



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF  
THURROCK  
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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in conjunction with the  
AUDIT COMMISSION**

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PARAGRAPHS</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1-3
<b>COMMENTARY</b>	4-11
<b>SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</b>	
Context	12-15
Performance	16-20
Funding	21-25
Council structure	26-27
The LEA strategy for school improvement	28-31
The allocation of resources to priorities	32-35
Promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value	36-39
<b>SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</b>	
Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement	40-41
Monitoring, challenge and intervention	42-43
The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need	44-47
The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools	48-53
Support for literacy	54-56
Support for numeracy	57-60
Support for information and communication technology (ICT)	61-63
Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3	64-65
Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers	66-69
Support for gifted and talented pupils	70-72
Support for school management	73-76
Support to governors	77-81
The effectiveness of services to support school management	82-92
The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	93-95
The effectiveness of services to support school improvement	96-106
<b>SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</b>	
Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision	107
The LEA's strategy for special educational needs	108-110
Statutory obligations	111-115
School improvement	116-120
Value for money	121-123

## **SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION**

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion	124
The strategy to promote social inclusion	125-128
The supply of school places	129-133
Admissions	134-135
Asset management	136-138
Provision of education for pupils who have no school place	139-142
Attendance	143-145
Behaviour support	146-148
Health, safety, welfare and child protection	149-152
Looked after children	153-155
Measures to combat racism	156-160

## **SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES**

Introduction to corporate issues	161
Corporate planning	162-165
Decision making	166
Leadership of officers and elected members	167-171
Partnership	172-175

## **APPENDIX : RECOMMENDATIONS**

## INTRODUCTION

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

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 on discussions with elected members, staff in the education and other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. Seventy-seven per cent of schools completed a questionnaire on aspects of the LEA's work and representatives from 82 per cent of the schools participated in either interviews or focus groups. Use was also made of the LEA's self-evaluation.

3. The inspection tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. Evidence from recent HMI visits to schools in the LEA was also included. The inspection 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 schools, and provides value for money.

## COMMENTARY

4. Thurrock LEA was previously inspected during autumn 2000. School performance was found to be poor, strategic leadership was inadequate, budgetary control was weak and support for the most vulnerable pupils was not consistent. In contrast, the findings of this report are more encouraging, with sound progress having been made in most areas. During the last year, the authority has embarked on a period of long-term, intense and sustainable change in a determined attempt to make up lost ground. In many areas, the LEA has taken appropriate action, but too recently for evidence to be available of proven effect. Weaknesses still remain in some key functions, including a minority where recommendations in the previous report have not fully been implemented.

5. The borough of Thurrock lies on the River Thames, just to the east of London. The economy is wide-ranging and diverse, but educational aspiration is generally low and the proportion of the adult population with higher education qualifications is well below the national average. Although levels of employment are high, typical family incomes are relatively low and often linked to part-time work. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) is well below average in primary schools, but above average in secondary schools. The proportion of pupils of minority ethnic heritage is in line with national figures.

6. Since the previous inspection, progress has been made in many areas. Overall, levels of pupils' attainment have risen. The previous weaknesses in strategic leadership have been addressed through some strong staff appointments to key posts. Support for school improvement now has a much sharper focus on raising standards and addressing failure, especially in relation to school management. A new strategy has been put in place for supporting pupils with special educational needs and the LEA has been pro-active in addressing teacher shortages. In responding to the Audit Commission survey, schools were very critical of the LEA. The inspection found, however, that many of the criticisms were no longer shared by schools, nor justified. The last six months have been characterised by a sharp re-focusing of the LEA's activities and the putting in place of structures that should help build capacity for the future.

7. There are still some important causes for concern, particularly relating to social inclusion. The previous criticisms of the LEA's support for schools in managing pupils' behaviour, and its provision for excluded pupils, have not adequately been addressed. The strategic management of school places is ineffective, and support for schools in difficulties, though improved, is not sufficiently robust. The LEA is having some difficulty in persuading all schools to adopt its improvement agenda and teacher retention is an ongoing problem. There are also significant weaknesses in the authority's strategic financial management of education, resulting in the allocation of resources to priorities not being sufficiently secure. This impacts not only on education, but also on the council's overall ability to prioritise resources.

8. There are, however, other positive signs. Education is now a key area of responsibility for the council's deputy leader and central to the role of the new managing director. The current director of education has been in post for only a year, but already has a good grasp of the needs of the authority and has put in place new and more appropriate management arrangements. The council recognises, for example, that the under-performance of Tilbury schools requires radical intervention and it has been

willing to take some difficult decisions. Significantly, as a small unitary authority, the LEA has also begun to accept that it cannot solve all its problems on its own, as is evident from the development with partners of a local public service agreement for raising aspirations and achievement.

9. Most of the LEA functions are discharged satisfactorily, and the following are performed well:

- support to schools for raising standards in numeracy; and
- support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communication technology (ICT).

10. The following functions are not performed adequately:

- targeting resources to priorities;
- monitoring of the implementation of corporate plans;
- identification of and intervention in under-performing schools;
- support to schools for gifted and talented pupils;
- co-ordination of services to support school management;
- strategy to promote social inclusion;
- supply of school places;
- asset management and property services support to schools;
- provision for pupils who have no school place;
- support to schools in managing pupil behaviour; and
- combating racism.

11. Although there are significant weaknesses, the LEA's track record over the last year gives confidence that it can be relied upon to implement the recommendations of this report and to move things forward. A period of stability is now needed to consolidate and build on recent gains. The new education senior management team is steadily gaining the confidence of schools and the schools themselves are becoming more self-reliant. Provided the now strengthened corporate support is sustained, the LEA should have the capacity to achieve further improvement.

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

### **Context**

12. The borough of Thurrock lies on the River Thames just to the east of London. With over 18 miles of riverfront, it covers an area of 64 square miles, over half of which is designated green belt. The population of the authority has remained generally stable since the previous inspection, at around 135,000. The Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions index of deprivation 2000 shows that Thurrock has slightly less overall deprivation than in 1998, although these figures mask the high levels of deprivation concentrated in certain wards.

13. The economy is wide-ranging and diverse, ranging from oil refineries to one of the largest retail shopping centres in Europe. Educational aspiration is generally low in the borough and the proportion of the adult population with higher education qualifications is well below the national average. Although levels of employment are high, typical incomes are below the national average and are often linked to part-time work.

14. Just over 22,000 pupils attend the borough's schools and the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils of minority ethnic heritage is also in line with national figures, although there has recently been a rise in the number of asylum seekers. Pupil numbers in the primary sector have remained stable since the last inspection, although those in the secondary sector have risen slightly. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is well below average in primary schools. However, comparable figures for the secondary sector have risen since the previous inspection and are now above the national average.

15. The authority has 62 schools; two new ones (one primary and one secondary) have been opened since the last inspection. Just over half of the 38 infant/primary schools have nursery provision. None of the secondary schools has sixth-forms. The pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools is in line with statistical neighbours\* and nationally, although in secondary schools it is well above. Appreciable levels of pupil mobility affect nearly two-thirds of primary schools.

\* Thurrock's statistical neighbours are: Medway, North Lincolnshire, Redcar and Cleveland, Rotherham, Halton, Tameside, Wakefield, Doncaster, Barnsley and North East Lincolnshire.

### **Performance**

16. Standards in primary schools remain below those of statistical neighbours and well below the national average. However, since the last inspection, the general rate of improvement at Key Stage 2 has exceeded that nationally. Standards at Key Stage 3 are still below the national average and are lowest in English. At Key Stage 4, however, there has been a marked improvement in pupils achieving five or more General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) graded A\*-C.

17. The LEA's baseline data show that children entering Thurrock schools during the Foundation Stage and/or Year 1 perform at lower levels than pupils in many other LEAs. Although performance at Key Stage 1, particularly in spelling, remained low in both 2001 and 2002 when compared to statistical neighbours and nationally, it has risen steadily. At Key Stage 2, the performance of pupils achieving Level 4 and above in 2001 remained in the bottom quartile nationally for all core subjects, but showed overall improvement. In 2002, further improvements were made in mathematics and science.

However, the 2002 targets were not met and five schools recorded less than 50 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in one or more core subjects.

18. At Key Stage 3, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 or above in English, mathematics and science in 2001 remained in line with statistical neighbours in all core subjects. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades A\*-C remained below the national average, but increased significantly. Further improvement in 2002 was also sufficient to achieve the LEA's target. In two schools, however, less than 25 per cent of pupils achieved five or more GCSE grades A\*-C. Based on 2001 data, around three-quarters of pupils leaving Thurrock schools at 16 continued in education/training provision leading to NVQ Level 2 or above (or equivalent) qualifications.

19. The percentage of good/very good primary schools is well below average and the proportion of schools requiring improvement is well above average. The picture at secondary level is, however, more positive, with the proportion of good/very good schools in line with the national average. The number of schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses is above average. Currently, there are five schools requiring special measures and four with serious weaknesses. Two other schools have been designated as under-achieving.

20. Pupils' attendance overall is still below the national average, with high levels of absence concentrated at certain schools. Unauthorised absence in both sectors has fallen during the past year. Exclusion rates (both permanent and fixed) remain high. However, fixed-term exclusions in primary schools have fallen over the last year, after rising significantly during 2001. In secondary schools, fixed-term exclusions have continued to fall, notably in Tilbury.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to further improve pupils' performance:**

- work with headteachers and governors to explore and identify the causes of pupils' under-performance in primary schools and the reasons for recent gains in attainment at Key Stage 4; disseminate the lessons learnt to all schools.

### **Funding**

21. The LEA's funding for primary and secondary schools continues to be in the top five unitary authorities and above the national average. Education is funded at least to Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), despite pressures from other parts of the council, particularly social services. Since the previous inspection, increases in SSA have been fully passed on to the education service and the authority has taken up its full allocation of Standards Fund money.

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>SSA for Education (£m)</b>	<b>Net expenditure on education (£m)</b>	<b>Expenditure as a percentage of SSA</b>
2001/2	67.7	67.7	100.01
2002/3	71.6	71.6	100.05

22. Current figures for school budget shares are:



<b>Local schools budget (LSB)</b>	<b>Thurrock</b>	<b>Unitary Authorities</b>	<b>England</b>
<b>Primary</b>	£2570	£2594	£2695
<b>Secondary</b>	£3485	£3305	£3303

2001/02 data

23. The recent restructuring of the education department has helped the authority to move towards greater overall budgetary control and improved systems and procedures to achieve this are now in place. School balances have reduced and effective procedures are in place to monitor expenditure and to challenge schools with balances in excess of ten per cent. Spending on special educational needs is still high compared with statistical neighbours, unitary authorities and nationally. However, the overspending highlighted in the previous inspection report has been addressed and an additional £2 million has been delegated to schools.

24. As a result of the council's poor asset management planning, its spending on all capital education projects is currently subject to monitoring by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Two major reorganisation schemes proposed by the council have significant strategic capital implications and it is not clear that its funding strategies are sufficiently secure to support them.

25. The council has recognised that it must maximise external funding sources and, in March 2002, sensibly adopted a policy to improve its performance in accessing these successfully.

### **Council structure**

26. The council has 49 councillors (37 Labour, nine Conservative, one Liberal Democrat and two Independent), including the council leader. There is a cabinet of eight elected members, including one from an opposition party. The portfolio holder for education is also the deputy leader. The children, school and family scrutiny panel is responsible for monitoring agreed aspects of education, reporting to the overview and scrutiny panel. The council has also recently introduced area governance with four area assemblies and a number of community fora.

27. The present director of education took up post in September 2001. He is a member of the corporate management team and is assisted by two heads of division, one of whom is temporarily seconded from elsewhere in the authority, pending the permanent appointee taking up the post. A new managing director (chief executive) joined the authority in August 2002.

### **The LEA strategy for school improvement**

28. The new Education Development Plan (EDP) for 2002-2007 is sound and has some good features. The LEA accepted the criticisms of the previous plan and has now set an appropriate agenda for tackling pupils' low attainment. The new plan has good coverage of the five national priorities and the two local ones are appropriate and firmly rooted in the audit. Good attention is given to tackling leadership and management issues, social inclusion and variable school performance. There is good targeting of activities at schools and pupils with particular needs, although the actions intended to support gifted and talented pupils lack detail. The LEA has recognised that its support

for schools in the use of data is underdeveloped and the plan addresses this issue. There are also good links with other LEA plans.

29. Taken overall, the LEA's targets are challenging and considerable and sustained improvement will be needed if they are to be met. In 2002, Key Stage 2 results in English and mathematics fell disappointingly short of the LEA's targets (by nine and seven per cent respectively). This means that very challenging targets for 2003 are now unrealistic and are unlikely to be met. The LEA will also struggle to meet its 2004 exclusion target. Conversely, the Key Stage 3 target for English in 2004 does not fully take into account the expected impact of the national strategy.

30. The new Education Development Plan has taken good account both of recommendations from the council's scrutiny review into standards in schools and the Best Value review of service provision. Throughout the plan, a minority of the proposed actions and success criteria is not sufficiently specific. There is also a tendency to identify 'reports' as appropriate outcomes, where measures relating to teachers' or pupils' progress would be more appropriate. Responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation are clear, with headteachers, governors and other stakeholders involved in the processes. However, the plan fails to make clear the extent to which elected members will be actively involved in challenging officers on the effectiveness of the plan's implementation, beyond simply receiving progress reports.

### **Recommendation**

#### **To improve the monitoring and evaluation of the EDP:**

- clarify the role of elected members in these processes, so that members' involvement exceeds simply receiving reports, but also involves challenging LEA officers on the effect of actions on raising pupils' attainment.

31. The LEA has made satisfactory progress in implementing the new EDP. Monitoring by officers has been thorough, and the majority of the actions are on track. However, the procedures developed for identifying under-performing schools are still not yet sufficiently secure.

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

32. The allocation of resources to priorities remains unsatisfactory. While there has been sound work to establish more effective budgetary control of education services and to increase delegation to schools, an overall education financial strategy has not been established. This is a major barrier to ensuring that resources are targeted effectively.

33. The council has rightly recognised the need to focus on its core responsibilities. There has been positive action to refocus the priorities of the education service and to realign teams and resources to reflect these priorities. Budgetary control is much improved and direct action is now being taken to support schools in budget making. Education capital funding, however, depends almost completely on New Deal for Schools.

34. Pending the arrival of the substantive post holder for education financial strategy, the director of education has assumed this role. However, the necessary strategic financial work, both in relation to the department and on the school funding formula, has not been sufficiently progressed. Key recommendations of the previous inspection report relating to the funding formula have not been addressed. The proposals for the two major school reorganisations have been agreed by elected members, but are not underpinned by fully-costed financial frameworks. The funding implications of the schemes can therefore not be judged effectively, either against the demands of other competing priorities or in the context of overall resource allocation.

35. As part of the council's budget-setting process, schools were consulted on possible options for reallocating some resources. The consultation documents gave clear explanations of budget pressures and the impact of any changes for school and service budgets. However, schools have had very few opportunities to contribute to developing these models.

### **Recommendation**

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

- establish a robust education financial strategy, which addresses the school funding formula, strategic developments regarding special educational needs and the focus on delivering core services.

### **Promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value**

36. Overall, the council's approach to Best Value has improved and some progress has been made in applying Best Value principles to delivering services. The strategies are satisfactory, but while the commitment to continuous improvement is real, the impact on service provision of using other providers has still to be demonstrated. The council's Best Value performance plan for 2001/02 was agreed unconditionally by external auditors. Assessment of the current plan is still awaited.

37. The council has made a noticeable culture shift, in understanding its role in securing value for money for its services, while recognising that it does not have to provide every service itself. Its new approach to procurement and the introduction of competitive benchmarking are also appropriate strategies for addressing the issue of variable quality across the various council services.

38. Since the previous inspection, the council has completed its Best Value review of Children in School, reporting in March 2002. The review focused on the contribution made by education services to the school improvement function. The outcome of the review succinctly assessed education services as high cost and low quality and led to a major restructuring of the service to focus on core responsibilities. As a result, support services, including finance and human resources, have been relocated to a corporate resources directorate. The refocusing of the department's work has meant that specific one-off projects, critical to strategic development, are now typically undertaken by suitably qualified external consultants.

39. Officers are determined to seek out and incorporate best practice. In addition to receiving mentoring support from another LEA, they have been pro-active in contacting

other successful authorities to learn from their experience. It is also evident that many schools are developing a clearer understanding of Best Value principles and are increasingly adopting these in procuring services, both from the council and other providers. Individual performance management is not yet developed across the council. While there is an increased recognition of the need to link individual appraisal and performance with an agreed competency framework, this is still not effectively in place.

## **SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement**

40. Most of the support to schools provided directly by the school effectiveness team is now carried out satisfactorily. At the time of the previous inspection, support was unsatisfactory. Since then, good progress has been made in establishing a common understanding of the LEA's role in helping schools to improve. The EDP and the new local code of practice have been especially significant in setting out a clear agenda for both the LEA and the schools.

41. A number of changes have been made following the recent Best Value review. Although early indications are that these changes are positive, the observable impact on schools has been limited. Costs are comparatively low, compared to other LEAs, and are below the average for unitary authorities. As far as can be judged, therefore, the effectiveness of school improvement services is satisfactory and they provide sound value for money.

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

42. The LEA's procedures for monitoring, challenge and intervention were rated as poor at the last inspection, but are now satisfactory, with schools confirming rapid improvement over the last year. The LEA was recommended to set out its strategy for the monitoring and support of schools more clearly, to clarify schools' entitlements and to distinguish between activities funded centrally and those which schools are able to purchase. The LEA has consulted widely and recently published its local *Code of practice on LEA/schools' relationships*. This is a good document and the majority of headteachers understand the new strategy.

43. The LEA has articulated six principles to underpin its approach to supporting schools. Sensibly, these include a commitment to, and trust in, self-managing institutions. The previous report recommended that the LEA should communicate more clearly the triggers used to identify schools requiring intervention. This has been done within the code of practice, although the LEA recognises that further refinement is needed to incorporate a range of other qualitative data and allow for more sophisticated early warning of where intervention may be needed.

### **The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need**

44. The LEA has made good progress in focusing its support on areas of greatest need, and provision has improved from poor to satisfactory. The newly appointed school improvement officers are deployed strictly to a formula that allocates support to schools in line with a transparent system of categorisation. This gives additional time to schools in the LEA's supportive intervention category and even greater amounts of time to schools with serious weaknesses or requiring special measures.

45. Schools recognise that the LEA has refocused its approach to school improvement, and that challenge to schools is more evident. This emphasis is welcomed by most schools and is beginning to have an impact on their work, particularly in relation to the use of data and school improvement planning. The new system for challenging schools to improve is sound and has the capacity to make the conduct of this function good in the near future. School improvement officers are pivotal to the flow of information on the performance of schools. In collaboration with the recently

launched curriculum services to schools, they also provide advice on consultants and external sources of support that schools may wish to purchase. These arrangements are sound in principle, but are too recent to be able to judge their effectiveness.

46. The notes of visit following advisers' contact with schools are now of better quality. They are sharper in focus and are a valuable record of the actions required by both the school and the LEA. As yet, there is no consistent system for ensuring that these notes are copied to a school chair of governors. As a consequence, she/he might not currently be made aware of any LEA concerns.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to improve the LEA's capacity to challenge schools:**

- ensure that notes of visit to a school written by school improvement officers are also shared with the school's chair of governors.

47. There have been significant improvements in the quality and use of performance data distributed both to schools and to LEA officers. This has significantly increased the LEA's capacity to support school improvement. The quality of data is now good and careful analyses are beginning to help target support more effectively on individual schools, groups of learners and geographical areas. Schools know what data will be circulated and when they will receive it. Bespoke analysis of the data and additional support to help with interpretation, are also available to schools. The LEA currently transfers data electronically by disk, but it is planned that on-line transfer will be available shortly, when security issues have been resolved. A satisfactory service to schools is also available to support effective transition between primary and secondary schools.

### **The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools**

48. The LEA's work with under-performing schools remains unsatisfactory. There are currently five schools in special measures (eight per cent of the total) and four with serious weakness. In addition, the LEA has identified a further 14 schools in need of supportive intervention. In all, this represents over a third of the authority's schools. These figures are very high, compared with other LEAs.

49. Two secondary schools have required special measures in excess of 24 months, but the LEA has had some success in helping primary schools to improve and be removed from these categories. Over the last four years, three primary schools have no longer needed special measures and four, where there was serious weakness or underachievement, have shown good progress by the subsequent inspection. Two of these successes have been in the last few months. However, one infant school has needed special measures, and a primary school has been designated as underachieving, during the last eight months. While there is now greater clarity in the use of triggers to identify and categorise schools requiring intervention, the process is still not sufficiently sensitive to pick up early signs of problems.

50. Over the last two years, both structural changes and the many changes in the LEA's personnel have resulted in slippage in the co-ordination of appropriate support in

implementing schools' and the LEA's action plans. The LEA's monitoring of progress made by schools causing concern has, however, recently improved.

51. The LEA has been explicit about its approach to challenging the variability in the performance of its schools in priority five of the new EDP and has set a target of no schools requiring special measures or with serious weakness by 2004. The objectives and activities proposed are good and are being accorded appropriate urgency by senior officers. The progress of schools causing concern is now regularly reviewed and direct action is taken in line with required improvements.

52. Senior officers and elected members have used the full range of their legal powers when schools are not making sufficient progress. They are now more willing to take unpopular decisions to tackle under-performance, for example, by withdrawing delegated responsibility from governing bodies, using capability proceedings and considering possible school closures or amalgamation. There are currently ambitious plans to tackle longstanding issues in three of the schools in special measures in the Tilbury and Chadwell St. Mary area. Although the project proposed is complex, with such a history of under-performance in the area, the LEA is right to seek more imaginative and long-term solutions to the needs of the local schools and their community.

53. Where schools have been removed from special measures or serious weakness the LEA agrees an exit strategy with the school. This process, however, has not always been clear. There is also a lack of consistency regarding exit strategies for schools in the supportive intervention category.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the LEA's work with under-performing schools:**

- develop the range and use of triggers to ensure greater transparency and reliability in the early identification of concerns in schools;
- ensure that the school improvement officer and headteacher clarify and agree the support required in schools' and the LEA's action plans and that the impact of the support provided is rigorously evaluated; and
- establish LEA action plans for the schools in the supportive intervention category and establish clear exit strategies for schools in each category of intervention, including the actions that are required, the time-scale set for improvement and the criteria by which a school will be judged to no longer be a cause for concern.

## **Support for literacy**

54. Support for literacy has improved since the last inspection and it is now highly satisfactory. Schools have been accurately identified for support based on a sensible range of criteria. Progress is monitored and data used effectively to support schools in analysing their own improvement needs. Not all schools, however, are yet fully aware of the level of support to expect from the literacy team.

55. The quality of support provided by consultants is good. Training is of consistently high quality and has made a significant impact on the work of many schools. The work of the literacy consultants in some under-performing schools has been among the most

influential in helping these schools to overcome their weaknesses. All schools have access to useful support networks and additional training. This is particularly valuable in those not receiving additional or targeted support.

56. The literacy strategy is having a significant impact on performance at Key Stage 1 and is marked by the improvements in standards in spelling. While overall performance is below the national average at Key Stage 2, the LEA has made significant progress. In 2001, there was a three percentage point rise in English compared with a national decrease of one percentage point. However, results in 2002 were nine percentage points below the target set. Appropriate plans for improvement are in place and links with the other strategies are improving, alongside a sharper focus on the needs of boys and higher achieving pupils.

### **Support for numeracy**

57. Support for numeracy was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, and is now good. The LEA's strategy is clear, and appropriate action plans are in place within the new EDP. Schools understand the strategy and are committed to the improvements it requires.

58. At Key Stage 2, the performance of pupils has improved at a rate faster than the national improvement, from 48 per cent in 1998 to 65 per cent in 2002. Results rose three percentage points in the last year, compared to a standstill in the national results. Nevertheless, the LEA was still seven percentage points below its 2002 target. Based on current trends in performance, the LEA is unlikely to reach the very ambitious target, of 85 per cent, set for 2004.

59. Support for numeracy is of high quality. Despite difficulties in recruiting consultants, the LEA has been creative in its use of external advisers and leading mathematics teachers, to ensure that the strategy has progressed without undue disruption. The strategy is managed very effectively and the strategy manager uses detailed self-evaluation to analyse the performance of the team. This enables the LEA to identify the impact of its support.

60. The effective use of data enables the LEA to monitor, challenge and support the quality of numeracy in its schools well. Under-performance and low expectations are rigorously challenged and support is effectively targeted. Significantly, the performance of different groups of pupils, including higher attaining pupils who are considerably underachieving, is carefully monitored and schools help to implement appropriate strategies for improvement. Links with the early years' developments, the Key Stage 3 and literacy strategies and the work of the school improvement officers have all improved, and are now good.

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

61. Support for information and communication technology in the curriculum is now good. There is a clear vision that is well understood by schools and advisory support is of a very high quality. During the last year, a clear and coherent education strategy has been developed, linking the curriculum use of information and communication technology with its use in management and administration.

62. The National Grid for Learning has been very well managed. Schools have understood the requirements for detailed action planning and the process for allocating



resources has been good. Many schools have already reached the 2004 targets for computer : pupil ratios. The management of the New Opportunities Fund training has also been good. While some difficulties have been experienced in the quality of training for secondary schools, training for primary schools has been well received and has resulted in much greater use of information and communication technology in classrooms and across the curriculum. The quality of additional training provided or brokered by the advisory service is highly regarded by schools and is having a beneficial impact. The dissemination of good practice is also well managed through the Beacon secondary school and a very active network of school co-ordinators.

63. The authority is not yet able to collate accurate and reliable data on the performance of individual pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 because there is still too much variability in the capacity of schools to accurately assess the levels of performance of all pupils. This is being appropriately addressed through targeted support for school co-ordinators. The LEA has a good knowledge of the progress made by secondary school pupils and there is great confidence that the Key Stage 3 targets set for 2004 will be exceeded. At Key Stage 4, the percentage of pupils successfully completing accredited information and communication technology courses is only 16 per cent. Only around a third of these pupils achieve a higher grade GCSE pass.

### **Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3**

64. Despite some delay due to recruitment difficulties, secondary schools have made a satisfactory start to implementing the Key Stage 3 strategy. Under able leadership, the first round of training has been well received and consultants are beginning to make an impact in some schools, particularly where the LEA has identified the need for targeted support. The literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology consultants have been working very closely with their respective subject teams and continuity between the strategies for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 is good, with secondary teachers encouraged to visit primary classes.

65. Compared to two years ago, results at Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science have risen at both Level 5+ and at Level 6+. Performance is still below the national average, but has improved at a greater extent than that nationally. With such improved performance and the rising standards at Key Stage 2, the targets set for Key Stage 3 in 2004 are challenging in mathematics, but less so in English and science. The LEA is now providing good quality end of key stage data to schools, including value added data from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. These data are well used to challenge performance in some individual schools, but not enough use is made of optional tests at Year 7.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to raise expectations and standards of attainment at Key Stage 3:**

- analyse the available performance data and ensure that targets for English and science, as agreed with schools, reflect higher expectations arising from the impact of the Key Stage 3 strategy.

## **Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers**

66. The previous inspection identified weaknesses in the strategic planning of support for minority ethnic pupils. There was also only limited take-up of the ethnic minority and traveller achievement grant and an insufficient focus within the EDP on raising the attainment of underachieving groups. Steady progress has been made and the support provided is now satisfactory.

67. The management of the service has strengthened, grant funding has been appropriately devolved and, against the backdrop of the LEA's comprehensive 'race equality scheme', good strategic decisions have been made, although these are not yet clear to schools. The LEA has assumed a strengthened monitoring role, and, in line with a thorough audit of provision that identified a continuing need for training in schools, the team supporting pupils with English as an additional language is to take on a broader remit. Raising the attainment of different groups of pupils is a priority within the EDP, and significant improvement has been made in the provision of pupil level data.

68. The development of the Traveller education service is at a critical phase. Until fairly recently, strategic planning and direction were weak and Travellers did not have a secure and visible profile in council policy and planning. There is now an appropriate action plan to bring about a sharper focus for work in schools and stronger links with other departments and agencies in the authority. A satisfactory start has been made in a number of key areas; for example, the appointment to the service of a full-time education welfare officer has started to address the unsatisfactory attendance of some Traveller pupils, particularly at secondary level.

69. The Traveller education service has satisfactory links with both schools and the Traveller communities. However, support agreements with schools are imprecise. They lack clear timescales and are not expressed in terms of intended outcomes. The proposed strategic shift in the work of the service towards a more pro-active role in curriculum development is well conceived, but there is still some way to go in achieving the changes needed to staff deployment and work patterns.

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

70. The LEA's support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory. There is currently no agreed strategy and the proposals in the EDP are not sufficiently detailed. Where initiatives have been developed, they have lacked co-ordination and have not been rigorously evaluated. Processes for identifying gifted and talented pupils have not been consistent across the authority and this has caused problems between schools, notably at the age of transfer.

71. The LEA's draft strategy for supporting gifted and talented pupils does provide a sound basis for future development. Elected members have begun to make a potentially helpful contribution by including gifted and talented pupils in their recently started scrutiny review. The Excellence Cluster has also provided some useful momentum by conducting an audit of current provision in schools and identifying areas for further development. Summer schools have been held both in cluster and non-cluster schools and these have provided a useful mechanism in helping these schools to further their own priorities.

72. So far, there has been very little sharing of information between schools. The Beacon school has provided some useful support to another secondary school on study skills, and members of staff from four schools have been involved in an international project that should result in further dissemination of good practice. Plans for literacy and numeracy support targeted at more able girls are appropriate, but at an early stage of being implemented. Support for gifted and talented pupils has yet to figure significantly in discussions with headteachers during annual school reviews.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to improve the support for gifted and talented pupils:**

- agree with schools a strategy for identifying and developing the pupils and, building on work of the Excellence Cluster, disseminate good practice.

### **Support for school management**

73. Support for school leadership and management was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. There have been a number of important improvements in the last year and it is now satisfactory. The director of education has rightly identified the quality of school leadership and management, as one of the key factors in bringing about the improvements needed. He has set out a clear vision of involving headteachers of self-managing schools as partners in this process. While the majority of headteachers are supportive of this approach, there remains a core of scepticism among the minority that the authority rightly sees as a challenge.

74. The LEA has made satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendations in the previous inspection report. Significant improvements have been introduced to the induction process for new headteachers and this is now generally valued by participants. Strategies for supporting senior managers are in place, but there is no systematic strategy for the development of middle managers. Elements of a good leadership and development strategy are present in the new EDP, but the whole strategy has yet to be articulated in one document and shared with senior and middle managers.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to improve the quality of leadership and management of schools:**

- publish the strategy for leadership and management development, including support for middle managers.

75. The LEA has recently carried out a valuable and systematic survey of schools' self-evaluation practices and improvement plans and this has been helpful in identifying schools' development needs. Schools are provided with good benchmarked information about their performance and appropriate training and advice on the use of data are available to school managers.

76. All schools have been asked to produce statements committing them to the principles of Best Value and the LEA has been active in enabling schools to be more effective in procuring goods and services. Where it makes sense, the LEA works with schools to gain economies of scale in purchasing. For individual services to schools, the LEA is active in developing brokerage arrangements and has clarified the funding available for core LEA services.

### **Support to governors**

77. Support for governors was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It is still satisfactory overall and has improved in several respects. However, the weakness described in the previous report, that governors are not appropriately informed when the LEA has concerns about their schools, has not been addressed consistently. Despite this, governors are mostly well supported. Consultation with governors and support for governing bodies in difficulties is particularly good. Effective governance has been highlighted in several recent Ofsted school reports.

78. A new post of education officer for governor development has been located within the LEA's school effectiveness team and officers are now rapidly deployed to support governing bodies that are experiencing difficulties. The policy for appointing additional governors to schools has been improved and a briefing booklet for new governors has been introduced. Useful support has been provided to help governors to understand performance data better. Nine out of ten schools subscribe to the LEA's support, which is easy to access and readily tailored to schools' needs.

79. The governor-training package is good, although non-attendance by governors at the sessions is an issue. Training and guidance for governors have been improved, with the opportunity of accreditation and termly briefings introduced for chairs of governors. Feedback to governors on schools' improvement plans has been especially helpful. The LEA has demonstrated its willingness to remove delegated powers from governors when difficulties occur. The lead member for Education has also been involved in helping to support schools in such circumstances.

80. Consultation with the Thurrock Association of Governors is very good. The association is encouraged to contribute to governor training. Its regular termly meetings with the director of education and the opportunity to be represented on council scrutiny panels are especially useful. Thurrock Association of Governors is involved in senior LEA appointments and governors are represented on both the school improvement group and on exclusion panels.

81. The current vacancy rate among governors is around 12 per cent, with particular recruitment difficulties in certain schools. Vacancy levels are monitored and a register of possible additional governors has been established. A strategy has also been put in place to boost recruitment of governors, including from outside the immediate area.

### **The effectiveness of services to support school management**

82. Although most individual services to support school management are at least satisfactory, the current strategy that underpins them is unsatisfactory. The strategy was developed three years ago when the council was committed to providing all services to schools itself. Failure to update the strategy has resulted in service provision not being effectively differentiated, service monitoring and improvement not

being sufficiently timely or responsive and schools having only limited information on alternative provision.

83. The Best Value review of Children in School challenged the presumption that the council should provide all services in-house. It identified problems with service specifications and standards, pricing and costs. The existing service level agreements with schools have been in place for three years and there are no agreements between education and other council services.

84. There has now been a significant shift in the council's approach to service provision, including services to schools. Efforts have been made to signpost schools to alternative providers and work is now in hand to introduce and develop internal service level agreements. Service planning systems now include performance monitoring and there is increased accountability for service delivery. However, these developments are still only at an early stage. Schools have not yet been fully involved in the changes and it is too early to judge how these are impacting on services.

85. **Financial services** continue to be satisfactory, with many strengths. The education finance team has been moved from the education department to the corporate centre and this has resulted in a major turnover of staff. However, there is now full staffing and the team is headed by a group accountant with education experience and expertise. The recent focus of attention has rightly been on establishing regular and secure monitoring processes for both education and school budgets; on addressing previous weaknesses in managing overspends on special educational needs and home-to-school transport; and on identifying and challenging schools with high levels of balances.

86. In line with the authority's commitment to promoting self-managing schools, there has been increased training for headteachers, governing bodies and education staff on the operation of education finance. Finance officers are now more actively involved in supporting schools causing concern as part of a co-ordinated approach to addressing under-performance. They also work closely with school improvement officers to identify schools likely to cause concern.

87. The service undertook sound preparation for the implementation of consistent financial reporting in April 2002 and a new financial information and communication technology package was installed in schools, supported by a programme of training and follow up. The finance service is highly regarded by schools with 97 per cent buy back in 2002/03. Internal audit services are now focused on delivering a risk-based approach to audit review. For 2002/03 they will audit consultation and communication with schools, financial services, recruitment, the education welfare service, education other than at schools and contingency funding. The service will be subject to the modernising financial services Best Value review in 2002/03.

88. **Human resources** continues to be satisfactory, although it has required sharp refocusing to address various problems since the previous inspection. Sound, modern operations are now in place. Some model policies for schools on various procedures have been redrafted and are ready for consultation, while others are being prepared. The corporate policy framework has been rewritten and new staff performance management systems are being implemented. A Best Value review is scheduled for 2002/03. Guidance materials prepared for schools make very clear the steps headteachers and governors must take to meet their responsibilities, while rightly encouraging schools to seek support at an early stage in the process. The new draft

service level agreements provide a model for further development. The payroll service has improved the flow of information to clients and now visits schools jointly with personnel officers. There is a robust monitoring system to ensure a high accuracy rate.

89. Support from **property services** is unsatisfactory. Responsibilities of both corporate and education officers have been redefined and clarified during the recent reorganisation, but issues relating to quality standards, lines of monitoring and compensation for service failure have yet to be addressed. The current service level agreement with schools is out of date and the quality of service provided is too variable. The information for schools on how the services operate is unclear and there is insufficient information available on alternative service providers.

90. **Information and communication technology for administration** is highly satisfactory. The strategy for education sets out the benefits, timescales, associated costs and funding sources. The broadband strategy is ahead of its target for primary schools and all secondary schools are already connected. All schools also have Internet access. A particular strength of the information strategy is the management and use of data to inform planning, to monitor and predict trends and to assess outcomes. Increasing use of electronic information management systems is also reducing duplication and error.

91. The **grounds maintenance and cleaning services** are satisfactory. Both are provided as a brokered service, with monitoring and invoicing available in line with individual schools' needs. Only 38 primary schools have bought the current grounds maintenance services offered and only 16 have bought the cleaning service. Most schools have chosen other providers. The current contracts are due for renewal in March 2003 and the manager is discussing with schools what they require from the service and what flexibility needs to be incorporated into the new specification and standards. The new procurement strategy should enable the council to broker a contract offering schools opportunities to benefit from economies of scale, but many are likely to continue with known providers.

92. **Catering services** continue to be highly satisfactory. All primary schools take up the direct service and a brokered service is also offered. The direct service regularly operates several types of client satisfaction surveys. Every effort is made to work to nutritional guidelines, but there are instances when this does not happen.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the quality of management services:**

- use the model service level agreements between human resources and education and between human resources and schools, to provide a framework for developing/updating other service level agreements;
- within the new service level agreements, incorporate clear service standards, specifications and costings, and provide flexibility to respond to changes arising from legislation or best practice; and
- provide opportunities for headteachers and governors to contribute to the development of brokering arrangements that are co-ordinated either by the council or by the schools themselves.

## **The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers**

93. The recruitment and retention of suitably qualified teachers is a key issue for the LEA and one of the priorities in the new EDP. A more rigorous approach to recruitment has been developed over the last year and support overall is satisfactory.

94. Levels of vacancies for teachers are above statistical neighbours and well above those nationally. The vacancy rate in 2002 is 5.3 per cent, double that in London and three times that in the east of England. The LEA has been effective in analysing its staffing needs and markets itself with imagination and clarity. It has been active in contacting local and regional initial teacher training institutions, has developed a vacancy website, secured housing through a starter homes initiative, run returners' courses and is developing a supply teacher agency with neighbouring LEAs. The LEA has also been very active in recruiting teachers from overseas. These strategies have been successful in reducing the overall level of vacancies.

95. To assist with the retention of teachers, the new curriculum support service is developing, with schools, a more systematic and targeted approach to identifying and addressing training needs. There has been considerable improvement in the quality of induction programmes for both newly qualified teachers and new headteachers. The quality assurance systems to underpin the overall approach to continuing professional development, which are essential if the LEA is to make further impact on teacher retention and quality are, however, not yet sufficiently robust.

### **Recommendation**

#### **To improve the retention and quality of teachers:**

- establish clear quality assurance systems for continuing professional development, covering both direct provision and that brokered from other agencies.

## **The effectiveness of services to support school improvement**

96. The leadership of services to support school improvement was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It is now satisfactory with some important strengths. There is strong leadership from the director and the head of school effectiveness, although leadership at other levels is variable. Priorities are clear and service plans reflect these well. Communication between the schools, officers and services is satisfactory and there is a growing understanding across the whole LEA of the priorities and their implications. There are emerging strengths in the leadership of the national strategies, although much still needs to be done to build confidence in the curriculum service.

97. The role of the school improvement officers is the key to the success of the LEA's strategy for school improvement. Leadership is good and progress has been made in creating an appropriate programme of professional development for the team. New systems have been put in place to ensure quality in most aspects of the work and there is a strong commitment, from senior managers, to challenge under-performance wherever it occurs.

98. The last inspection criticised the LEA for lack of differentiation in the frequency and purpose of visits to schools. In the context of the current needs of schools, this area is

now satisfactory. The LEA has been right to resist any pressure to increase the amount of time allocated to all schools. However, once the LEA and schools are more confident about the way the code of practice is being implemented, deployment of staff will need to be reviewed.

99. Although staff workloads are monitored, some members of staff have recently been overburdened at times. This can be attributed to the recent reorganisation and to the difficulties that have been experienced in filling some key posts. Staffing levels are tight and leave little room for work on crises, new projects or sickness cover. Some of these issues have been alleviated, however, by the effective use of consultants and secondments.

100. Strategic planning to support school improvement is satisfactory with some notable strengths. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection when planning was poor. The new EDP, the local code of practice and the education service plan provide a good set of strategic documents to support school improvement. Priorities are clear and, in most cases, the targets that have been set are appropriately ambitious and focus clearly on raising standards.

101. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of key plans are secure overall, but some inconsistency still resides between teams. This issue is well understood by the head of school effectiveness and appropriate steps are being taken to ensure higher levels of consistency across the department.

### **Recommendation**

#### **To improve the effectiveness of services to support school improvement:**

- ensure that priority in the allocation and deployment of adviser/officer workload is always given to supporting schools where the need is greatest at any given time.

102. The performance management of services to support school improvement was poor at the time of the last inspection, but significant improvements have been made and the overall effectiveness is now satisfactory. Improved strategic planning provides a good structure for individual staff to locate their work within the priorities that have been set. Performance review is not yet sufficiently systematic to have a significant impact on individual performance.

103. The induction of all staff supporting schools is taken seriously and professional development plans have been drawn up for the various new teams. This has been difficult for the LEA because of the large number of new and key posts, and the delay in recruiting to some of these. Within the constraints imposed by the urgency of actions required to raise standards and to ensure that new staff are operational as quickly as possible, the LEA has managed induction and professional development well.

### **Recommendations**

**In order to improve the performance management of staff involved in school improvement:**



- establish an appropriate set of professional competencies for all school improvement officers and advisers; and
- carry out systematic performance reviews of all staff supporting schools to ensure that each person and team has the skills needed.

104. Despite considerable difficulties with recruitment, the expertise of staff has remained satisfactory due to some very good recent appointments and a strong focus on the development of existing staff. Senior managers actively support the continuing professional development of staff and encourage them to take greater responsibility for strategic decision making. This is having a significant impact on the growth in confidence of some key officers.

105. The recently appointed school improvement officers are a credible team with appropriate skills and experience to fulfil their challenging role. Rightly, the director has made it clear that the LEA requires members of staff who have credibility with schools and have the requisite expertise. Finding the right people has sometimes meant that posts have been left unfilled, in which case, good use has been made of suitably qualified and experienced consultants.

106. There is a growing confidence among the schools that the expertise in the LEA is capable of successfully taking on the school improvement programme set out in the new EDP. The advisers remaining in the curriculum service for schools are generally well thought of, and schools consider some to be excellent. However, this small team is not yet in a position to ensure the best use of the expertise in schools or to broker expertise not specifically held within the team itself.

## SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

### Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision

107. Support for pupils with special educational needs is much improved since the last inspection and is satisfactory. A clear strategy is now in place and most of the criticisms made in the previous report have been addressed. As the strategy becomes fully operational, the relatively high number of statements in secondary schools should steadily reduce. Financial arrangements have been improved and recruitment and retention problems in the educational psychology service have largely been overcome.

### The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

108. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs is now satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has developed a clear strategic policy for special educational needs, taking full account of the principles and entitlements of the Code of Practice. There has been widespread consultation on the policy, and plans to increase the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools have been written into the school organisation plan. Elected members are committed to securing the improvements and to supporting the principle that, where possible, Thurrock children are educated in local provision. The council's children, schools and family scrutiny panel is also focusing on the LEA's support for special educational needs as a theme for the current year.

109. The policy is based on a comprehensive audit and an assessment of the current range of provision. It incorporates clear assessments of strengths and weaknesses within current arrangements and sets out options for how provision might be reconfigured. The strategy proposes to change the nature of the three special schools to become centres of excellence. They will focus on speech and language and autistic spectrum disorders, providing outreach to other schools. There are also plans for resource bases for visually and hearing impaired pupils at local primary schools. These developments all have significant building and capital funding implications.

### Recommendations

#### To ensure successful implementation of the special educational needs/inclusion strategy:

- identify and secure additional capital funding sources for intended building projects, consistent with the council's asset management plans; and
- consult with stakeholders on proposed transition arrangements, pending the projects' completion.

110. First steps have been taken to implement key elements of the strategy, especially in relation to improving links and provision in the early years and at *school action* and *school action plus*. A significant constraint in implementing the strategy, however, is the lack of detailed financial planning. Work has been commissioned from a consultant to address this, but has not yet been completed.

## **Statutory obligations**

111. The authority has improved its effectiveness in meeting its statutory obligations and provision is now satisfactory. There are clear processes for identifying pupils with special educational needs and clear written guidance on the statement management process, particularly regarding complex assessments. The authority is also committed to reducing its reliance on out-of-borough placements, particularly for statemented pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

112. Schools do not participate sufficiently in the drawing up of statements of special educational need. Parents, however, are positively encouraged to be involved in the assessment process from the earliest stages and over half of parents have taken up this offer. Since December 2001, the authority has completed all statements within the statutory timescales. It has established six-week targets for educational psychologists to complete their advice and there has been substantial progress in meeting this target. Schools involve pupils in annual reviews and amendments to statements arising from reviews are completed to an agreed and monitored timetable.

113. Schools are now clearer about the criteria used to allocate funding for individual statements. Staff are now more directly involved in annual reviews, especially in monitoring schools' delivery of what is specified in statements and pupils' achievements against targets. School improvement officers also monitor the use of delegated funding.

114. The authority has decided that it is most cost effective to use external consultants to draft statements of special educational need and to support case management and speech and language work. However, the rationale for using consultants in these ways is not sufficiently clear to schools.

115. Parents are well supported by the parent partnership service and the authority has a network of independent parent supporters to increase the availability of support. A conciliation service is in place and successful efforts are made to resolve disputes without recourse to tribunals, resulting in a low number of referrals.

## **School improvement**

116. The effectiveness of the LEA's support for special educational needs is satisfactory, with few weaknesses. Services have been restructured, bringing educational psychologists, assessment teams and specialist consultants appropriately into a single team.

117. Both the central support mechanisms and the services provided directly to schools have improved since the last inspection. In particular, weaknesses identified in the educational psychology service have been addressed and support is now satisfactory, and improving. The authority has positively addressed its recruitment and retention problem by recruiting specialist education psychologists who have clear work timetables for both their general work and for carrying out their specialisms.

118. The LEA has issued clear and helpful guidance to schools on the application and implementation of the revised Code of Practice. Support for the production of individual education plans is particularly good, with the comprehensive guidance, the monitoring visits from consultants, and the support from educational psychologists, all making useful contributions. Target setting for individual pupils is now more robust, although analysis of performance data for pupils with special needs is not yet fully in place.

119. Special educational needs co-ordinators in schools are well supported in their role. The local forum works effectively for sharing and developing practice and as a consultative group for LEA policy. The authority provides useful advice and guidance and appropriate training. Although some special educational needs co-ordinators find recent changes to the forms for individual education plans and annual reviews burdensome, these have improved consistency of information about pupils and its transfer between schools. The data is used to monitor service delivery in schools, identify changes in patterns of need and provision and inform future planning.

120. Weaknesses in provision for speech therapy have been addressed in the special educational needs strategy. Considerations about special educational needs are also well integrated into the Key Stage 3, literacy and numeracy strategies.

### **Recommendation**

**In order to improve special educational needs functions to support school improvement:**

- extend the analysis of performance data to cover the progress made within key stages by pupils with special educational needs.

### **Value for money**

121. The management of resources for pupils with special educational needs is now satisfactory. There is now much greater clarity and control over the constituent parts of the special needs budget and this has helped schools to improve their management of support. There are also effective systems for monitoring schools' spending and the previous budget overspend has been brought under control. An additional £2 million has been delegated to schools for statemented pupils during the current financial year and there are plans to increase delegation further.

122. The school funding formula sets out clear criteria for funding secondary pupils on a banding system and these are appropriately applied and monitored. Primary schools still receive funding on an individual statemented pupil basis. Although there are plans to review this, progress has been slow. Criteria for ceasing to maintain a statement have recently been developed.

123. The authority now participates in a range of benchmarking activities involving LEAs within the eastern region. Collaboration within the region has also helped to negotiate reductions in the fees charged by some independent providers.

## **SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION**

### **Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion**

124. The previous inspection found the authority's overall support for social inclusion to be lacking coherence and both equal opportunities and cultural diversity issues needing to be addressed. Fixed-term exclusions were rising, the rates for reintegrating pupils following exclusion were low and pupils' attendance was poor. There was also criticism of the LEA's admissions arrangements, its support for schools in managing behaviour and its attempts to combat racism. Although some improvement has been made in a number of these areas, other key recommendations have not been fully addressed. The new EDP includes a range of activities to tackle social inclusion, but many of these are yet to have a demonstrable effect.

### **The strategy to promote social inclusion**

125. The LEA's strategy to promote social inclusion has a number of positive features, but overall it is still unsatisfactory. There is still no overall corporate social inclusion strategy and so no clear steer on how different departments should work together. This has the effect that support services are not sufficiently co-ordinated. It also hampers the council's ability to secure and maximise the effective use of additional funding.

126. There have, however, been some positive developments. Social inclusion has been a theme for the corporate management team for the past year and 'support for vulnerable people' has been added to the list of corporate objectives. Strategies to improve inclusion of pupils have also been incorporated into the new policy on special educational needs.

127. Liaison with social services, local health agencies and the police has improved and the Healthy Thurrock Alliance has been successful, for example, in channelling support to dysfunctional families. Family learning schemes are also helping to address gaps in adult literacy/numeracy and parenting skills. As a result of better LEA data, pupils either out-of-school or at risk of exclusion are now readily identified. There is, however, a lack of clarity between schools and the authority regarding the status of the policy and associated protocols for reintegrating excluded pupils.

128. Attendance in secondary schools has risen and the number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen. There has been good progress in managing admissions and some very good support has been provided to enhance child protection. Guidance and training have been provided to schools on the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and racist incidents are now recorded, although not monitored. Racial equality policies are present in all schools and appropriate support is available to refugees/asylum seekers and Travellers. Support for behaviour and for pupils who have no school place have not improved and both areas lack strategic direction and clear planning.

### **Recommendations**

#### **To improve the strategy to promote social inclusion:**

- improve the co-ordination of the council's approaches to tackling social exclusion; bringing together the various strands in a coherent framework which identifies clear and quantifiable targets for improvement, including those for pupils' attainment and

progress; and

- produce an action plan to achieve the targets for improvement, which identifies priorities, responsibilities and resources, within a realistic timetable.

## **The supply of school places**

129. The LEA has addressed some of the concerns raised in the previous inspection, but the planning of school places is unsatisfactory. Surplus places are high at 15 per cent and the methodology for projecting the number of places required, criticised in the previous report, is still being used. Although both the school organisation plan and the school organisation committee meet statutory requirements, the planning and provision of school places have important strategic weaknesses and the outline timetables for major projects are over-ambitious.

130. Surplus places are spread across the borough. Although the authority prudently allows for ten per cent overall surplus to allow for mobility and growth, the school organisation plan does not link strategically with the asset management plan. Some useful links are made between school place planning and school improvement, but proposals to address surplus places by changing standard numbers are no longer appropriate.

131. The number of pupils, in some areas, has not met projected growth. Projections are also not shared with schools and consultation on the planning of school places is not consistently in line with good practice. Only recently has the council shown itself willing to take radical decisions on strategic planning and provision of school places, to help tackle the issue of low standards and under-performance. However, the complex issues highlighted by the development of major reorganisation projects, for example, are only beginning to be addressed.

132. A radical proposal to create an all-age school in Tilbury was referred to the adjudicator, and subsequently withdrawn. This caused delay. A revised proposal now includes a plan to close a primary school and two secondary schools and reopen the secondary schools as one new school. This should help tackle school under-performance, as well as reduce surplus places in the area. The council has secured capital funding to support the proposal, but it still has to develop transition plans and prepare a fully-costed implementation plan. These are critical in order to secure the confidence of parents, pupils and school staff and governors. There is a very ambitious outline timetable and the new school's proposed Fresh Start and foundation status has not yet been confirmed.

133. The council has rightly responded to criticisms on its provision of places for pupils with special educational needs. The strategic plan for the three special schools has statutory funding and implementation requirements, although these have not yet been fully set out. Consultation on the school organisation plan caused some uncertainty regarding policy proposals in relation to faith schools. These issues have now been resolved.

## **Recommendations**

**In order to ensure effective strategic planning of school places, particularly in Tilbury:**

- ensure that school capacity calculations are validated and adopted in drawing up proposals for reducing surplus places;
- improve the methodology for planning school places and ensure projections are shared and discussed with schools;
- establish a multi-disciplinary project team for the Tilbury proposal, ensuring that project planning includes appropriate contingency for meeting statutory consultation and publication timetables; and
- make more explicit links between school organisation strategies and the education and corporate asset management plans.

## **Admissions**

134. Since the previous inspection there has been good progress in improving the authority's effectiveness in relation to admissions and this service is now highly satisfactory. Primary and secondary admissions booklets have been improved in line with best practice and an admissions forum has been established. From September 2003, the LEA will manage the secondary admissions process for all eight local admissions authorities and parents are receiving clear information about the change. This is a very positive achievement.

135. Parents are now also able to express first and second preferences for primary admissions rather than just one. The majority of primary appeals relate to admission to Key Stage 1, where many classes are already over-subscribed. Appeals tribunals have supported the LEA's decisions in all cases. The service makes effective use of information and communication technology to manage procedures efficiently and has recently implemented a new module to improve further service delivery and to produce timely monitoring information on trends at individual schools. It also makes sound use of geographical information to assess home-to-school transport entitlements.

## **Asset management**

136. Asset management planning is poor. Until recently, the authority was in breach of statutory requirements, having previously failed fully to devolve capital funding to schools. Government departments are working very closely with the authority to help bring its asset management plan up to the required standard. This has meant that the authority's priority projects have had to be agreed and a comprehensive action plan produced before the condition and modernisation funding could be released.

137. Staffing to support asset management has been extremely limited. There have also been technical difficulties with the software chosen by the authority and this has seriously hindered progress on meeting requirements. There is little evidence of strategic asset management planning linking condition with suitability and sufficiency. There are also no strategic links with the school organisation plan and the LEA's major reorganisation proposals. Schools and diocesan authorities have not been appropriately consulted and there is no consensus on priorities for investment. Only four schools completed suitability assessments by the original deadline.

138. Weaknesses in the education asset management plan have important corporate implications. For example, the council will have difficulty in securing the additional capital resources, unless these weaknesses are resolved.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to maximise capital funding allocations and to secure Best Value in asset management planning:**

- implement cross-cutting measures to ensure that the education asset management plan is adequately resourced;
- ensure that the relevant education and corporate software systems are compatible and operate effectively and efficiently; and
- ensure that all major strategic plans include specific capital funding risk assessments, funding sources, contingency plans and maximise the use of capital assets.

## **Provision of education for pupils who have no school place**

139. Provision for education otherwise than at school continues to be unsatisfactory and has some poor features. The previous inspection identified ineffective strategies for the reintegration of excluded pupils, a lack of alternative provision for pupils at Key Stage 2, and no formal 'hard to place' protocol between secondary schools. It also recommended that the progress of pupils educated out of school should be monitored more systematically.

140. Little progress has been made, with a lack of strategic and operational direction hampering progress. For example, there is still confusion about arrangements for managing excluded pupils. The current system for reintegrating pupils into mainstream schooling does not work consistently and some excluded pupils have remained out of school for lengthy periods. A new policy has been developed, but there is confusion over whether or not this has been agreed.

141. Education other than at school is delivered through a range of provision, including a pupil referral unit, youth service programmes, on-line tuition, and education at home. Robust procedures are in place for monitoring the progress and achievements of pupils educated at home. However, the quality of other provision and the monitoring of attendance, prior attainment, work programmes and the number of hours tuition per week, varies considerably. In 2001, of the Year 11 pupils educated out of school, only one achieved a pass at GCSE, the majority gaining basic certificates in literacy and numeracy. Discussions have been held about the possible role of the pupil referral unit in preparing excluded pupils for reintegration to mainstream schools, but this has not yet been agreed. Records show that not all pupils are receiving the required 25 hours tuition per week. Provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties is poor.

142. There is some effective inter-agency working with social services, health and education welfare officers, for example, in supporting pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers. Some useful on-line tuition has also been developed for pupils in Year 10. Acceptable as a short-term measure, it is less appropriate in the longer term, with the risk of limiting rather than broadening the curriculum and thereby promoting social exclusion.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve support for education otherwise than at school:**



- ensure that all pupils receive the legally required 25 hours tuition per week;
- agree the role of the pupil referral unit and ensure that this is adhered to by schools;
- work with schools to agree effective procedures for the re-integration of pupils; and
- agree plans to improve provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

## **Attendance**

143. The LEA's support for attendance remains satisfactory. There are clear structures and policies outlining school and LEA responsibilities and legal powers are enforced, where necessary. The LEA has set realistic and achievable targets and data analysis has been strengthened. Attendance levels in primary schools have risen, although they continue to be below the national average. Unauthorised absence remains above the national figure. Attendance in secondary schools has also improved and is now in line with national averages. Attendance at the pupil referral unit is, however, poor.

144. The LEA has introduced several initiatives for improving attendance and has developed some good partnerships in the local community. There is close collaboration with the police, with regular truancy sweeps carried out in areas prone to high levels of absence. The different interpretations by schools of what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absences is being addressed and the LEA has started to record attendance data for specific pupil groups. Guidance to schools on improving attendance is good and the LEA has produced a number of successful case studies that have been disseminated nationally.

145. The education welfare service has recently introduced a new service level agreement with schools, enabling the work of education welfare officers to be monitored more rigorously. The service continues to provide good value for money.

## **Behaviour support**

146. Support for behaviour was poor at the last inspection. Serious concerns were expressed about both the effectiveness of the overall behaviour support strategy and schools' commitment to the inclusion of pupils with behavioural difficulties. The LEA has made little progress and support is still poor.

147. There is still no sense of direction or clear planning. Rates of exclusion from both primary and secondary schools and the percentage of pupils with statements who are permanently excluded, are all above national figures. Targets for reducing exclusions have been set in the EDP, but the LEA has fallen well short of these during the last two years. The behavioural support plan expired in April 2001 and has not been updated.

148. Support for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties is particularly poor, with many housed inappropriately in the pupil referral unit or placed in out-of-borough provision. There have been discussions on various alternative approaches, but progress is slow and schools are confused over the direction to be taken.

## **Recommendations**

**In order to improve behaviour support:**

- revise and update the behaviour support plan, fully involving schools and other stakeholders and partners; and
- improve arrangements for behaviour support, to enable schools to manage poor behaviour more effectively, and to reduce exclusions, especially for pupils with statements.

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

149. The LEA's statutory obligations for health and safety, and child protection are satisfactory. Previously, schools reported anxieties about the responses of social workers to their concerns about child protection matters. This has been actively addressed through the area child protection committee. The LEA provides clear guidelines on all aspects of health, safety and welfare and continues to meet its statutory duties in this area.

150. The LEA has produced a comprehensive health and safety policy for schools covering all statutory requirements. Guidance is provided on risk assessments and work on an updated policy on school visits is well in hand. Schools undertake annual safety audits of their policies and practices and the results of these are monitored by the LEA. Schools also continue to have access to a wide range of corporate training on health and safety.

151. All schools have child protection co-ordinators and clear procedures are in place for tracking missing children. Good inter-agency partnerships have developed between police, social services, health and education, and the number of child protection referrals has fallen over the last year. However, a survey recently sent to schools has identified many gaps in schools' awareness and understanding of child protection issues.

152. The LEA has continued work on a 'zero tolerance respect' project designed to tackle young peoples' attitudes to physical and sexual abuse and has initiated an Internet-based scheme to address child protection issues using social inclusion funding. Both of these developments are receiving national acclaim.

## **Recommendation**

### **To improve support for child protection:**

- ensure that the continuing programme of training on child protection for headteachers, designated teachers and governors is accompanied by wider dissemination in schools.

## **Looked after children**

153. Support for looked after children was satisfactory during the last inspection and remains so. Weaknesses in corporate parenting have been addressed and improvements in the quality of pupils' performance data have meant that pupils' attainment and progress are now effectively monitored. Attendance of looked after children is now much improved. Support is still developing and many recent developments, though positive, have yet to take effect. The authority is taking reasonable steps to discharge its statutory duties and designated persons responsible for looked after children are in place in all schools.

154. Corporate responsibility for looked after children is taken seriously. A corporate parenting group meets half-termly to receive attainment reports and is pro-active in promoting activities to support the pupils, such as council-based work placements for those leaving care. Liaison with social services has improved and is now mostly effective. Agreement has been reached on the sharing of data and there has been joint provision of training for schools. The head of school effectiveness and the head of children's services both attend the children and young people strategic partnership.

155. Protocols for 'fast-tracking' pupils through school admission procedures have been agreed and schools are generally kept up to date about any changes to pupils' care arrangements. Most looked after children now have personal education plans and work is ongoing to ensure that pupils are fully involved in drawing these up. Funding from social services is also supporting the setting up of homework clubs.

### **Measures to combat racism**

156. Measures to combat racism are unsatisfactory. Findings in the previous report that the LEA had lost momentum in implementing policies following the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence and that schools were not sufficiently engaged in promoting diversity, still have some validity. Recommendations from the report have only partly been addressed and, although new comprehensive policies and procedures have been introduced, these are too recent for their effectiveness to be proven.

157. Some progress has been made. 'Supporting diversity' is now a corporate priority and progress towards this goal has recently been satisfactory. Many schools, however, still lack confidence in managing cultural diversity. Although the LEA has developed some useful curriculum materials and there are pockets of good practice in the schools, these should be made more widely known.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to improve measures to combat racism:**

- support schools in planning further training on the management of, and teaching for, cultural diversity.

158. A diversity leadership team has assumed responsibility for meeting the recommendations of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, and the policy is enacted through a diversity implementation group comprising representation from all council directorates. Level 1 of the Committee for Racial Equality standards has recently been achieved, although progress has been uneven across the council.

159. Schools have received sensible guidance on developing race equality policies and for recording and reporting racist incidents, and good training has been provided for governors. The majority of schools have equality policies and systems for reporting racist incidents are in place.

160. Consultation with local minority ethnic communities takes place through the citizens' panel, but this has had little impact on council policies and practice. Although the council aims to improve the representation of ethnic minorities in the workforce, positive action so far has been limited.

## SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

### Introduction to corporate issues

161. The previous inspection was critical of the strategic leadership of the authority. Following the inspection, strategic management of the education department was provided by external consultants commissioned by the council. Consultants were also involved in providing a number of second and third tier officers to drive forward the construction of various education plans, including the post-Ofsted action plan. During this period the council recruited the current director of education and consulted with schools and staff on a revised structure for the department. A final departmental structure was only put in place in April 2002.

### Corporate planning

162. Corporate planning has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. The aims, principles and policy objectives for the education service are clearer and both departmental and statutory plans now reflect corporate priorities. The council's objectives are, however, not sufficiently detailed to inform education planning.

163. The Best Value performance plan is clear and feasible, but it contains insufficient financial analysis. The community plan is also largely aspirational. Although the six priorities of the council arise from the plan, these are not sufficiently focused. The plan also does not articulate clearly enough the measurable gains and investment that will be needed if education is to contribute fully to Thurrock's future economic growth and prosperity.

### Recommendation

#### To improve the quality of corporate planning:

- ensure that corporate planning gives appropriate priority to education and links educational improvement to local economic development. In particular, develop greater clarity about the qualities, attributes and range of skills needed by young persons graduating from Thurrock schools at 16.

164. The education service plan appropriately identifies the role of 'education' in delivering corporate priorities and identifies some of the resources needed to deliver these. The plan also makes links with other strategic plans, especially with the new EDP and the school organisation plan. However, although resources in terms of officers' time are identified, there is little detail on the other financial implications arising from the plan. Time-scales are either over-ambitious or not sufficiently defined. It is also difficult to trace the overall demands on individual lead officers and teams.

165. The implementation of corporate plans has improved since the last inspection, but remains unsatisfactory. The absence of clear, intended and measurable outcomes makes it very difficult for elected members to evaluate progress in implementing plans against their declared priorities. Although departmental plans acknowledge corporate priorities, there is too little co-ordination and links between the roles of different departments are not sufficiently explicit. The result is that implementation of corporate plans appears *ad hoc* and plans are dependent on the interpretation by senior staff.

Lines of accountability for delivering council priorities are unclear and monitoring of progress unnecessarily complex and insecure.

### **Recommendation**

#### **To improve the implementation of corporate plans:**

- translate council priorities into intended measurable outcomes and accountabilities, which can be readily monitored and evaluated.

### **Decision making**

166. Corporate decision making has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. The recent modernisation of the council was designed to speed the decision-making process and improve corporate accountability for service quality. Elected members have started to take difficult decisions about educational provision. Records of meetings are clear and most routine decision-making processes are timely and well understood. There was extensive consultation on the budget for 2002/2003 and on proposals to increase the delegation of services. Although the process of financial decision making is transparent, the basis for allocating resources is not sufficiently robust.

### **Leadership of officers and elected members**

167. The quality of leadership by senior officers has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. The new managing director has already identified support for education as a priority and has begun to focus corporate attention on improving the quality of services. The director of education provides strong leadership and the high expectations within the education department have begun to challenge previous silo mentalities among staff. The strategy for supporting schools is becoming increasingly secure and the need for intervention in schools is gradually reducing.

168. Senior officers respond positively to new initiatives, providing a clear steer on what is appropriate for Thurrock. Communication and consultation are very good and over the past six months an improved sense of partnership has developed with most of the schools. Where relations are less productive, notably with primary schools, this is frequently a result of a failure to reach agreement on the need to pursue the standards agenda. Attempts to establish a peer culture of challenge among headteachers are at a crucial and critical stage.

169. Leadership provided by elected members has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Senior elected members have a clear sense of the importance of education and a clear view of their strategic role in supporting autonomous schools. They have a good grasp of the need to address low aspirations through community development and have recognised that the underlying systems of corporate financial and performance management need strengthening. Arrangements for delegating to officers are good, although precise accountabilities for meeting council priorities are not explicit. Continuing professional development of officers is actively supported and external accreditation encouraged.

170. The scrutiny of policy decisions by elected members is steadily becoming more rigorous, as the new cabinet/scrutiny arrangements are consolidated. During the last year, the scrutiny of school standards by members has informed the development of the new EDP and work has begun on monitoring special educational needs provision. This work has been well organised and has made effective use of performance data, expert witnesses and school visits. Nevertheless, the ongoing monitoring of progress towards meeting council priorities lacks rigour. Senior officers have provided good support to help elected members develop their scrutiny role, but some members lack the necessary knowledge of educational issues and are reluctant to challenge officers.

### **Recommendation**

#### **To enable elected members to provide better leadership:**

- provide elected members with more opportunities to challenge the extent to which education is contributing to council priorities. In particular, enhance the scrutiny process to enable elected members to challenge officers on the extent to which LEA activities are contributing effectively to school improvement.

171. Advice to elected members is satisfactory. The information provided is both clear and timely. Elected members are kept apprised of their responsibilities and presented with sufficient material to take necessary decisions. Relations between senior officers and leading elected members are productive and non-executive elected members have ready access to information, as appropriate. The director of education provides useful termly briefings for elected members. He has also undertaken joint-visits with elected members to schools, thereby helping them to broaden their knowledge and experience of education issues.

### **Partnership**

172. Collaboration with other agencies is satisfactory. The new director of education has taken a positive approach to developing partnerships and, in so doing, has brought a fresh challenge to some previously unproductive arrangements. A major weakness is the absence of success criteria and, in consequence, the difficulty of proving impact of various initiatives. The current development, with partners of the LEA's local public service agreement on 'Raising Aspirations and Achievement of Thurrock's Young People' is an opportunity to address this.

173. Relations with lifelong learning partners are especially strong. The director of education chairs the local learning partnership and there are good links with further and higher education and the local Connexions partnership. Support for family learning through the adult community college and the children to university project, have been particular priorities. Pre-vocational programmes 14-16 are now well established and these are helping to improve pupil motivation and pupils' prospects post-16.

174. Relations with other partners are also good. There has been good liaison with the police, resulting in the sharing of information and good joint working on truancy patrols and drugs education. The Healthy Thurrock Alliance is an effective model for supporting vulnerable families and the healthy schools scheme supports many schools in the most deprived areas of the borough. The Early Years and Childcare Partnership

is helping to develop parenting skills and, through Sure Start, efforts are ongoing to raise parents' self esteem.

175. The new education forum is at an early stage, but is already valued as a vehicle for elected members, officers and schools to share, discuss and review issues of mutual interest. Good relations with diocesan representatives also provide useful contributions to staff development and important links to the rest of the Thames Gateway region.

### **Recommendation**

**In order to improve the effectiveness of both LEA partnerships and the new local public service agreement:**

- develop measurable performance indicators to assess the contribution that the various partnership arrangements make to pupils' attainment and progress.

## **APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**This report contains a number of recommendations. Of these, the following should be acted upon as a matter of urgency:**

### **Recommendations**

- Improve the quality of corporate planning by ensuring that corporate planning gives appropriate priority to education and links educational improvement to local economic development. In particular, develop greater clarity about the qualities, attributes and range of skills needed by young persons graduating from Thurrock schools at 16.
- Improve the implementation of corporate plans, by translating council priorities into intended measurable outcomes and accountabilities, which can be readily monitored and evaluated.
- Enable elected members to provide better leadership, by providing them with more opportunities to challenge the extent to which education is contributing to council priorities. In particular, enhance the scrutiny process to enable elected members to challenge officers on the extent to which LEA activities are contributing effectively to school improvement.
- Specifically (linked to the recommendation above), improve the monitoring and evaluation of the EDP by clarifying the role of elected members in these processes, so that members' involvement exceeds simply receiving reports, but also involves challenging LEA officers on the effect of actions on raising pupils' attainment.
- Improve pupils' performance by working with headteachers and governors to explore and identify the causes of pupils' under-performance in primary schools and the reasons for recent gains in attainment at Key Stage 4; disseminate the lessons learnt to all schools.
- Improve the allocation of resources to priorities by establishing a robust education financial strategy, which addresses the school funding formula, strategic developments regarding special educational needs and the focus on delivering core services.
- Improve the LEA's capacity to challenge schools, by ensuring that notes of visit to a school written by school improvement officers are also shared with the school's chair of governors.
- Improve the LEA's work with under-performing schools by:
  - developing the range and use of triggers to ensure greater transparency and reliability in the early identification of concerns in schools;
  - ensuring that the school improvement officer and headteacher clarify and agree the support required in schools' and the LEA's action plans and that the impact of the support provided is rigorously evaluated; and
  - establishing LEA action plans for the schools in the supportive intervention



category and establishing clear exit strategies for schools in each category of intervention, including the actions that are required, the time-scale set for improvement and the criteria by which a school will be judged to no longer be a cause for concern.

- Raise expectations and standards of attainment at Key Stage 3 by analysing the available performance data and ensuring that targets for English and science, as agreed with schools, reflect higher expectations arising from the impact of the Key Stage 3 strategy.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management of schools by:
  - publishing the strategy for leadership and management development, including support for middle managers.
- Improve the quality of management services by:
  - using the model service level agreements between human resources and education and between human resources and schools, to provide a framework for developing/updating other service level agreements;
  - within the new service level agreements, incorporating clear service standards, specifications and costings, and providing flexibility to respond to changes arising from legislation or best practice; and
  - providing opportunities for headteachers and governors to contribute to the development of brokering arrangements that are co-ordinated either by the council or by the schools themselves.
- Improve the retention and quality of teachers, by establishing clear quality assurance systems for continuing professional development, covering both direct provision and that brokered from other agencies.
- Ensure successful implementation of the special educational needs/inclusion strategy, by:
  - identifying and securing additional capital funding sources for intended building projects, consistent with the council's asset management plans; and
  - consulting stakeholders on proposed transition arrangements, pending the projects' completion.
- Improve special educational needs functions to support school improvement, by extending the analysis of performance data to cover the progress made within key stages by pupils with special educational needs.
- Improve the strategy to promote social inclusion by:
  - improving the co-ordination of the council's approaches to tackling social exclusion; bringing together the various strands in a coherent framework which identifies clear and quantifiable targets for improvement, including those for pupils' attainment and progress; and

- producing an action plan to achieve the targets for improvement, which identifies priorities, responsibilities and resources, within a realistic timetable.
- Ensure effective strategic planning of school places, particularly in Tilbury by:
  - ensuring that school capacity calculations are validated and adopted in drawing up proposals for reducing surplus places;
  - improving the methodology for planning school places and ensure projections are shared and discussed with schools;
  - establishing a multi-disciplinary project team for the Tilbury proposal, ensuring that project planning includes appropriate contingency for meeting statutory consultation and publication timetables; and
  - making more explicit links between school organisation strategies and the education and corporate asset management plans.
- Maximise capital funding allocations and to secure Best Value in asset management planning by:
  - implementing cross-cutting measures to ensure that the education asset management plan is adequately resourced;
  - ensuring that the relevant education and corporate software systems are compatible and operate effectively and efficiently; and
  - ensuring that all major strategic plans include specific capital funding risk assessments, funding sources, contingency plans and maximising the use of capital assets.
- Improve support for education otherwise than at school by:
  - ensuring that all pupils receive the legally required 25 hours tuition per week;
  - agreeing the role of the pupil referral unit and ensuring that this is adhered to by schools;
  - working with schools to agree effective procedures for the re-integration of pupils; and
  - agreeing plans to improve provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- Improve behaviour support:
  - by revising and updating the behaviour support plan, fully involving schools and other stakeholders and partners; and
  - improving arrangements for behaviour support, to enable schools to manage poor behaviour more effectively, and to reduce exclusions, especially for pupils with statements.

**The following recommendations are important, but less urgent:**

### **Recommendations**

- Improve the support for gifted and talented pupils, by agreeing with schools a strategy for identifying and developing the pupils and, building on work of the Excellence Cluster, disseminating good practice.
- Improve the effectiveness of services to support school improvement by ensuring that priority in the allocation and deployment of adviser/officer workload is always given to supporting schools where the need is greatest at any given time.
- Improve the performance management of staff involved in school improvement by:
  - establishing an appropriate set of professional competencies for all school improvement officers and advisers; and
  - carrying out systematic performance reviews of all staff supporting schools to ensure that each person and team has the skills needed.
- Improve support for child protection, by ensuring that the continuing programme of training on child protection for headteachers, designated teachers and governors is accompanied by wider dissemination in schools.
- Improve measures to combat racism, by supporting schools in planning further training on the management of, and teaching for, cultural diversity.
- Improve the effectiveness of both LEA partnerships and the new local public service agreement, by developing measurable performance indicators to assess the contribution that the various partnership arrangements make to pupils' attainment and progress.

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