stages 1,3 and 4.

19. By the end of Key Stage 1 standards in reading and writing are above national averages and in mathematics they are in line with the national average. In all three areas the rate of improvement over recent years has been well above the national trend and better than that of similar authorities. Results at the end of Key Stage 2 are in line with the national average in both English and mathematics. For both subjects the rate of improvement is in line with the national trend but below that of similar authorities in English.

20. Key Stage 3 results show that standards in English and mathematics remain in line with national averages. In English, the rate of improvement over recent years has been in line with the national trend and that of similar authorities, whilst in mathematics it has been above the national trend. In the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) the proportion of pupils who gain five A*-C grades and one A*- G grade is above the national average. There has been improvement in the five A*-C results over the last three years at a rate that is well above the national trend and that of similar authorities. Improvements in the proportion gaining one A*-G grade has been in line with the national trend. The average points score for GCSE is above the national average. Results in vocational qualifications in Key Stage 4 have fluctuated over the last five years but have always been above those of similar authorities and mainly above the national average.

21. Attainment in advanced courses has improved and is now above the national average for those taking one course and in line with the national figure for those taking two or more courses. For both measures the average points score is above that of similar authorities. The percentage of post-16 students successfully taking vocational qualifications at intermediate and advanced levels is rising and is above national averages.

22. In Key Stages 1, 2, and 3 girls out-perform boys in English as they do in GCSE overall. However in mathematics at Key Stages 1 and 3 boys' attainment is equal to that of girls. The pattern of attainment of pupils with an ethnic minority heritage is in line with national trends. Indian pupils out-perform white and Pakistani pupils at Key Stages 2 and 4. Chinese pupils do well at all key stages. Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi pupils, who do well at Key Stage 2, do least well at GCSE. National Curriculum tests in 2000 show significant improvement in the attainment of Pakistani pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 and of Indian pupils at Key Stage 2.

23. Information from inspections of Slough schools indicates that the quality of education in primary schools is improving and by 2000 the proportion of good schools was equal to the national average. Primary schools benefited from additional resources in 1998/1999. The selective secondary schools consistently secure high standards, but overall the proportion of good secondary schools is below the national average. Since 1998 resources and support have been directed to the needs of non-selective secondary schools. Improvements in standards and the quality of education provided are evident in some of these schools.

24. Attendance in primary schools is stable at 93 per cent and below the national average. Attendance in secondary schools has been consistently above the national

average for three years, at 92 per cent.

25. Schools have been successful in reducing permanent exclusions of which there were ten in 1999/2000, well below the LEA target of 32 for that year and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) target of 26 for 2002. However, fixed term exclusions have increased significantly over the same period.

Funding

26. Slough has given education a high priority since the start of the new unitary authority. The Standard Spending Assessment [SSA] per pupil is significantly above the national average and members' aim has been to increase expenditure to SSA levels. In 1998/99 expenditure on education was 94.1 per cent of SSA rising steadily to 97.8 per cent in 2000/2001, which is £1.4 million below SSA. The Council has committed itself to reducing the shortfall to £0.6 million in 2001/2002. The budget under SSA sub-blocks shows that under 5s continue to be given a very high priority, although expenditure on primary, secondary 11-15 and post-16 have all increased significantly in 2000/2001.

2000/2001	Under 5	Primary	Secondary 11-15	Secondary post 16
Budget as a % of SSA	120%	95.8%	98.0%	86.1%

27. Despite an education budget below SSA, the Local Schools Budget [LSB] in 2000/2001 is £3,051 per pupil, which is £259 higher than the unitary authority average. A high proportion of the LSB is delegated to schools: 86.7 per cent compared to the national and unitary authority average of 84.2 per cent. Overall, delegated funding is high at £2,644 per pupil, which is £295 higher than the unitary average. The primary Individual School Budget [ISB] per pupil in 1999/2000 was £172 higher than the unitary average: the corresponding figure for the secondary ISB per pupil was £223 higher.

28. For a small unitary authority, centrally managed expenditure in 2000/2001 is low overall and includes central administrative costs of £53 per pupil that are at the unitary authority average. Central costs for other strategic management (£9) and access (£40) are below the unitary averages of £33 for other strategic management and £62 for access. However school improvement costs (£34) are higher than the unitary average of £25. A high level of special educational needs (SEN) funding is delegated to schools and centrally retained funding per pupil, of £130, is less than the unitary authority average of £152.

29. The LEA has been successful at competitive elements of bidding for Standards Fund and overall in 1999/2000 this was £86 per pupil, £33 higher than the unitary average. Other education grants include Single Regeneration funding of £98.7 thousand and New Opportunity funding of £197 thousand. Slough also has an EAZ that attracted funding of £858 thousand in 2000/2001.

Council structure

30. Slough borough council was established in seven departments; for education, community services, town services, assets and resources, legal and corporate plus development and consumer protection. The leader of the council and the chief executive have been instrumental in setting the key priority for education in the new authority and they continue to give clear leadership and direction.

31. A cabinet structure was established in April 1999 and has operated as a pilot since that time. The cabinet comprises the leader of the council and five commissioners. The cabinet committee carries the executive responsibilities and is an extension of the cabinet with three additional councillors from opposition parties, plus added members including representatives from schools, and the dioceses. The cabinet commissioner for children and young people works closely with the chief education officer to develop strategies and monitor progress.

32. A scrutiny overview committee monitors the work of the executive through scrutiny of the portfolios of the five commissioners, achieved via five sub groups. At present scrutiny is programmed both before and after the implementation of policy, an unnecessary complication of the principle of post action evaluation. Councillors are clarifying the scope and rigour of the scrutiny work in order to improve their practice. Procedures for the scrutiny of Best Value reviews are clear and the scrutiny overview committee uses a 'call in' approach for reviewing current LEA actions. A scheme of delegation for chief officers includes appropriate reporting of policy decisions and performance management issues for scrutiny purposes. There are suitable budgetary checks and balances.

33. Systems are in place for chief officers and commissioners to meet regularly and there are cross department corporate working groups which focus on strategic planning and development. The recently introduced community forum meetings in the five districts of Slough are a good mechanism for the public to meet councillors and officers to discuss local issues and concerns.

The Education Development Plan

34. The Slough Education Development Plan (EDP) received approval from the DfEE for three years following revisions at the early stages. It is a satisfactory framework for the school improvement programme in the borough and progress with the activities has been good overall. The plan has eight priorities that are to:

- raise levels of attainment in literacy;
- raise levels of attainment in numeracy;
- extend and improve the use of information and communication technology (ICT);
- improve the quality of teaching;
- improve school leadership and management;
- develop an inclusive education strategy, particularly for special educational needs;

- reduce the rate of exclusion; and

- develop an inclusive education strategy, particularly for children from an ethnic minority background.

35. At the outset the LEA applied its effective procedures for consultation very thoroughly and schools contributed extensively to the formulation of the plan. In addition senior officers consulted with other local authority departments and the extensive range of education partners in the Slough area. Primary, special and nursery schools regard consultation on the plan, its strategy and relevance to their schools as good and secondary schools view them as satisfactory. A detailed audit identified existing strengths and weaknesses. The plan addresses the weaknesses well, especially in the local dimension of the attainment of pupils with ethnic minority heritage and staffing issues, both of which are supported by appropriate strategies.

36. There are clear operational links between the EDP and other strategic plans of the LEA as well as that of the EAZ.

37. Effective systems are in place for monitoring progress with the EDP priorities through adviser visits to schools, the analysis of current OFSTED inspection reports and monitoring within the school improvement team. A comprehensive summary of progress with the activities is taken annually to the cabinet and to the standards forum, the latter comprising representative headteachers, the commissioner for children and young people and key partners of the LEA.

38. The EDP has some weaknesses; targets and success criteria are not precise and measurable outcomes are few. In addition, there is a lack of detail on the financial costs of actions in the revised 2000 plan although overall resources and changing emphases in funding are clear. The LEA intends to improve the plan by amending success criteria and eliminating overlap. At present the shortcomings make robust evaluation of the effectiveness of the EDP improvement strategies difficult to achieve.

39. The LEA targets for Key Stage 2 tests in 2000 were challenging and were met in English and exceeded in mathematics. As a result, the LEA has amended upwards the target for mathematics in 2002. In GCSE examinations the number of pupils with five grades at level A* to C rose significantly above the 2000 target and those with one grade at A* to G met the target. Overall, good progress has been made with the actions of the EDP, particularly in the work done to implement the literacy strategy, to support ICT developments, to introduce innovative approaches to staff recruitment, to develop early intervention strategies for SEN and to provide for newly arrived bi-lingual pupils, asylum seekers and refugees. The remaining three priorities for numeracy, support for school management together with exclusion and attendance have made satisfactory progress, although there has been some slippage against the action plan in the case of numeracy.

The allocation of resources to priorities

40. The council has made education its highest priority and steadily increased expenditure on it by a series of efficiency savings, reductions to other services and improved targeting of resources. It has increased expenditure from its notional education budget of £48.0 million in 1997/98 to £61 million in 2000/2001, an

increase in real terms of £3.4 million. It has met all of the government's spending targets. It has made good progress with investment in early years provision, primary school funding, its 'value added' data project and more recently building maintenance. Although it has had difficulties with keeping expenditure to budget on SEN pupil placements outside the LEA and on home-to-school transport it has taken effective action to bring these budgets under control. It has consulted schools well in its review of school delegation formulae achieving partial success in its aim to reduce the number of factors and relate these more closely to need. However, greater transparency is still needed so that schools fully understand the formulae for the allocation of resources.

41. Two key weaknesses in its strategy have accompanied these positive developments. The first was the introduction of a financial accounting system across the new council that led to substantial difficulties in schools. The lack of budget reports, the degree of payroll miscoding, inadequacies in budget monitoring and in the centralised accounting system to schools have all contributed to these difficulties. Apart from the time spent by schools in attempting to keep prudent balances without routine reconciliation, the more cautious approach adopted by many schools has not always led to an effective use of resources. However, this has not led to problems of school deficits and budget information and control is now improving. The second was the absence of a capital programme matched to need in the first two years, partly attributable to difficulties with attracting capital grants from Government. A capital programme in 2000/2001 of £5.11 million rising from £1.57 million in 1999/2000 is evidence of progress. In the absence of sustained investment in the future it is hard to see how inefficient, short term, recurring expenditure will be avoided.

Best Value

42. The LEA has no department wide system for performance management. Aspects of work in the pupil services branch are effective in this respect and are part of a council pilot of the use of 'continuous improvement plans' and 'Business Excellence' models. The District Audit judgement on the Best Value Performance Plan, supported by the inspection findings, is that it complies with requirements but has insufficient emphasis on the dimension for challenge. The council's corporate guidance on Best Value does not give a sound basis to make improvements because it lacks clarity and fails to address Best Value requirements, though this is now being updated.

43. The Headteachers consultative committee receives feedback on services but this on its own is not adequate to review service performance. Although the education department regards itself as a 'small' provider this does not take away from its need to produce informative service documentation and a structure for delivering improvement. Whilst foundation schools buy services externally, community schools are not actively supported in adopting Best Value principles in the purchasing of services. More work is needed to produce definitive LEA service specifications, standards and costs together with a range of performance measures and systematic, rigorous evaluation.

44. The education department is making slow but steady progress in incorporating

Best Value principles. Although consultation is normally very good, the council failed to adequately consult schools on the programme for Best Value reviews and it has more to do to improve its approach to challenge and competition. The chief education officer has stated publicly that the LEA will not provide services if it cannot provide good value. However the LEA does not have a sound basis to make such judgements in advance of Best Value reviews. The council's review programme does not include education services in the first year as councillors decided to review the weakest services first and these were outside education. It has acted too slowly to resolve problems with its financial advice and support to schools and responded to problems with personnel casework without undertaking a sufficiently full and rigorous review. A clearer vision about the way forward is beginning to develop.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic planning:

- improve the clarity and precision of EDP targets as a basis for robust evaluation of the impact of the plans;
- establish comprehensive performance management procedures that incorporate Best Value principles and:
 - provide clear information on service specification, standards, targets and costs; and
 - establish robust and consistent procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of services.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

45. Education is a key priority for the council. The central role of the school improvement and life long learning (SILL) branch is, in the main, well supported by other services of the LEA. Overall the SEN functions of the LEA are discharged well, particularly in respect of support for school improvement and raising attainment. Provision for the access of pupils to education is generally satisfactory or better and the LEA, with its partners, takes these responsibilities seriously. Shortcomings exist in some of the management services provided to schools, particularly those for financial and human resources. This has hindered the efficiency of school management in a significant number of cases.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

46. The LEA is implementing effectively the Code of Practice for LEA/school relations. Schools have been consulted fully on the LEA procedures and understand the implications of the application of the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success. The LEA has modified its strategy for monitoring and supporting schools each year since its inception. This rapid development of the strategy has reached a point where central resources are sharply differentiated and well focused on need, in line with LEA and government policies.

47. The newly formed unitary authority wanted to establish a good working knowledge of its schools, particularly as there were a number of foundation schools with whom new relationships needed to be formed. To this end, all schools were offered a detailed annual review undertaken by advisers. This was a significant element of the centrally retained funds for school improvement. It has been supplanted by a more discriminating, LEA-led, system of central review of data leading to the allocation of resources to early intervention or 'focus' schools, and to schools identified as causing concern as a result of OFSTED school inspections.

48. The full range of powers to intervene have been used by the LEA in schools causing concern. Its interventions have been clear, often uncompromising, and effective. The success of the focus schools strategy is becoming evident in a reduced need for LEA intervention in schools as difficulties are identified early and remedied swiftly.

49. Schools are challenged to improve through the provision, and use, of high quality pupil performance data. This is the main focus of the three half day visits per year made by the school's liaison adviser, and is based on a rigorous analysis of school performance and needs conducted by the central school improvement team. The speed of development of the monitoring and support strategy of the LEA has left some schools unclear about the level of their entitlement to advisory support provided from centrally retained funds. What is clear is that, in nearly all the schools visited, the services of the LEA were well regarded and in high demand by schools. This is particularly the case when the LEA has supported the school's self-review process, providing an external validation and a probing challenge to the school's own findings. In three schools visited, the liaison adviser, twice with the aid of

adviser colleagues through a full review, did not provide sufficient challenge to the school. These cases were in sharp contrast to the high quality challenge found in the other schools.

50. The advisory service is small, with 5.5 advisers and five consultants/advisory teachers. Centrally retained funding per pupil for school improvement is well below the national average, although above that for unitary authorities. The LEA has established a register of consultants and advisers, covering a wide range of curriculum expertise, and uses these consultants to supplement its resources, as well as enabling schools to access specialist advice that has been quality assured by the LEA. The leadership of the SILL branch provides a clear imperative for school improvement and this has been maintained during the appointment of the new assistant chief education officer for autumn 2000. Although good attention was paid to the maintenance of the operations of the branch, there has been a period during which its strategic development took a lower priority.

51. Monitoring of the service's work is good, with focused team and individual service review and supervision meetings. Medium term service planning is still at an early stage of development. Timescales, resources and responsibilities for projects are clearly identified, although criteria to enable the evaluation of the service's effectiveness are too often vague. Altogether, evaluation of effectiveness has been accorded a lower priority than securing the implementation of its plans. This contributes to a weakness in performance management, as there is no formal system of linking service priorities to individual targets. However, there are good induction and support procedures for staff, and training and development are appropriately focused on the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

52. There is a good match between advisers' skills, knowledge and expertise and schools' needs. Good use is made of expertise, often by linking senior or specialist colleagues to a liaison adviser to provide support for a specific school. The service is very responsive to new requirements and to school needs, often through the flexible use of the associate advisers and consultants. Nevertheless, some individual workloads are very heavy, and all advisers are required to retain responsibility for a wide range of duties. The recruitment and retention issues that the LEA faces mean that pressure on service provision is increased as a result of delays in finding suitable candidates for key posts. Despite this, the LEA has not compromised on quality, preferring to re-advertise posts rather than make appointments that would dilute the effectiveness of the service. For the most part this has been a successful strategy. Most advisers are, rightly, respected for their expertise and specialist knowledge.

53. Overall, Slough schools perform better than most of the LEA's statistical neighbours and are close to the national average. The inspection team visited many good and improving schools in which the LEA had made an appropriate contribution to school improvement. Relationships with schools are good. Effective use has been made of two externally led projects, one to establish good value-added data for schools and the other focused on raising standards of pupil attainment. The service is of relatively low cost and offers good value for money.

Collection and analysis of data

54. The LEA provides a highly regarded service to its schools. The provision of a comprehensive range of data with a detailed LEA analysis is a strength of the LEA. All schools receive a helpful analysis of their performance data. This includes comparisons with other schools in Slough and draws upon pupil-level data and value-added data. Pupil performance is analysed fully by gender and according to the ethnic heritage of pupils. For secondary schools, it is also analysed according to the type of school.

55. Schools make good use of these data, which received high praise in every school visited during the inspection. They use the data to target teaching resources, to identify pupils in need of support and to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies to raise standards. Its publication is timely; schools and the school improvement team plan their programmes based on its publication. Schools also value the willingness of the LEA monitoring officer to reconfigure data to meet any particular management information requests they make.

56. There is a comprehensive programme of training and support for schools in accessing and using the data. An effective feature of this support is the development of user groups and networks that are differentiated according to needs and take good account of differing levels of confidence in schools' handling of data.

57. The data are used well by liaison advisers to challenge schools to set ambitious targets. In three schools visited the use by the LEA of a well informed target range had the effect of persuading the schools to raise their original targets. Nearly all schools now set intermediate targets at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and these are the subjects of discussion by advisers and schools. In three schools, headteachers felt that the target-setting process had lacked some realism, with a perceived reluctance on the part of the liaison adviser to engage with the particular circumstances of the school. In only one of these schools was there a lack of rigour in the target-setting discussion.

58. Electronic transfer of data is established, and will be extended to all schools shortly. The LEA has been careful to ensure that all schools have sufficient technical resources and expertise before moving to the position where all data are transferred in this way. Pupil performance records are also capable of being transferred effectively when they move schools. However, in two schools this process had not operated smoothly.

Support for literacy

59. Support for literacy is mainly good with few weaknesses. Standards in Key Stage 1 have improved at a much faster rate than nationally, and in Key Stage 2 and 3 the improvement has equalled the national trend.

60. The LEA has set out a clear strategy for literacy that is linked well to its numeracy strategy and draws upon family/community literacy projects, EAZ initiatives and the National Literacy Strategy. The LEA target for eleven year olds was set at 80 per cent achieving Level 4 and above in 2002. This was at the top of

the range proposed by the DfEE. This target has since been raised to 81 per cent. Seventy five per cent of 11-year-olds reached Level 4 and above in 2000 and the schools are on track to achieve the 2002 target.

61. The greatest impact of the LEA's strategy has been seen at Key Stage 1, particularly in boys' achievement and in the improvements in writing. At Key Stage 2 the strategy for addressing underachievement by pupils with English as an additional language had a significant impact in some schools in 2000, reversing the trend for these pupils who had previously been making the slowest progress. Few other trends are discernible across the LEA and its response to schools is, rightly, based on a careful analysis of the context and performance of each school, rather than an LEA-wide analysis of need.

62. Support for schools has benefited from the energetic leadership of the adviser with responsibility for literacy, who has ensured that the strategy remained on course, despite a high level of turnover in the post of literacy consultant. Because of the imperative to maintain service provision during this period, evaluation of the effectiveness of the LEA strategy has been a low priority. On the other hand, monitoring of the work undertaken, and the progress made by schools, has been thorough.

63. Support to schools has been effective, and based upon a clear classification of needs. However, some of the training provision and consultancy, particularly in the early stages, was felt by schools to be inflexible and insufficiently targeted at their needs. Networks to support literacy co-ordinators have not been fully effective in providing peer support for the implementation, and development, of the literacy strategy. This has been a particular concern in supporting secondary schools but has been addressed by the recent appointment of a Key Stage 3 consultant. Other than the literacy summer schools and a cross curricular project, there has been little provision made for secondary schools.

64. The LEA has made good use of the various features of the national strategy. Leading teachers have been carefully prepared for their role; booster classes have received very positive feedback from schools; 110 additional learning support assistants have been trained; more than 20 teaching assistants are trained through an accredited course each year; and good use has been made of national programmes targeted at specific skills.

Support for numeracy

65. Standards in mathematics have risen faster than nationally at Key Stages 1 and 3. At Key Stage 2 the rise each year since 1998 has been equal to or better than the national trend. Despite staffing instability, the LEA has given good support to the numeracy strategy.

66. The LEA has a good strategy for raising standards of numeracy. It planned to provide a wide range of targeted support to identified weaknesses, and, until the autumn term 2000, was successful in achieving its objectives. However, changes in the consultant post and the departure of three leading teachers and the mathematics adviser resulted in an overall lack of continuity in the provision. An

external consultant now provides the planned training programme, although some schools are still waiting for the final day of their entitlement. The arrangements made to cover the role of the adviser, who worked hard to ensure continuity, and the numeracy consultant post, have proved less effective. A new numeracy team, including a Key Stage 3 consultant, has now been appointed for April 2001.

67. The LEA target for eleven year olds was set at 72 per cent achieving Level 4 and above in 2002 and has subsequently been revised upwards to 79 per cent. The 2000 intermediate target of 68 per cent was exceeded by three per cent and the new target of 79 per cent represents a more realistic and achievable target given the 19 per cent improvement in Slough since 1997. Targets for pupils with English as an additional language are set in all schools, and for underperforming groups where there are significant differences within a school.

68. The most positive aspects of the LEA's support for numeracy have been its training, and use, of leading mathematics teachers; the initial training for schools and the active use of teacher/co-ordinator networks, including those for secondary schools. The seven leading teachers were well prepared for their role by the mathematics adviser and have been able to make a good contribution in many schools. The notion of using excellent teachers to spread good practice has been central to the LEA's strategy and has been effective in schools, resulting in the appointment of more leading teachers than was originally planned. It has been effectively expanded into the use of demonstration lessons given by teachers in their own schools. The initial training was well received by schools and a well-attended conference on Key Stage 3 mathematics was held last year. Numeracy summer schools have also been held, which has given some secondary schools greater insight into the improved numeracy skills and understanding those Year 7 pupils will have. Support for secondary schools has been much more limited than that offered to primary schools. However, the support networks facilitated by the mathematics adviser and the consultant were popular and enabled schools from all phases to share good practice and maintain contact with the lead LEA personnel.

Support for ICT

69. The LEA has placed a high priority on the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) in schools, to raise attainment in information technology and to use ICT across the curriculum. Its strategy is ambitious but is well conceived. This strategy enabled all schools to reach a common platform of IT provision in 1998, and then phased in the installation of networks and technical support in succeeding years. Very good links with local commercial and business partners, and with the EAZ, have been established to promote further the use of ICT. Many schools have benefited, often considerably so, from a range of innovative partnerships of this nature.

70. The LEA has created a first class website for schools, with curriculum and assessment materials readily available for use by teachers and pupils. All schools have good quality Internet access and are well placed to access the full Slough Intranet when it goes on line in 2001. Curriculum and administrative applications of ICT have been developed in parallel, particularly for assessment purposes. In only one school visited had delays in the installation of hardware limited the school's use

of ICT. Good guidance has been issued on training, enabling schools to access and make effective use of the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training.

71. At the heart of the LEA's strategy is an emphasis on teaching and learning and on ICT applications across the curriculum. Helpful guidance has been issued to schools, with good quality training to support its use. Networks and user groups for teachers are well attended and benefit from the expert leadership of the adviser and advisory teacher for ICT. Careful attention has been paid to the use of ICT to support the learning of children with special educational needs and, for example, the hospital unit is able to make good use of the website to enable children to maintain contact with their studies whilst hospitalised. Good use has also been made of ICT to improve the attainment of pupils of minority ethnic heritage.

72. The LEA monitors attainment closely, gathering data on pupil attainment for years 4,7,9 and 11 and uses these data to target its training and guidance. Teacher skills and knowledge are audited carefully, secondary school reviews and the on-line ICT health checks for schools being effective features of this.

Support for schools causing concern

73. The LEA has designed and implemented an effective strategy to identify and remedy weaknesses in schools. It has also acted decisively in the relatively low proportion of schools where weaknesses have been identified by OFSTED inspections. Since 1998, one secondary school has been removed from the special measures category. One secondary school was deemed to require special measures in May 1998 and is still the subject of monitoring by HMI. The monitoring reports from these visits indicate that the LEA has provided significant and constructive support to the school. Two schools have had serious weaknesses identified, a primary school in November 1997, and a secondary school in March 1999. In subsequent inspections both schools were found to have addressed successfully the weaknesses identified in the earlier inspections.

74. Two further schools, one secondary and one primary, have been identified by the LEA as causing concern. The primary school is the subject of continuing LEA support and review. The secondary school, in common with the school requiring special measures, has still to resolve fully issues of teacher recruitment, despite considerable LEA support. The LEA has used the full range of intervention powers available to ensure that schools causing concern are fully aware of the urgent need for improvement. These powers have been used thoughtfully, but decisively, to pinpoint and resolve particular weaknesses in schools. The triggers for their use are understood by schools and are discussed in detail with them.

75. Eight schools have been designated as focus schools for early intervention and support and the LEA has been successful in supporting these schools to address the weaknesses identified. Following a thorough review, involving the full school improvement team, senior officers and members, schools in this category receive intensive support. Good quality, costed and targeted action plans are drawn up, progress is monitored carefully and exit strategies are prepared to enable schools to move out of the category as soon as possible. The only weakness in the strategy is that governors were not involved sufficiently in the early stage of identification and

action planning.

Support for governors

76. The LEA fulfils its statutory duties to support governors and it provides a basic level of service to governing bodies. However, it does not actively promote and develop their strategic role and responsibilities in community or nursery schools.

77. Information is provided to governors, and governing bodies are well consulted on LEA policy and changes in strategy. A termly meeting for chairs with the CEO and the commissioner for children and young people is an effective means of keeping governors abreast of LEA developments. When the LEA sought governors' views on how they would like to be consulted this was the schools' preferred method. It means that, other than in some focus schools and in schools causing concern, there are few opportunities for governors to join LEA officers in discussing their role to monitor and evaluate a school's success in meeting its priorities for development.

78. LEA advisers too rarely meet governors. Until 2000/01, governors were not involved in the school's review and target-setting meeting and, although they were invited to attend in the current academic year, few did so. During the inspection, it was apparent that few governors were aware of this opportunity. The personnel unit, which manages governor support, has very recently been moved into the SILL branch. The previous isolation of governor training and information services means that there have been too few opportunities for the LEA to play an active role in offering co-ordinated leadership to promote the higher order operations of governance.

79. Whilst many councillors sit on governing bodies and regularly canvass for additional LEA members they have not actively promoted the role of governors in the community. The representation of minority ethnic heritage groups is low in many schools. A recruitment campaign, launched in September 2000, has been successful in reducing the level of vacancies from 41 to 16. This still means that 11 per cent of LEA nominated governor positions were vacant at the time of the inspection. The LEA has effectively used its powers of intervention to appoint additional governors in one school.

80. A termly briefing and induction programme for new clerks is provided. These services are well received by the schools that access them and governors feel that the new authority makes strenuous efforts to keep them informed. However, summary briefings of important documents are rarely provided, and when they are it is often some time after the document has arrived in school. At least two schools purchase a briefing service from another source.

81. Governor training is managed within the personnel unit and difficulties in recruitment meant that, until 2000, there were insufficient staff to respond to the wide range of demands upon the unit. Despite this, a training programme is offered and officers are now appropriately qualified to deliver the training programme. However, take up of many courses is low and courses have had to be cancelled, often at short notice. Many schools use training from private providers and one

cluster of schools now organises its own, well-attended, governor training programme. The LEA induction course for governors is appreciated by schools and used widely.

Support for school management

82. A good range of support is available to support management in schools. The LEA is committed to a programme of supported school self review to replace the annual review process that has now ceased for the majority of schools. Some schools have developed sophisticated self-review strategies and need little or no LEA involvement in their management. The LEA has recognised this and has directed its work, in consultation with these schools, to providing an external validation of the school's review processes or monitoring judgements. There is, however, little justification for retaining resources centrally to spend time supporting management in these successful schools.

83. Over two thirds of schools have attended the LEA facilitated self-evaluation course and all schools have received a copy of the helpful LEA guidance on school self-review. This guidance was drawn up in conjunction with schools. School visits confirmed that the emphasis on developing self-managing and self-improving schools is an appropriate one. In nearly every school visited, headteachers identified LEA support for self-review as the most significant element of the support it offered to them. The positive impact of this strategy has, in part, been weakened by a lack of involvement of governors in the LEA training and development process.

84. Liaison advisers offer good support to the majority of headteachers and school leaders. They broker support well and give guidance to schools in the development of classroom observation and self-monitoring strategies.

85. Good attention is paid to headteacher development and induction. The LEA gives its full backing to the national leadership programmes and plays a strong quality assurance role in finding, and contracting, external support for schools that choose to avail themselves of this facility. A reasonably comprehensive range of training covering management and curriculum topics is offered to schools. The evaluations of courses indicate that they are well received by participants. However, a number of courses are cancelled owing to low take-up, often at quite short notice, and problems with obtaining in-school cover for teachers sometimes restricts take-up.

86. Support for curriculum leaders is patchy. There is a lack of focus on the development of these middle managers in the context of their school and their responsibilities. The opportunities provided for middle managers to develop their skills and to share expertise with others are not effective. Some co-ordinator networks, notably for SENCOs, for ICT, and until recently for mathematics, have proved very successful but in other curriculum areas, particularly English, science and music, little LEA leadership is offered.

87. Support for newly qualified teachers is good. The LEA offers a good induction and training programme and targets its in-school support to schools where these teachers need additional support, or where the school requests an external view of

the judgements it has made in relation to the national standards.

88. The LEA has made effective use of leading teachers and advanced skills teachers in primary schools, particularly through facilitating the extended role of the latter in other schools. The Beacon School provides a range of training and support for other schools, in some cases at the suggestion of the LEA, although it has no formal brokering role. Two schools visited had made requests for support that had received no response from the school.

Support for early years education

89. Slough has made a high commitment to early years childcare and education and progress has been good. The council budget for early years is above the national and unitary authority averages. The early years development and child-care partnership plan (EYDCP) takes good account of the EDP and the childrens' services plan and was produced through widespread representation and consultation. The plan promotes and supports the council's equality policy and the strategy for early intervention for children with special educational needs. However, there is insufficient leadership for the foundation curriculum in schools, and a need for more coherent guidance to schools on the management of the early years strategy overall.

90. Initial work was appropriately targeted on the co-ordination of a range of strategies, settings and providers to establish effective joint working and this is steadily improving. Using nursery assessment and baseline measures in schools the LEA is establishing a database from which pupil tracking and added value measures can be developed for the future. Places are available for all four-year-olds and 95 per cent are taken up. The target for three-year-old places by 2004 will be met and already 75 per cent of children can be placed. The council offers an integrated training programme for all providers with an emphasis on pre-school settings.

91. Slough has five nursery schools including two early years centres, both in areas of social and economic need. A Sure Start programme and First Steps provision have been developed in areas of similar need. They offer good family support programmes, bilingual staffing in the centres and training in community languages for parents and staff. Effective support and guidance are available for early years' staff, particularly for children with special educational needs and for children and families with an ethnic minority heritage.

Support for 14-19 education

92. Standards of attainment at Key Stage 4 have risen steadily since 1998 and by 2000 were above the national average and those of statistical neighbours. The standards achieved by post-16 students are broadly in line with national averages.

93. Slough has made satisfactory progress in its support for 14 to 19 curriculum developments. A helpful review of Post-16 curriculum provision and quality of teaching, carried out with further and higher education partners, has recently reported. A secondary review is underway charged with investigating the impact of selection on school places and admissions as well as on the attitudes of pupils and

parents. So far the developments for 14 to 19 education have been fragmented and the LEA has a greater leadership contribution to make to the strategic decisions for the future.

94. A number of appropriate conferences and training opportunities have been brokered by the LEA for senior and middle managers in schools on 14-19 provision, Curriculum 2000, vocational qualifications and key skills. As a result two schools have introduced pre-16 vocational courses. Links have been strengthened with East Berkshire College of Further Education to provide vocational workshops and key skills programmes for pupils. The business community works closely with the LEA to support the curriculum, for example, the Activate programme, whereby 50 Key Stage 4 pupils will be able to follow an integrated five day programme of work related learning and work experience from September 2001. Similarly the Nai Roshni Partnership supports effective projects such as 'Tune into Work', Easter revision schools, 'U Choose' for pupils in public care and a summer university.

Recommendations

In order to assist governors in playing a full role in monitoring and evaluating the work of schools:

- involve governors more with senior officers and advisers in the outcomes and strategic implications of LEA monitoring of schools.

In order to further strengthen management in schools:

- develop a formal system for validating the outcomes of school self reviews; and
- improve the effectiveness of the continuing professional development of middle managers to give more support to improving teaching in schools.

In order to develop the 14-19 curriculum:

- establish the principles and strategic intent for 14-19 education in the borough.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

95. Corporate planning procedures are strong in Slough. There is a good degree of coherence between the objectives of the strategic plans of the council and those of the education department. Elected members and senior officers give clear leadership to the decisions and strategies for implementation. The council strategy has been effective in involving representatives of business, schools, community groups and other organisations in the development of the plans. This has led to good levels of understanding and agreement about the Council's overall intentions. There has been considerable debate and challenge from the communities of Slough over the detailed operational interpretation of some of these broader intentions. The LEA has responded to these situations with a satisfactory degree of reflection, clarity and resolve about its purposes.

96. Education, skills and employment are key components of the community plan and the economic development plan. There are clear links between these plans and the actions of the EDP, the children's services plan and the EYCDP. There is also good liaison between the LEA and the EAZ to co-ordinate activities for school improvement. Cross department corporate working parties of senior officers are charged with implementing plans collaboratively to provide coherence for the users of services and this is beginning to work effectively. In the main, the plans are achievable and practical in terms of resources and suitable timescales. Financial decision-making and the budget procedures of the council are sound and linked well to overall education priorities. There is no medium term financial plan but medium term targets are in place.

97. The senior management of the education department comprises the chief education officer and three assistant chief education officers. They lead branches for school improvement and life long learning, resources and pupil services which are soon to be re-structured into two branches through the incorporation of resources into the other two branches. The chief education officer provides open, thoughtful and sensitive leadership to the service and this is widely appreciated by schools. Changes and staffing difficulties in the education management team since the start of the LEA have hindered progress, particularly in financial services and in some areas of school improvement. The current management team provides good leadership and an increasing level of challenge, both within the department and in schools. There is a very strong commitment to school improvement and this is well communicated to elected members and schools. Senior staff welcome and support new initiatives and have made a substantial commitment to their co-ordination and management. A strength of the LEA is the effective partnerships built with almost all of the schools.

98. Officers provide clear and comprehensive information to elected members who find the briefings helpful. However the analyses seldom provides members with a range of options for their decisions. Rather they include a well-presented case for a preferred option. Briefing for members is too rarely informed by rigorous evaluation of current strategies and their effectiveness.

99. Performance management and Best Value processes are inconsistently developed in the LEA. Annual appraisal is in place for all staff. The children and pupils services branch is using the continuous improvement management model as part of a corporate pilot for performance management. Some services, for example SEN, use a good range of survey methods with schools and parents to evaluate their work. However, robust evaluation of departmental actions and provision is not consistently present. In addition, the financial information available to schools about the costs of central LEA services lacks the detail for any value for money judgements to be made. Nevertheless, there is a good quality specification for the forthcoming Best Value review of the SILL branch and a clear intention to improve the EDP by introducing annual implementation plans with more precise targets and success criteria. Additionally, an electronic system for monitoring the work of the school improvement team is soon to be introduced. These developments are appropriate and needed across the LEA to ensure more effective evaluation and accountability of the services provided and to move the department closer to the requirements of effective performance management.

Partnerships with other agencies and local government departments

100. Slough has built upon and extended existing partnerships to make this a strength of the authority. Effective consultation, planning and operational work are achieved with the diocesan boards of education, the college of further education, community groups, the race equality council, local and national agencies and a wide range of local businesses. Networks are extensive and constructive and the LEA supports them through good communication and an open style. These partnerships are more than aspirational, they provide practical support for teachers and pupils where the need is greatest.

101. The breadth of provision is impressive and is exemplified by the following: a police led community safety programme with young people focusing on racial incidents; Project Business which offers ICT support to teachers and pupils and the use of shared facilities; Nai Roshni which provides business and leadership mentors for young people together with mediation support. Strategic liaison with social services and health are effective and operate well in the early year's field.

102. The EAZ is a key partner and its work with schools is well aligned to the EDP priorities. The LEA, in partnership with schools, took the lead at the outset and defined the relationship appropriately. Part of the function of the EAZ is to pilot and resource initiatives that can be developed across the LEA. These projects include work with staff on English as an additional language (EAL) in mainstream schools, ICT training, plus school nurture groups to reduce exclusions through work with disaffected pupils in the primary phase.

Management services

103. Services to support management in schools have not been consistently effective and support to schools on finance has been particularly unsatisfactory. Problems with recruitment, combined with the lack of any staff transferring to Slough from the former Berkshire LEA, made it difficult to provide responsive financial and

personnel advice. Inadequacies of financial accounting systems and of payroll have placed a disproportionate burden on many schools. Although much effort has been expended to overcome these problems, insufficient creativity and urgency has been shown in resolving them. While the property services section has made a satisfactory contribution overall to the asset management process, it has not managed the performance of the repair and maintenance work adequately. In contrast, there are many new and exciting initiatives that are being launched in support of ICT for administration in schools.

104. The **financial services** overall have been poor. There are a few individual examples of effective intensive support to schools in difficulty but these do not extend to other schools. Apart from a brief period of six months, the education finance team has been understaffed throughout the LEA's tenure to date, despite repeated attempts to recruit new staff. The introduction of a financial accounting system ill matched to the needs of schools contributed greatly to the frustration experienced by them. The LEA gave schools the choice of keeping their own accounts in 1999/2000 but two thirds of schools continue to use the corporate accounting system and, although upgraded, they report dissatisfaction with it. Slough does not undertake monthly reconciliation, but for schools using the council's systems the LEA is now moving to quarterly monitoring. School budget information has not arrived in schools early enough for schools to plan effectively, although ambitious targets have been set for next year. Payroll miscodings and errors also occupy too much school time, although the council has tendered for a new payroll system that it hopes will be in place for 2001/2002. The well developed provision for administrative ICT provides a common platform of commercial software for schools' financial management.

105. The education **personnel service** has a balance of strengths and weaknesses. The team has been beset with much the same staffing problems that the finance team has experienced and has struggled to give its schools a responsive service for casework relating to capability, sickness absence and on conditions of service. The service was reviewed by the council in the summer of 1999. The outcome, implemented in April 2000, was the outsourcing of casework support, leaving a small team to undertake a strategic role in developing model policies, recruitment, and support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and on equal opportunities. It has performed this role well and heads praised the work of the recruitment manager in acting to reduce teacher vacancies. Although support for procurement could have been better handled, the LEA did undertake a limited but often effective client role in supporting schools with their new responsibilities. Some schools feel, with justification, that they did not have full information about the likely costs of the new arrangements and are disappointed that a more fundamental review with more detailed options for change were not explored earlier. There is a lack of focus on the development of these middle managers in the context of their school and their responsibilities.

106. For **administrative ICT services** the LEA has succeeded in developing and implementing a wide-ranging and robust strategy in schools. It has put in place an effective agreement with an external provider for an audit of requirements, hardware and software support and training differentiated to need. It has also provided two machines per school for administrative use from its added value project funding. A

corporate and a school' 'online' website have been introduced with the aim of providing an interactive library and to support data exchange. A pupil level database is also being developed to support the analysis of performance data, and plans for the pupil level annual census data are well advanced. It has taken a number of positive steps to reduce the bureaucratic burden on schools and subjected its provision to peer group evaluation using the DfEE's national information and communication standard. The LEA expects to introduce a new standard requiring all directorate business to be handled electronically within the next three months.

107. The LEA has strengths and weaknesses in its **property services**. Good progress has been made with asset management procedures but the repairs and maintenance to property have been unsatisfactory.

108. The planning and development team supported by property services have met all DfEE requirements on asset management planning to date, completing all condition and suitability surveys on time and sharing results with schools. Building work, mostly relating to replacement of temporary buildings last year and this year, has proved to be satisfactory.

109. The council inherited a substantial backlog of repair and maintenance but, despite this, levels of investment by the council have been poor in relation to need until this year when delegated revenue maintenance increased significantly. Delegated funding overall is not matched to need and the LEA is committed to increasing this investment in the future. Although almost all schools buy into the council's arrangements for repairs and maintenance, technical support on its school building has been too variable and unsatisfactory overall. The council has moved forward by providing a building liaison officer linked to every school, but this has been too long in coming and more needs to be done to improve quality assurance and responsiveness.

Recommendations

In order to improve the management support services to schools:

- improve the advice and support to schools for finance and personnel exploring a range of options that meet the needs of schools;
- develop and implement a procurement strategy that is supported by service standards, service specifications and detailed information on the costs of service activities; and
- develop and implement arrangements to assure the quality of technical support for repairs and maintenance of school buildings.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

110. Slough has a clear strategy for special educational needs that is effectively linked to elements of the borough's inclusion policy. The strategy is supported by individual policies for specialist provision such as autism and sensory impairment. A strength of the LEA has been the extensive consultations with schools and the community to audit provision and gather views on future needs. There is a clear and comprehensive SEN development plan and service delivery plans which are reviewed termly by a monitoring group of headteachers and officers.

111. The medium term strategy articulated by senior officers and many headteachers is clear. It involves a reducing use of out-borough special schools and the maintenance of a small and high quality provision within the two Slough special schools and two pupil referral units. Mainstream school resource bases for specific needs have been developed at a good pace and this will be further extended. Funding mechanisms are evolving to meet the incremental changes in schools and to secure the highest possible level of inclusion. Slough has made good progress with SEN in a short period of time. It has introduced a judicious balance of mainstream and special provision in which schools are clear about their role.

112. Slough maintains two special schools, one for children with moderate multiple and severe learning difficulties and the second for educational and behavioural needs. There are two PRUs, one for pupils who, for reasons of emotional need, do not attend school and the other for those in secondary schools with educational and behavioural difficulties. In addition, there are eight special resource centres in mainstream schools that provide for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and for pupils with physical disability. This approach is effectively developing the further inclusion of pupils into mainstream schooling. A good service for SEN has been established in partnership with schools and the LEA is effectively changing the culture towards greater inclusion. This is being supported by most schools. Officers confidently lead innovation through projects for example to reduce the number of statements, to use information technology for SEN teaching and to provide on-line outreach support from a special school for hospital based pupils.

113. The budget for SEN as a percentage of its local school budget is 8.5 per cent below the unitary average and, taken together with its relatively high school funding levels, this investment is well matched to the increased needs in schools. Expenditure on placements outside the LEA and on special needs transport is higher than unitary averages although the strategy appropriately seeks to reduce the expenditure at a pace aligned to the inclusion of pupils in mainstream schools in Slough. Delegation of SEN funding is more than 20 per cent higher than the unitary authority and national average. Arrangements to monitor the use of delegated funding and guidance on the best use of school resources for SEN have not yet kept pace with these funding changes. There is also insufficient transparency about the basis for allocating SEN resources to school budgets.

114. The SEN strategy is well managed by the assistant chief education officer through strong teams led by the principal educational psychologist. The direction

and guidance given to schools on the provision for pupils are of high quality and the services provided are mainly good.

Statutory obligations

115. Slough takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations for SEN but the administration of statutory assessments is unsatisfactory. Currently, the LEA completes only 65 per cent of statements within the recommended 18-week period, an improvement on the 40 per cent figure in 1998/1999. The target for 2000/2001 is 90 per cent and the high resource commitment to the education psychology service and administration team makes this target achievable. The SEN panel, comprising headteachers and officers, determines the referrals for a statement and most schools regard this process as open and fair. The quality of writing within statements has improved and the annual review of statements is thorough with a focus on amendment and up dating at the point of transfer at the end of Year Six.

116. Comprehensive information is provided for parents about the LEA's provision for SEN. Some documents are not easily readable and lack an informative presentation that would benefit parents. The recently introduced parent partnership and the parents forum are good developments; SENCOs speak highly of their value to schools and parents. Importantly, LEA staff recognise the need to maintain impartiality in the role and an independent conciliation service is also available to parents via an external organisation. Since April 1998 there have been only two tribunals, an indication that the LEA procedures are effective in most cases.

Improvement and Value for Money

117. Slough provides good value for money for SEN. Planning is well developed and, as part of a local authority pilot, all services use the continuous improvement model for service plans. Monitoring of progress with the development plan takes place through service evaluation that includes review meetings and questionnaires with schools, plus 'customer' surveys of parents and other agencies. In addition the special educational needs monitoring group, comprising headteachers and officers reports to the education commissioner on a regular basis. The progress and achievements of pupils with SEN are monitored by the LEA through termly liaison meetings in schools, annual reviews of statemented pupils and feedback from service teams. A unique pupil database has been introduced, in line with all LEA pupil data, to track particular disability groups and their attainment and progress at the end of each key stage.

118. The LEA has effective systems in place for identifying and assessing pupils with SEN and good documentary advice is provided to schools. The criteria for determining a referral for statutory assessment are well documented and the teaching and support service (TASS) provides schools with clear diagnostic assessments of pupils' needs. The educational psychology service is highly regarded by all schools and termly liaison meetings, which often include education welfare officers, learning support staff and child and family social workers, are helpful in identifying strategies to support individual pupils. Parents and schools receive good advice from a bilingual assessment co-ordinator to clarify their identification of special educational needs as distinct from language needs. Special

Educational Needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) are appropriately involved in moderation of the levels of need of individual pupils, and this provides valuable professional development.

119. The provision of support services to schools is generally good. The network for SENCOs is well received, efficiently organised and provides worthwhile updates and professional development. Through the schools' website pupils and staff are able to communicate and get support from special and mainstream schools. Learning and advisory support is good overall as is the guidance given for pupils with sensory impairment. In a few areas support is unsatisfactory although strategic links are good. These concern the accessibility and speed of response from social services and health services, shortages in speech and language support and insufficient guidance to governors on their statutory responsibilities for SEN.

Recommendations

In order to improve the implementation of the policy for SEN:

- make clear to schools the level of SEN funding and the method of allocation;
- put in place procedures for monitoring the use of SEN funding in schools;
- produce clear and detailed guidance on the use of SEN resources in schools to best meet the varied needs of pupils and schools; and
- ensure that the efficiency of the administration of statutory assessments is greatly improved.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

120. The LEA has made sound progress in its management of school places which is satisfactory. It has made good progress with the removal of temporary classrooms and dealt sensitively with the amalgamation of infant and junior schools, against considerable opposition.

121. Slough has 11 secondary schools of which four are selective schools with sixth forms. The LEA faces a major challenge in meeting the increasing demand for secondary school places. Seven thousand new houses have been allocated to Slough through the Berkshire structure plan. Demand for secondary school places will rise year on year and peak in 2003/2004, increasing by 7.2 per cent. The LEA has responded by initiating a review of secondary school provision alongside one for sixth form education. Consultation with secondary schools has taken place within a positive and open climate. The school organisation plan provides a generally satisfactory platform to do more detailed research and analysis integral to the implementation of the review. As part of the review the LEA has commissioned an external study of pupil mobility, parental preferences, pupil attitudes and the impact of selection on future patterns of admission. Whilst the review is underway, the LEA is reserving its position on future secondary school strategy including the issue of selection.

122. The infant class size plan provided a good basis to meet the Government target and it has done so. Net surplus places in primary schools will fall from the current level of 5 per cent by 1.7 per cent by 2004/5. The three primary schools with more than 25 per cent surplus places are in central Slough and involve a relatively small number of surplus places. An upturn is forecast after 2004/5.

Admissions

123. Slough provides a service for admissions that operates in a complex context and is satisfactory overall. Further progress is needed in the work with foundation and aided schools to clarify and simplify arrangements. The LEA has made reasonable progress, although it avoids involvement with the arrangements relating to selection. Admissions booklets are well written and generally comply with good practice. Slough has an effective admissions forum that is moving forward on issues affecting pupils in the borough. There is now a common admissions policy for nursery schools and nursery classes. The admissions adjudicator has agreed to the admission of four-year-olds into reception classes a term early giving the LEA the flexibility to provide more nursery class places for three-year-olds with social needs. The LEA is now seeking a single point of entry for its community primary schools to bring them in line with the September entry in foundation schools.

124. Admissions appeals for places are determined in good time: in primary community schools by the summer half term while secondary ones are completed before the start of the summer term. However, although the LEA co-ordinates a programme of admissions for both the primary and secondary sector, parents applying for places in selective secondary schools have to complete a separate

application form for each school. This is in addition to the application form they need to complete for a place in a non-selective school. Arrangements for admissions appeals require parents to appeal for a selective place and then for a specific place at a selective school. The process is cumbersome and lacks clarity. The LEA has done insufficient work with selective schools to improve parents' experience of secondary transfer.

Provision of education other than at school

125. The LEA's provision for pupils who have no school place has strengths and some weaknesses. The placement of pupils who are not on a school roll, or registered both at school and the PRU, is closely monitored through advisory and steering groups and the 'at risk' panel. Referral systems are well known to schools and they are satisfied with the support from the LEA. There is a firm commitment to reintegration and the LEA achieves reasonable success in this.

126. Resources are used flexibly to support pupils' education and welfare in a variety of settings. Plans for 25 hours of full-time education by 2002 are on target at Key Stage 4 but not at other key stages. Excellent links have been developed between schools and one of the PRUs through the designated teacher scheme whereby the mainstream teachers in secondary schools with responsibility for supporting behaviour and attendance spend some time teaching in the PRU. This enhances the expertise and curriculum in the unit, supports effective communication and serves as a training ground and seedbed of good practice, which is disseminated into schools.

127. For pupils at Key Stage 4, the LEA makes very efficient and high quality provision, based on a good analysis of need and effective links with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations and local businesses. The work at teaching bases is greatly enriched by a wide variety of alternative provision through very good support from the education business partnership, youth offending team, youth and community service, East Berkshire College and other organisations and individuals. Pupils achieve well at this key stage, as reflected in the above average percentage of Year 11 pupils receiving alternative tuition who are entered for GCSE. Some pupils in Key Stage 3 also benefit from this effective work at the PRU.

128. In contrast, there is no clear strategy or costed plan to provide adequate education for pupils at Key Stages 2 and 3. Most pupils receive insufficient direct teaching. The majority of these pupils at the time of the inspection were receiving less than six hours. Records indicate that in a number of cases the LEA has not met its target to make provision for pupils within half a term of notification.

Attendance

129. Support for attendance is satisfactory overall but there is insufficient improvement in primary school attendance. Whilst attendance in secondary schools is above the national average, primary schools fall below the national figure. The target for authorised absence in primary schools in the EDP for 1999/2000 was not met. The transitory nature of the school population, the increasingly high proportion of refugees and asylum seekers, the incidence of extended visits overseas and the

significant number of children of Traveller families are contextual factors which have contributed to this lack of improvement. The failure to recruit has meant that the education welfare service (EWS) was not fully staffed until September 2000 and this has limited the effectiveness of the service. Nevertheless, the majority of schools are at least satisfied with the support they have received. Special schools rate the support as good. In the schools consulted where the support was found to have shortcomings, it was linked to changes of personnel and staff being over-stretched.

130. In secondary schools, attendance has remained above the national average. Levels of authorised absence are below the national average and unauthorised absence is in line with the national average. In primary schools, attendance has remained below the national average and both unauthorised and authorised absences are above the national average.

131. Despite its staffing difficulties, the EWS has played a key role in enabling the LEA to fulfil its statutory duties. Prosecutions are used appropriately. Clear guidance for schools on arrangements for granting extended leave has been produced but this has had little impact in reducing authorised absence. Extensive consultation and co-operation between the EWS and other pupil services and organisations has developed a good range of strategies and procedures to support government-set targets and the priorities in the EDP. Early intervention is a clear focus and the introduction of first day response and an 'on duty' system on which schools can call every afternoon is particularly appreciated as a means of reducing the length of pupils' absence. Work with newcomers into the LEA, poor attenders and vulnerable groups at risk of exclusion has begun, but its impact has not yet been evaluated systematically. Attendance is monitored carefully and followed up by relevant agencies. Although each school has a minimum entitlement of support, resources have been appropriately targeted in schools where levels of absence and exclusion are of greatest concern. Effective guidance and support for these schools has raised levels of attendance.

Behaviour support

132. The LEA's arrangements for tackling issues of behaviour are good and, although well resourced, the services give good value for money. The council's commitment to inclusion is reflected in the way in which the management of behaviour is properly seen as the shared responsibility of all staff in schools. The LEA assists them to do this by providing the support and skills they need to manage problems within classrooms. The recently produced behaviour support handbook includes much helpful information, including a wide range of relevant policies, a clear description of the range of support available, and details of some of the innovative projects in the borough which might be transferred.

133. Reducing the rate of exclusions has been a high priority which is reflected in the EDP as well as the behaviour support plan. Exclusions from primary and secondary schools were above the national average until 1998. Since then the schools, with the support of the LEA, have been successful in reducing permanent exclusions. In 1998/1999, there were no permanent exclusions from primary schools. Between 1998 and 2000 no pupil was permanently excluded from a special school, and fixed term exclusions fell from 13 in 1999 to three in 2000. In 1999 there

was also a significant fall in permanent exclusions from secondary schools at Key Stage 4 dropping to one from 11 in the previous year. Despite these successes, fixed term exclusions have risen over the same period; this has been at a similar rate for boys and girls and in primary schools they have increased by almost a third.

134. The behaviour support plan contains credible and realistic strategies to improve attendance and behaviour, but there is no clear indication of how the success of the various strategies is to be evaluated. Neither is attention given to how schools will keep curricular and pastoral strategies under review to reflect the particular needs of Black African and Caribbean boys.

135. Operational planning is good. Through a well co-ordinated multi-service and inter-agency approach, the LEA offers a wide variety of support which is appreciated by schools. The contribution of the educational psychology service (EPS) is held in particularly high regard. The success of the support derives from the trust and good communication between schools and pupil services and the flexibility of the services to respond to identified needs. The focus of the LEA's work is shifting to preventative work and with younger children. Spending on the EPS and EWS service is high and the behaviour support service (BSS) is also well resourced partly as a result of attracting funding from a variety of sources.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

136. The LEA gives inadequate leadership and guidance to schools to enable them to fulfil their statutory responsibilities for health and safety. Planning focuses on the short term only. The LEA has insufficient information about policies, practices and potential hazards in schools to inform planning and targeting of resources to areas of greatest need. Berkshire LEA policies are still in use, most of which date back to the early 1990s and are in need of revision. There is no policy on school security. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) audit of 2000 revealed that schools' health and safety policies were also largely generic documents, some were undated and unsigned and in need of revision. Although the LEA has reminded schools of these shortcomings, this has not been monitored effectively.

137. There are gaps in information, training has had poor take-up and governors and the LEA cannot be sure that risk assessment is adequate. A condition survey and a number of OFSTED inspections confirmed that there are unaddressed health and safety issues in some schools. For the last year, the under-resourcing of this function has been tackled through the secondment of a corporate health and safety officer to the education service, who has begun to draw up a plan for schools which will facilitate their development of compliant health and safety management systems. The council has recently begun to attach greater importance to health and safety issues.

138. Sound child protection procedures are in place, the guidance to schools has been updated and there is close monitoring of children on the child protection register. The school survey confirms that advice on child protection procedures is at least satisfactory and in special schools it is good. Liaison with social services is satisfactory at a strategic level, but the quality of support at school level is not

consistently satisfactory. Joint protocols, some co-operative project working and joint training of social workers and teachers involved with children in public care are examples of how the two services work well together in some situations. The head of pupil services and a headteacher play an active role as representatives on the area child protection committee and in training for staff. Links between the LEA and the health service are satisfactory and the LEA is well ahead with the government's target for healthy schools projects and awards.

Children in public care

139. The LEA meets statutory requirements and makes good provision for promoting high achievement, good attendance and ensuring the welfare of the children in its care. This is based on the development of guidelines for best practice and protocol for use between agencies, good support from the EWS and strong links between schools, parents/carers and children's homes. The looked-after children's service (LACES) is well regarded by schools and other agencies for its swift, effective action, clear criteria for referral and good support. It provides good value for money. The LEA achieves considerable success in instilling confidence in carers and children that they can succeed, and in supporting staff in raising children's self-esteem and levels of attainment. No child was excluded last year. LACES provides both advice, strategies and training for the teacher who is designated in each school to support pupils. The service also provides a temporary alternative curriculum at a resource base.

140. Pupils achieve well at all key stages. In 2000 pupils' results improved significantly and GCSE targets have been revised upwards. The LEA keeps up to date records, which enable pupils' progress to be monitored. All pupils have personal education plans which form the education component of the young person's care plan and record identified educational needs, how these will be met and by whom.

Gifted and talented children

141. The LEA has begun to develop the provision for pupils who demonstrate particular gifts and talents. Recent action has started to draw together existing curriculum enrichment strategies to give the plans greater co-ordination. A two-day conference for primary schools in January 2001 considered fundamental questions of pupil identification, policy issues, school strategies, and skills development. LEA and school policies are a planned outcome of the conference. Good links for music exist with the Guildhall School, Eton College, and the Berkshire Musicians Trust. The EAZ and the arts development officer provide out of school activities, and a secondary school offers master-classes in English, mathematics, science and Latin. A successful science summer school took place in 2000 for Year 6 pupils who were transferring to non-selective secondary schools. Sport is another focus and is supported by the leisure and youth departments of the council as well as sponsors.

Children of minority ethnic heritage including Travellers

142. The LEA provides satisfactory support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage, given the range and complexity of the issues to be addressed. The EDP is well

constructed from the point of view of minority ethnic issues with reference throughout to the needs of specific ethnic groups. Several priorities refer to specific activities targeted at these groups. Priority 8 is entirely about meeting the needs of late arriving bilingual pupils and refugees, and working with parents to promote the achievement of underachieving groups. A good quality ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grant (EMTAG) plan demonstrates a coherent approach to provision with references to the EDP. The strategies are good and related directly to the needs identified. The LEA provides helpful guidance on the use of EMTAG funds in its 'raising achievement' document and more general information in its 'Equality in Education' manual. Grant funding is delegated to schools according to clear criteria. The variability in expertise of teachers, a shortage of particular skills and the way in which central resources are deployed results in an unevenness in meeting the needs of pupils and their families. Systems of monitoring are insufficiently rigorous to identify this variance in effectiveness.

143. The collection and analysis of attainment data by ethnicity is recent, but its use in identifying underachieving groups and setting more realistic targets for minority ethnic groups is developing well. The results achieved in 2000 by Pakistani and Indian pupils were close to the targets, but those for black African and Caribbean were well below. Specific projects to address the underachievement of these pupils are underway or planned but it is too early to gauge impact on pupil outcomes.

144. The LEA provides good support for Travellers through the joint service in the Thames Valley consortium. Good relationships have been established with Traveller communities. The consortium development plan outlines the strategic direction for the service and the LEA has produced specific targets for its pupils. In response to growing and changing needs, the LEA has broadened the scope of its work and carried out project work in a number of schools to raise attainment, support integration and facilitate transfer from primary to secondary.

145. Slough has approximately 300 newly arrived pupils from asylum-seeking and refugee families. The council strategy provides a well-planned and sequenced programme of support, initially to the family and then to pupils on their admission to school. Guidance is given to teachers at the outset and in addition the skills of the school's EAL staff and other support teachers are used to meet the needs of pupils. This puts added pressure on EAL and teacher resources in some schools. Once settled in school pupils are monitored by the EWS. The EAZ supports EAL courses for staff in mainstream schools, bilingual booster classes are available for pupils and community language teaching began in February 2000. Slough has a database of newly arrived asylum seeking and refugee children that is regularly monitored.

Social exclusion

146. There are many strengths in Slough's work so far in promoting social inclusion, but there are also weaknesses in some current actions. More importantly, most officers and community representatives are confident about the achievements to date and optimistic about future improvements. Since its inception Slough council and the education department have had high aspirations, through the partnerships with community leaders, business leaders and other agencies, to promote and achieve equality for young people, social harmony and a community without racism.

147. Council policies and guidance on equality and measures to combat racism are comprehensive and clearly stated. Reasonable progress has been made with the equality action plan. There has been satisfactory progress also with the implementation of the development plan produced following the report of the Macpherson inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. However, in schools the LEA has been slow to formalise the procedures for reporting and monitoring racial incidents which were introduced in December 2000. There is no detailed guidance pack to help headteachers and governors with suitable procedures. Council training and monitoring is comprehensive and action taken, following racial incidents within its central departments, is rigorous. The education department provides suitable courses for staff and governors. A good modular training programme, 'Embracing Diversity,' is available through a partnership between local businesses and the Slough race equality council and encourages the participation of staff across sectors.

148. The LEA has established good data on the attainment, progress, attendance and exclusions of boys and girls from all ethnic groups which are used effectively by schools and the LEA to target teaching and support. Additional ethnicity data are now collected on pupils, students, governors and staff.

149. Staffing in the council and in schools falls short of being representative of the ethnic mix of the Slough community with approximately eighteen per cent of employees in a population which has close to thirty per cent from a wide range of ethnic groups. Good strategies are in place for attracting staff from outside and for training locally, suitably qualified and experienced applicants, but progress is slow.

150. The new multi-faith curriculum developed through the Standing Committee for Religious Education (SACRE) has been welcomed by schools and community groups. Many schools demonstrate very good practice in the overall ethos, attitudes and behaviours which encourage and model equality and inclusion. This approach is not as strong in all schools. A recent senior appointment to the school improvement branch appropriately includes a key responsibility for equality issues across the education department.

151. In the broader context, the LEA works effectively with its partners to use the range of local and regeneration funding for the benefit of education inclusion. LEA data gives clear information on the progress of individuals and groups of pupils at risk of underachievement or exclusion and planning responds directly to this information to target the appropriate groups. The number of permanently excluded pupils in Slough is falling. The children and pupils services branch has a clear view of the effectiveness of support services and reviews its work with schools and parents. There is good strategic liaison and planning with social services, the health services and the police.

152. The key challenge for the whole of Slough and particularly the education department, is to overcome the gaps in awareness and knowledge that exist for stakeholders in education in relation to some key policies, strategies and concerns about education and to secure greater mutual understanding. Officers recognise the need to give more time for parents and communities to explore the implications of

the LEA's strategies for raising standards and improving the quality of education alongside the difficult decisions that accompany them.

Recommendations

In order to improve access to education:

- improve for parents the clarity and co-ordination of admission arrangements to secondary schools;
- develop a clear strategy and draw up a costed plan to ensure that the small number of pupils in Key Stages 2 and 3, educated other than at school, receive an adequate education; and
- work with parents and community groups to promote the value of continuous education.

In order to improve the support for health and safety:

- ensure that the implementation of the health and safety development plan is completed within the defined time scale and that a medium term strategy is developed;
- implement an appropriate programme of training for middle and senior managers, headteachers and governors;
- enact a formal system of monitoring; and
- allocate sufficient human and financial resources to support the identified needs and address weaknesses.

So that the principles and strategies are made clear and misunderstanding reduced to a minimum:

- strengthen existing procedures for the LEA, with its schools, to address key education issues with the communities and parents of Slough.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to improve strategic planning:

- improve the clarity and precision of EDP targets as a basis for robust evaluation of the impact of the plans;
- establish comprehensive performance management procedures that incorporate Best Value principles and:
- provide clear information on service specification, standards, targets and costs; and
- establish robust and consistent procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of services.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to assist governors in playing a full role in monitoring and evaluating the work of schools:

- involve governors more with senior officers and advisers in the outcomes and strategic implications of LEA monitoring of schools.

In order to further strengthen management in schools:

- develop a formal system for validating the outcomes of school self-reviews; and
- improve the effectiveness of the continuing professional development of middle managers to give more support to improving teaching in schools.

In order to develop the 14-19 curriculum:

- establish the principles and strategic intent for 14-19 education in the borough.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In order to improve the management support services to schools:

- improve the advice and support to schools for finance and personnel exploring a range of options that meet the needs of schools;
- develop and implement a procurement strategy that is supported by service standards, service specifications and detailed information on the costs of service activities; and
- develop and implement arrangements to assure the quality of technical support

for repairs and maintenance of school buildings.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Recommendations:

In order to improve the implementation of the policy for SEN:

- make clear to schools the level of SEN funding and the method of allocation;
- put in place procedures for monitoring the use of SEN funding in schools;
- produce clear and detailed guidance on the use of SEN resources in schools to best meet the varied needs of pupils and schools; and
- ensure that the efficiency of the administration of statutory assessments is greatly improved.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

In order to improve access to education:

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- develop a clear strategy and draw up a costed plan to ensure that the small number of pupils in Key Stages 2 and 3, educated other than at school, receive an adequate education; and
- work with community groups to promote the value of continuous education.

In order to improve the support for health and safety:

- ensure that the implementation of the health and safety development plan is completed within the defined time scale and that a medium term strategy is developed;
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