

Inspection report
WALTHAM FOREST
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: September 2002

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Contents

Section	Page
Basic information about the LEA	6
Introduction	7
Commentary	8
Section 1: The LEA strategy for school improvement	11
Context	11
Performance	11
Funding	12
Council structure	13
The LEA strategy for school improvement	13
Implementing the strategy for school improvement	14
The allocation of resources to priorities	15
Structures to ensure continuous improvement, including Best Value	16
Section 2: Support for school improvement	18
Summary	18
Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention	19
The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	19
The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools	19
The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools	20
Support for literacy	21
Support for numeracy	21
Support for information and communication technology (ICT)	22
Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3	24
Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers	24
Support for gifted and talented pupils	25

Support for school management	27
Support to governors	27
The effectiveness of services to support school management	28
The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	31
The effectiveness of services to support school improvement	31
Section 3: Special Educational Needs	33
Strategy	33
Statutory obligations	34
Special educational needs functions to support school improvement	35
Value for money	36
Section 4: Promoting social inclusion	38
The strategy to promote social inclusion	38
The supply of school places	38
Admissions	39
Asset management	40
Provision of education for pupils who have no school place	41
Attendance	41
Behaviour support	42
Health, safety, welfare and child protection	43
Looked after children	44
Measures to combat racism	45
Section 5: Corporate issues	47
Summary	47
Corporate planning	47
Decision making	49
The leadership provided by officers and elected members	49

Partnership	50
Appendix: Recommendations	51

Basic information about the LEA

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Address of LEA:	Walthamstow Town Forest Road Hall London E17 4JF
Reporting inspector:	Janet Mokades
Date of inspection:	September 2002

Introduction

1. This inspection of Waltham Forest local education authority (LEA) was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (December 2001)*, which focuses on the effectiveness of the 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 informed by data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with elected members, staff in the education and other council departments, other staff and governors, parents, representatives of the minority ethnic communities and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, schools were invited, on two occasions, seven months apart, to complete a survey, initially by questionnaire and latterly on the Audit Commission website. On the first occasion, the response rate was 72 per cent; on the second occasion it was 58 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through small group discussions with headteachers, governors, deputy headteachers and other staff from three-quarters of the schools in the authority. There were telephone consultations with four schools and visits were made to two primary schools, two secondary schools and three pupil referral units (PRUs). The discussions considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in challenging and contributing to developments in the school and provides value for money.

Commentary

4. The outer London borough of Waltham Forest consists of very differing areas. The north is largely affluent and suburban, while the south is culturally and ethnically very diverse and includes wards that are among the most deprived ten per cent in the country. Over 50 per cent of the borough's school pupils are of minority ethnic origin. Mobility rates are high, in part due to increasing numbers of new arrivals.

5. The Ofsted inspection of May 2000 concluded that the strategic management of education was weak, the LEA had forfeited the trust of schools, and things would not improve without external assistance. Following over 18 months of interim management, a five-year contract was let. The contractor started work on the 1st of September 2001.

6. The performance of schools in Waltham Forest has improved and standards are rising, but not fast enough to close the gap with national averages. However, the rate of improvement in the number of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is greater than in similar authorities and nationally. Unauthorised absence is above the national average in both primary and secondary schools and exclusions, though much reduced, remain above the national average.

7. The LEA suffered from a lengthy period of virtual stasis following the last inspection. While members negotiated with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and others, interim management operated in a vacuum, chief education officers came and went, services deteriorated and the confidence of schools, already low at the time of the inspection, hit rock bottom. The newly appointed contractor faced a daunting task in September 2001.

8. Given this scenario, prioritisation was clearly crucial. Introducing clarity and direction through an agreed strategy, laid out in credible plans, was given top priority. Within that, the first service to be turned around was that for school improvement, now the school development and review service. These were sensible priorities and the contractor has driven them forward with energy and determination. Sound, clear and appropriate plans have been consulted upon and agreed. High quality staff have been recruited to the senior management team. A strong team of school effectiveness advisers has been assembled and appropriate arrangements put in place for their work with schools. Systems for monitoring and chasing progress have been built into all the new arrangements.

9. From a very low base, most school improvement functions are now being performed satisfactorily. The following aspects, although not yet good, are highly satisfactory:

- leadership by senior officers;
- the strategy for school improvement;
- the expertise of staff to support school improvement;
- support for literacy;
- support for numeracy;
- support for the Key Stage 3 strategy;
- asset management planning; and
- cleaning, caretaking and grounds maintenance.

10. There have been improvements in functions relating to social inclusion and some of these are now performed to a satisfactory standard. Progress has not been made with regard to special educational needs and this area remains poor. The following functions are unsatisfactory:

- support to schools for information and communication technology (ICT);
- support for school leadership and management;
- admissions;
- support for behaviour;
- support for attendance;
- provision for pupils who have no school place;
- support for looked after children;
- all special educational needs (SEN) functions;
- financial services, property services and ICT in school administration; and
- the effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement.

11. A new chief executive is providing strong and determined leadership on corporate matters and is driving change forward. The council has undergone change and no one party now has overall control. Some important decisions, such as spending at Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) on education, have been taken. Through the new scrutiny arrangements, members are beginning to monitor education matters in a better informed and more constructive manner.

12. A quantum leap has been made with regard to arrangements for children out of school and the authority now has a grip on this area. Nonetheless, the position is not yet satisfactory: arrangements are very new and still fragmented, there is no concordat around exclusion, schools are not fully in the frame and not all pupils have 25 hours of organised provision.

13. Where SEN is concerned, the LEA has forfeited the trust of schools and this has the potential to undermine the emerging recognition by schools of the quality of work now being done on school improvement. Schools accept the principle of inclusion, but at an operational level, a lack of transparency, poor decision making and poor customer care have alienated them. At a strategic and resource management level, urgent and decisive action is required by the LEA to ensure that the resources devoted to SEN are used to enhance the education of the children in question in the most cost effective way.

14. The question of trust remains central. Moves to create effective partnership mechanisms with headteachers are beginning to produce results and the headteachers involved are ready to engage with the LEA, though cautiously. Others remain on the sidelines, disengaged or, in some cases, actively hostile, in particular, to members. The new lead member has made some inroads into this scepticism and is well regarded by those with whom he has had contact. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to convince schools that partnership with the LEA has something to offer them. At the same time, schools need to meet the LEA half way.

15. Overall, this cannot be judged a satisfactory situation. There are still significant weaknesses and progress overall has been too slow. But there has been some improvement and there is potential for more. The honesty and rigour of the LEA's self-evaluation demonstrate self-knowledge and clarity about what remains to be done, essential prerequisites for further progress. The outsourcing has led to a clarification of roles and responsibilities, proper planning and monitoring, the installation of a capable and energetic senior management team and the fragile beginnings of partnership working between schools and the LEA. It is too early to detect impact in schools. Nonetheless, on the basis of the LEA's self-evaluation and of what has been done to date since the contract was enacted, the inspection team finds that the authority has the capacity to implement the recommendations of this report.

Section 1: The LEA strategy for school improvement

Context

16. Waltham Forest is a borough of sharp contrasts. While the north is affluent, the south is disadvantaged inner-city territory, with three wards featuring in the most deprived ten per cent nationally.

17. The richly diverse population of around 220,000 has a higher than average proportion of people aged under 20. The black and minority ethnic population is increasing rapidly and now stands at 36 per cent, with a higher proportion amongst the younger age groups. Over 50 per cent of school-age pupils are of minority ethnic origin. The largest minority ethnic group is of Pakistani origin and constitutes nine per cent of the population, followed by those of African Caribbean origin, at eight per cent. There are substantial numbers of asylum seekers and new arrivals, and English is the second language for 32 per cent of school-age pupils.

18. Unemployment is relatively high at 5.5 per cent, but is much higher among deprived young people on the most disadvantaged estates. The local authority and the health authority are the major local employers and private sector employment is mainly in small businesses.

19. The school age population is 36,104. Thirty per cent of primary aged pupils and 31 per cent of secondary aged pupils are entitled to free school meals. This is above the national figure in both phases. Just over two per cent of pupils have statements of special educational needs.

20. Waltham Forest has 92 schools. There are four nursery schools. Seventeen of the 65 primary phase schools are first/infant schools. Of the 17 secondary schools, fourteen are 11-16 schools and three have sixth forms. There are six special schools and four newly registered pupil referral units.

21. There are five Beacon schools, one of which is a nursery school. Three secondary schools have specialist status. The Excellence in Cities programme is in place in all secondary schools and 19 primary schools. There are also two Education Action Zones.

Performance

22. Performance in Waltham Forest schools is rising slowly, but it remains below the national average at all key stages. The rate of improvement is too slow to close the gap. However, the rate of improvement in pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE is above the national trend and that of similar authorities¹. The percentage of primary schools

¹ Waltham Forest's statistical neighbours, as defined by Ofsted, are Lewisham, Hounslow, Walsall, Oldham, Enfield, Rochdale, Brent, Bolton, Ealing, Kirklees.

judged in Ofsted school inspections to be good or very good is below the national average and broadly in line with that of similar authorities. Where secondary schools are concerned, the percentage is below both the national average and that of similar authorities.

23. At Key Stage 1, performance is below the national average, but broadly in line with that of similar authorities in reading and mathematics. It is below similar authorities in writing. Improvement is below the national rate and that of similar authorities on all measures.

24. At Key Stage 2, performance is below the national average and that of similar authorities. Improvement presents a more mixed picture. In English it is below the national rate and that of similar authorities, but in mathematics and science it is broadly in line with the national trend and above that of similar authorities.

25. At Key Stage 3, performance is below the national average and broadly in line with that of similar authorities. Improvement, however, is above the national trend and that of similar authorities, except in mathematics, where it is in line with similar authorities.

26. At Key Stage 4, the picture is mixed. Performance is mostly below the national average and in line with that of similar authorities. Improvement is above the national trend and that of similar authorities with regard to pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE.

27. Attendance is below the national figure for primary schools and broadly in line with it for secondary schools. Unauthorised absence is above the national figure for both primary and secondary schools. The exclusion rate is above the national figure for both primary and secondary schools.

Funding

28. At the time of the last inspection, funding overall was good, although spending on education was below the Standard Spending Assessment. Funding is now satisfactory.

29. Waltham Forest has highlighted education as a priority and made a commitment to spending at the SSA on education for three years. The council has passed on the full SSA increase and has protected education from cuts, which have been applied in all other service areas. In 2003/04, schools will continue to be protected, although LEA central services will not.

Academic Year	SSA for education £M	Net expenditure on education- £M	Expenditure as % of SSA
1999/00	111.05	109	98.15
2000/01	116.36	117.32	100.83 (+2.68%)
2001/02	123.27	123.39	100.09 (-0.74%)
2002/03	127.87	128.60	100.57 (+0.48%)

30. Expenditure in recent years has remained constant at slightly above the SSA for primary pupils and slightly below for secondary pupils. The SSA for both primary and secondary pupils is above the average for statistical neighbours, outer London and England. Capital expenditure has remained relatively constant between 1998 and 2002. However, the planned capital expenditure for 2002/03 has increased by over 120 per cent, with a significant increase in borrowing this year. This reflects a planned programme, which includes a large Private Finance Initiative project and significant building works to support SEN developments.

31. At 86 per cent, Waltham Forest delegated its local schools budget in line with similar authorities and nationally in 2001/02. This has increased similarly in 2002-03 to 87 per cent. The gross delegated funding per pupil was above the average in all sectors in 2001/02, being the second highest in outer London for special schools, the fourth highest for secondary and fifth highest for primary. The LEA has taken up all Standards Fund grants available to it and receives £236 more per pupil than the outer London average; of this it has devolved just over 76 per cent to schools, in line with the average for outer London authorities.

32. The LEA has been successful in obtaining external funding from a variety of sources, including targeted capital funds, Single Regeneration Budget and New Opportunities Fund. An external funding manager has been appointed to assist both schools and the LEA in attracting external funding.

33. Waltham Forest LEA's expenditure on centrally provided services in 2001/02 was above the outer London average on school improvement and it was the highest spender on access in this comparator group. It spent below the average for similar LEAs and nationally on SEN overall. The highest spending area within this was the special schools individual schools budget. The lowest spending area is educational psychology assessment. Funding for pupils with statements is delegated to schools.

Council structure

34. The council has 60 elected members. Following four years during which Labour was the majority party, the council is now balanced. No one party has overall political control. Labour now holds 29 seats, the Conservatives 18 and the Liberal Democrats thirteen.

35. A modernised system was piloted from May 2000 and has now been fully implemented. There are ten cabinet members with portfolio leads and ten scrutiny committees, including one for lifelong learning. This works on a cross-party, consensus basis and is chaired by a Liberal Democrat member. Scrutiny panels can call in decisions, including those made by the cabinet. Under the new council, the lifelong learning scrutiny panel has become better informed and assumed a higher level of involvement in education matters.

The LEA strategy for school improvement

36. The evaluation of the Education Development Plan (EDP) 1 is hard hitting and self-critical. It takes full account of the Ofsted LEA report and draws on a suitable range of data.

The analysis in relation to the national priorities is rigorous and clear. The local priorities established are appropriate and clearly derived from the audit.

37. In EDP2, targets are challenging, particularly that for Key Stage 2 mathematics, which demands a 17 per cent rate of improvement by 2004. With the exception of Key Stage 2 mathematics in 2001, there has been a steady upward trend in achievement and this, coupled with the new arrangements for the delivery of school support now in force in the LEA, suggests that the targets may be feasible. The LEA targets are not entirely compatible with those of the schools; there are minor differences at Key Stage 2 and slight variations elsewhere.

38. The school improvement programme proposed is fully justified by the rigorous audit. The strategy is clear, as are the links between actions, priorities and success criteria. The latter are specific and hard-edged. Nonetheless, there is some unevenness in the quality of the planning. The omission of activities means that what is proposed is, in some instances, insufficiently specific and too broad. Some of the actions are, in fact, aspirations. In places there is too heavy a reliance on the provision of courses and of unspecific 'support' as a means of effecting improvement. Elsewhere, there is good detailed and practical planning for action, for instance, in relation to teacher recruitment and retention. Responsibilities and accountability are clear. The plan is cross-referenced by priority to other plans. It is costed by priority, but there is no breakdown by activity.

39. Though more detailed planning of activities is needed for some priorities, overall, if implemented, the plan should lead to the desired outcomes. The re-launched Excellence in Cities programme is well focused on supporting school improvement.

Implementing the strategy for school improvement

40. Implementation of the LEA's strategy for school improvement is satisfactory with good prospects for further development; an improvement from the previous inspection. The period of uncertainty that followed the previous inspection resulted in little effective action with regard to either the first Education Development Plan or the post-Ofsted action plan. Lack of leadership, ceaseless staff changes and deteriorating services gave schools little cause for confidence and their expectations fell further in the following 20 months. That deterioration was evident in the survey of schools' views. The words of one school reflect the views of many, 'we almost descended into chaos'.

41. Significant progress has been made since the appointment of a new executive director to the LEA in May 2001 and the letting of an intervention contract in September 2001. Initially the contractor, EduAction, prioritised proper planning and an organised approach to consultation coupled with the improvement of services. Schools acknowledge the fresh approach to dialogue with them, which led to the new EDP being approved in February 2002. The plan is satisfactory and steps have been taken to address the issues for improvement in EDP2. However, implementation of the plan is at a very early stage.

42. Similar approaches have been taken to other aspects of strategic planning. The post-Ofsted action plan has been rewritten. Schools have also been consulted about a new SEN and inclusion plan and generally give their support to its principles. The behavioural support plan has been rewritten twice to include expansion of provision and the new behaviour

improvement project. The contractor rightly judged that these improved plans were essential in order to move the authority forward and re-establish its credibility with schools.

43. On the services front, the contractor took the school development and review service as its first priority. The school improvement team is now strongly staffed and appropriately focused on the EDP. Staff development and service area plans also reflect its educational objectives and those of other plans. However, services for special educational needs are still struggling and unable to contribute to the drive for school improvement, while in the access areas important and potentially crucial innovations, such as the new behaviour support arrangements, are only just being put into place.

44. The first Ofsted report expressed well-founded concerns about the Excellence in Cities initiative. At that time, the LEA lacked the leadership necessary to play its part in the initiative and it struggled to make progress. Its challenges have now been recognised by the contractor and a full time co-ordinator has been appointed. He is working, together with the partnership board, to plan its future development. The co-ordinator is a full member of the school development and review service, which now brings together key officers with an appropriate focus on the EDP.

45. Unvalidated data indicates that Key Stage 1 targets have been met in 2002, but that Key Stage 2 performance in English has fallen well short of target. At Key Stage 3, targets for science and mathematics were met, but in English they were not. Improvement in pupils achieving five or more GCSE A*-C grades was maintained.

46. Planning and monitoring are secure, but have not yet had an appreciable impact. Most schools cautiously welcome the changes, but many do not yet link LEA objectives to their own planning. The pace and volume of planning change has inevitably left schools wondering whether so much change can be delivered. Until monitoring indicates appreciable improvement resulting from the plans, many strategies remain largely untested.

The allocation of resources to priorities

47. At the time of the last inspection, the allocation of resources to priorities was satisfactory. Recommendations focused on the need for the LEA to: improve long term financial planning; budget estimation and control; provide schools with better information on the costs of services and involve them more closely in their monitoring and review; establish a dialogue with schools at a formative stage of the budget making process; and develop mutual trust and confidence.

48. The targeting of resources to priorities remains satisfactory overall. Spending at SSA now reflects the council's priority on education. Funds are appropriately directed to strategic priorities identified in the EDP and other LEA plans. Communication and consultation on these strategic issues has been good. This has included the processes for simplifying the funding formula and reviewing the local management of schools scheme. The LEA has met all government targets for delegation and has commenced three-year financial planning, although this is at an elementary stage. It has been successful at attracting external funding in line with its priorities, for example, targeted capital funds to provide pupil referral unit facilities. Useful and flexible service level agreements have been produced by the contractor

for all its management services in 2002/03 and headteachers have been consulted on their development.

49. Budgetary control, however, has continued to be weak and inaccurate, particularly in the areas of SEN and home-to-school transport. Financial monitoring has not been sufficiently rigorous, including that of external grant funding. The monitoring and support for school budget making and control has not been appropriate; no deficits have been licensed and the use of significant balances has not been challenged. Three schools have also had delegated powers removed. All of these issues, features of the period before the awarding of the intervention contract, have recently started to be addressed by the contractor.

50. Ineffective communication of the detail of the 2002/03 budget-setting process for schools unfortunately led to serious, though ultimately unwarranted, concerns from headteachers that resources had not been directed to priorities.

Structures to ensure continuous improvement, including Best Value

51. No judgement was made on the extent to which the LEA had effective strategies in place to promote continuous improvement during the last inspection. However, the lack of an overarching performance monitoring and review framework was identified. The extent to which the LEA now has effective strategies in place to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value, is satisfactory overall.

52. The council adopted an improvement strategy, 'Committed to Success,' earlier this year, which identifies both service and partnership priorities. Its impact, however, has yet to be felt in terms of outcomes. The performance monitoring and review of staff remains inconsistent. However, the contractor has very recently implemented a new framework and the council is implementing a new policy document 'Framework for Managing People'.

53. The Best Value Performance Plan is sound and the council has improved the quality of its performance indicators. It has rightly been working on streamlining its Best Value review programme in order to deliver a more targeted and focused model. Staffing and resources to support Best Value at the corporate centre have been increased. Although scrutiny is not, as yet, sufficiently rigorous or systematic, there has been clear improvement recently. The lifelong learning scrutiny committee is taking a proper and appropriate interest in key issues in education.

54. The lifelong learning directorate has undertaken no specific Best Value reviews in education, other than libraries, following the market testing and awarding of the intervention contract to an external company in September 2001. The council decided that this Ofsted inspection would fulfil the function of a Best Value review.

55. Monitoring of the intervention contract by the council has been insufficiently rigorous in its first year. This has been acknowledged and improvements are underway. The assistant chief executive has taken responsibility for contract monitoring and management. Due to the illness of the director of education, the contractor's director of school support services has taken temporary responsibility for overall LEA services, reporting directly to the chief executive. While this has been expedient in the short term, there is clear potential for conflicts of interest in the longer term and this is unsatisfactory.

56. Schools are not receiving sufficient guidance on Best Value or on how to become efficient and effective purchasers.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

Summary

57. The history of the LEA since the previous inspection is a complex one. In many respects the quality of services to support school improvement deteriorated initially and only from mid-2001 have there been signs of the improved leadership so clearly demanded by the Ofsted report. This was evident to schools whose confidence, never strong, weakened further and still has to be won back if an effective partnership for school improvement is to be created.

58. A period of interim management, leading to the outsourcing of most school services, impacted badly on schools. Leadership at director level was uncertain for almost a year, following the resignation of the previous director and his deputy. This included a period when a consultant acted as director, following an unsuccessful advertisement for a successor. Apart from the new executive director, who took up post in May 2001, all other senior managers have been in post for a year or less. There has been other staff turbulence during uncertainty about the prospect of outsourcing. Filling posts permanently and successfully continues to be a major difficulty affecting a number of key posts.

59. The first post-Ofsted action plan was not followed up satisfactorily and some actions actually further weakened schools' confidence. For example, many schools have commented on a restructuring of the advisory service during this period, which, in their view, greatly weakened its knowledge of schools. Other support services did not become more fully engaged in school improvement as had been recommended. The LEA found it difficult to engage in promoting national initiatives such as Excellence in Cities. The outsourcing of school services took a long time to realise. This was, in part, due to negotiations between the council and the Department for Education and Skills. It also reflected the weakness of the LEA in many key areas. Inevitably the first EDP also failed to deliver the majority of its objectives.

60. Since the appointment of an executive director and the letting of the schools services contract, there have been early signs of improvement. The contractor has worked hard to offset recruiting problems, bringing in expertise and making some very sound acting appointments. Schools are now beginning to recognise the improved quality of leadership. A strong team of senior managers has been assembled and priority has been given to developing an advisory service, which is focused on improvement and has the respect of schools. Supported by improved data, more differentiated approaches to support are now possible and a sound strategy of monitoring, challenge and intervention is emerging. The contractor has also set about developing urgently required policies on which to base improvement. There is little, so far, to show in the classroom for the planning and staff development of the past year. However, faced with major challenge, the strategy of building a secure base is the right one. School improvement has been given the highest priority and is where the most 'green shoots' can be seen. It is not yet possible to measure success more broadly. Although the quality of leadership and most processes are now satisfactory, outcomes are not.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

61. The definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention is now satisfactory, although new guidelines have only been introduced very recently and are yet to be fully understood by all schools. Change comes from a low base with little past confidence or trust in the LEA's competence. This was reflected in the recommendations of the last inspection to establish better partnerships with schools and adopt a more differentiated approach to support.

62. Those recommendations were not addressed effectively until 2001. Since then, there have been clear signs of efforts to build better relationships with schools and define the LEA's role in school improvement. Following consultation with schools, good quality documentation has now been produced. It describes the process of monitoring, challenge and intervention. It also explains the differentiated approach to support and the rationale behind it. For schools identified to receive intensive support, there is explanation of the reasons, accompanied by a programme of action that engages the school effectiveness adviser and other school services with the school and its governing body. These are important steps in the right direction.

63. The contractor has still to win the agreement of all schools to working in partnership to raise standards. This is not easy because of some complex relationships that reflect the past weakness of the LEA. Many schools have grown accustomed to functioning despite the local authority. They do not readily accept that new initiatives will be more successful than previous efforts that were seen to fail. Other schools continue to have expectations more appropriate to the period before self-management. Some sound beginnings have been made, but their impact on school improvement is not yet clear.

The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need

64. This is now satisfactory. The lack of differentiation noted in the last inspection has now been addressed with a stronger focus on areas of greatest need. Schools now have access to robust performance data that increasingly helps them to target weakness. Attempts have been made to improve the transfer of data from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, following criticism in the last report. However, schools still report weaknesses in the transfer of data and links between schools. The role of advisers has been clearly defined with a differentiated approach to support. There is a graduated scale of support for those with greater need, linked to an assessment of priorities. The annual programme of basic support for all schools has only been in operation for one year and is not yet fully established. It is generally well received by schools, although some perceive it to follow the authority's agenda rather than one shared with schools. Increasingly confident action has been taken where schools cause concern.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools

65. The monitoring and challenge of schools using performance data is now satisfactory. It has been an important aspect of the LEA's support for school improvement. Schools receive a useful annual data profile. It mostly consists of performance data, but it is due to be improved next year with the inclusion of increased contextual data. A sound programme of training helps schools in data interpretation. However, electronic transfer of data remains

unsatisfactory. A monitoring system has been introduced, which brings together performance data across a wide range of services. The statistics from some units are not integrated fully into a meaningful overview of school performance.

66. Target-setting arrangements in the past have been unsatisfactory with schools reporting that some targets were sometimes set during a telephone conversation. There has been improvement in the past year. Targets have been set based on shared data and with increased confidence in advisors' knowledge to challenge schools' proposals.

67. Steps have been taken to strengthen the team of advisors and to focus curriculum and leadership advice within a new organisational structure. Schools express strong support for these changes and note, in particular, their confidence in the new team of school effectiveness advisers. That includes support for secondary schools that was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. The process for providing written advice following most visits is not yet entirely consistent.

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

68. This is now satisfactory following recent improvement, but its impact has yet to be confirmed. Until mid-2001, there was no clear system and the borough had a level of schools requiring improvement higher than the national average and statistical neighbours. At the time of the last inspection there were four schools deemed to require special measures and five with serious weaknesses. There are now three in special measures and four with serious weaknesses; one since November 1999. However, during the past year, no schools have required special measures, although two have been identified as having serious weaknesses.

69. In 1999, the LEA identified one third of the schools as causing concern. There are now policies and procedures for identifying, monitoring and supporting schools that are causing concern. Following their introduction, 17 per cent of schools are now identified. There are three levels of intervention and five categories of concern. This categorisation is complex and is not yet fully understood by schools. Evidence is drawn from the performance database, attainment, distance from targets and direct contact through the school effectiveness adviser and support group meetings.

70. Schools causing concern receive planned and differentiated support. There are clear timescales for improvement, which make clear the expectations for improvement and action. Improvement plans for schools causing concern are detailed and provide a sound basis for improvement, although exit strategies are not always sufficiently detailed. Most services coordinate effectively their support of schools, but there is scope for improved links with SEN and other pupil services. There is a system for appointing additional, experienced, governors to schools causing concern. Schools value this. The school improvement monitoring group is a positive innovation and comprises cross-service senior managers with headteacher representation. It regularly reviews the progress of schools causing concern and decides on additional resources. The member scrutiny committee receives school improvement monitoring group reports and oral updates. There is a helpful process to give additional support when governors appoint a new headteacher at a school causing concern.

71. Serious attempts have been made in the past year to define the LEA's role in school improvement and set up systems to focus support through better knowledge of schools and a commitment to intervene where necessary. It is too early to assess the impact of these changes, although they appear well thought-through and, increasingly, have the support of schools. Some schools remain unconvinced of the authority's competence to support school improvement. Nonetheless, some effective foundations have been laid.

Support for literacy

72. Support to schools for raising standards of literacy, including the implementation of the literacy strategy, is satisfactory. Support was good at the time of the last inspection, but the authority has been through a turbulent time recently and there have been changes to key staff. The authority assessed this area as satisfactory and schools assessed it as good in both surveys conducted this year.

73. The quality of the leading consultants, the use of training material and courses, and the work of the leading literacy teachers are all still highly valued by schools and co-ordinators. They are now firmly established and the capacity for more improvement is sound. More intensive support is available to schools that require it and improvement is more rapid in those schools that have received intensive support. Co-ordinators meet termly and there is a good range of information packs and regular newsletters to keep schools informed about developments and progress. Many schools now have a governor with responsibility for literacy and the contractor monitors governors' minutes and the work of the school advisor.

74. There are effective links between Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant co-ordinators and literacy consultants, although there are some weaknesses in the training provided. Links have been established with other initiatives and have improved teachers' awareness. These include work with the numeracy and Key Stage 3 strategy teams. Lessons learnt from the implementation of the literacy strategy are being used to good effect in implementing the Key Stage 3 strategy in secondary schools. A useful initiative involved Year 7 teachers observing the teaching of pupils in Year 6 at their primary schools. The sharing of good practice between schools is a regular activity across the borough.

75. Targets have been set for 2004, but these present a considerable challenge to schools. Standards of attainment in literacy remain below national averages and those of statistical neighbours. They are rising slowly, but improvement is below the national rate and that of similar authorities.

Support for numeracy

76. Support for raising standards in numeracy is satisfactory. The LEA has effectively implemented the strategy for numeracy and, although staff changes have meant that at times progress has been interrupted, the quality of training and support has continued to meet most needs of the schools within the authority.

77. Support for schools was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, and this is the current assessment by the authority. Schools understand the level of support that they are entitled to and most schools appreciate the quality of the work done by consultants.

78. Recent training has covered a number of key issues, such as developing guidance on links with Key Stage 1 and the support for inclusive education of bi-lingual learners and the gifted and talented pupils. Primary mathematics co-ordinators meet termly and courses run in the authority to support teachers and headteachers are well attended. A good range of quality training packs are available for schools and this, along with the excellent quality of the leading mathematics teachers scheme, is seen as valuable additional support for schools who do not receive regular, more intensive support.

79. Strong links have been established with secondary schools and these developments have used the expertise of the primary team to develop a strong initiative to support the implementation of the Key Stage 3 strategy. The primary team has made good links with other initiatives in the borough. Key lessons have been learnt and these have been used to support newly qualified teachers, work with the team for supporting minority ethnic pupils and to develop the training of governors. Many schools now have a governor for numeracy who is actively involved with target setting and monitoring.

80. The analysis of data is a recent initiative since the introduction of improved data for schools. They are now helped to use test data to set targets and the use of Qualification and Curriculum Authority optional tests in Year 4 have helped this process. Schools are better informed about the abilities of their pupils. Numeracy standards are rising and progress is in line with national averages and better than similar authorities. However, attainment is below national averages and below statistical neighbours at the end of Key Stage 2 and the targets for 2004 present a real challenge to the schools.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

81. Support for raising standards and curriculum use of ICT is poor. It was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection and it has seen little significant progress until very recently. The authority assessed this area as unsatisfactory. Constant staff changes and a lack of strategy for improvement resulted in this area continuing to deteriorate. The capacity for further improvement remains unsatisfactory, as there are a number of serious issues outstanding, which have not been fully resolved or shared with schools.

82. This term the contractor has published a strategy for ICT, which promotes a new vision and use of ICT across the curriculum and an intention to focus on the raising of standards. However, few schools are aware of its existence or have been involved in consultation about its contents. There has been no recent audit of schools' needs or analysis of pupils' attainment.

83. Schools have been allocated resources via the National Grid for Learning budget and the majority of schools are reported to have met the requirements of the national targets for computer ratios, but in some cases this includes systems that are old or are of poor quality. Little guidance was given to schools about how they should assess their computer equipment and many schools included systems older than five years, which did not meet the National Grid for Learning requirements. Hence the publication of ratios is likely to be inaccurate.

84. Schools have been offered limited advice about procurement of systems and software for curriculum support. Many have researched and purchased their own equipment

from local suppliers. This has resulted in a range of different systems, software and quality of technical support in many schools. As a consequence, schools have not always purchased the appropriate resources that can be developed into a coherent strategy for the whole authority. Technical support across the borough is varied. Some schools have this as part of their contract with their own provider and these are proving expensive in certain cases. With the range of different systems it is difficult to see how these will be easily supported in the future.

85. Headteachers and administration staff are connected to e-mail systems. However, teachers and pupils are not, except where the school has made its own private arrangements. There is no LEA-wide structure to support and develop school websites and to secure the e-mail systems for safe use by pupils. This is a potential health and safety issue. There is no LEA-wide structure to support and develop school websites. There is a plan to connect schools via broadband to the London grid for learning by the end of the year, which includes the provision of e-mail and URL filtering to enable safe use by pupils. An audit to assess schools' suitability to connect to the LGfL was conducted in April 2002, but this did not cover school hardware. Many schools lack the confidence that this plan will be implemented on time as it has already met with LGfL's delay in providing connection, causing progress as at August 2002 to fall behind other local authorities.

86. The majority of schools will have signed up to New Opportunities Fund training by March 2003. Progress has been slow and it is unlikely that all teachers will complete the training by this time. The quality of the training has varied and, in some cases, has been inappropriate to the need of the schools, neither building on teachers' existing skills in the schools nor delivering the training needed. In other schools, training and support has been successful.

87. The contractor is unaware of what pupils' standards are in ICT. Many schools are assessing pupils at Key Stage 3 and some are doing this at Key Stage 2. The information is not collated across the borough. The contractor is unclear about the impact of training and, as yet, is unable to target additional support where needed. Training, co-ordinators' meetings and sharing of good practice and information are beginning to take place. Many different support groups have established themselves, but communication between the groups is not co-ordinated by the contractor and many schools are unaware of what developments are taking place.

Recommendations

In order to raise pupils' standards in ICT, improve the information available to schools and give support for ICT administration in schools :

- ensure that long term forward planning, including the ICT strategy, is shared and consulted upon with all schools;
- oversee a thorough audit of systems and rigorously monitor and evaluate it to ensure more accurate information about schools' progress in meeting government targets about provision;
- monitor technical support to all schools to ensure high and consistent quality;
- develop an LEA-wide strategy for pupils' safe access to e-mail and websites; and

-
- ensure that the planned implementation of the new integrated central IT support systems is managed efficiently and without delay.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

88. The support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. This area was not part of the previous inspection and the authority judged it to be satisfactory. It has adopted the national strategy and implementation is already effective. Schools are positive about the support they are receiving.

89. There is good continuity between all the strategies for raising standards and for school improvement. The good practice and success in literacy and numeracy support, at Key Stage 2, as mentioned in the last report, have been developed, enabling this strategy to be successful in a short time. An audit was conducted at an early stage and this identified the strengths and weaknesses. Successful appointments have been made, to strengthen the team, across the subjects and in ICT.

90. There are good links with heads of departments of foundation subjects in secondary schools. Good practice, including joint lesson observation in Year 7, has promoted links between primary and secondary schools. The implementation of the strategy has transformed the attitudes of schools and is beginning to make an impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Schools recognise the value of sharing good practice and ideas, and a steering group has been established with representation at different levels.

91. The identification of good secondary department practice in science and history and the use of Beacon status schools has continued to strengthen the service. Other links have been established with the school effectiveness group and the support offered is aimed at raising standards across all schools. Cluster groups of schools are beginning to analyse data so that pupils' progress can be tracked from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. There has been a good focus on the transition of pupils from primary and secondary schools building from the links established through joint lesson observations. The work with minority ethnic groups has also had additional focus and impetus and is beginning to contribute to improved performance.

92. Performance is below the national average and broadly in line with that of similar authorities. Improvement, however, is above the national trend and that of similar authorities except in mathematics, where it is in line with similar authorities. As yet, there has been little improvement in the attendance and exclusion rates at Key Stage 3.

Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers

93. Support to schools in raising standards of minority ethnic and Traveller children is satisfactory overall. This is as it was at the time of the last inspection. The LEA judged that this area would be unsatisfactory, but enough progress has been made recently to improve the situation and the capacity for further improvement is sound.

94. Policies are now devised and in place in most schools. Through a centralised training programme and intensive school support, where necessary, work has been done on combating racial harassment. Most secondary schools have co-ordinators responsible for minority ethnic

achievement. Links have been made with other strategies including literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3. Governors from minority ethnic groups are well represented in most schools across the borough and have received training alongside their headteachers.

95. The contractor has collected and analysed attainment data by ethnicity. Both the data and the analysis are thorough and are a good basis for the targets set in EDP2. Monitoring of standards by ethnicity is in place and the review of attainment by ethnicity is incorporated in the procedures of the school effectiveness team. There is some under achievement amongst minority ethnic groups at all Key Stages. In particular, pupils of African and African Caribbean origin under perform at Key Stage 4. The progress of pupils with English as an additional language is slow compared with similar authorities. Exclusions of children of African Caribbean origin have reduced.

96. Members have recognised the central importance of raising minority ethnic achievement and this is now a corporate priority, with very challenging targets incorporated in the draft local public service agreement. Schools are still unclear about what this means to them in terms of raising achievement to reach their challenging targets.

97. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant was delegated to schools from April 2001. Changes to the formula for allocating funding were made for 2002/03 based upon prior attainment of pupils. Not everyone has welcomed this process as some schools have suffered a reduction even though they still support a high percentage of pupils with English as an additional language. Schools do not fully understand the process nor have they received a clear rationale about how to formulate a strategy for implementation or monitoring the use of the grant. Both governors and headteachers were confused by the changes to funding arrangements this summer. Some schools would welcome more support in translations of important information for parents and governors.

98. The administration of the Travellers Achievement Grant meets requirements, but it is not yet monitored. About 180 Traveller children attend Waltham Forest schools. The Traveller education teacher works closely with families and is well informed about the community. Data on attendance, attainment and the work done with families and children is analysed and shared with six other London boroughs to provide continuity of information across London. This service responds rapidly to the increasing numbers of pupils identified in some schools.

99. The LEA is implementing the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The formal recording of racial incidents has completed one cycle. This is an improvement from a previous system, which was *ad hoc* and unclear to schools.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

100. Although support for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory, overall it has several significant weaknesses. There is evidence of much sound practice, but the programme lacks a strategic overview and sense of direction. It has moved forward in an incremental fashion, sometimes constrained both by LEA weakness and limitations within the Excellence in Cities partnership. Members of the partnership board recognise the issues and are now addressing them.

101. The programme began in 1999 with the formation of the Excellence in Cities partnership. All secondary schools appointed co-ordinators, who received national training. However, with continually high turnover at school level, coupled with the significant instability within the advisory and inspection service since 2000, a strategic sense of direction did not develop. At authority level there was a lack of leadership in encouraging the partnership to develop. Those problems were reflected at school level in difficulties in affording the project sufficient priority and in resourcing co-ordinators in their role.

102. Often progress at individual secondary school level has been better than within clusters or the whole partnership. Some schools are making very effective progress in setting and reviewing individual pupils' targets. They are also identifying some exciting and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. An impressive range of school-based initiatives exists both in the classroom and through study support programmes. The authority has sought to monitor this effectively, but has been severely hampered by the lack of comparative data. Although improvements are in hand, there has been inadequate information to support schools in tracking progress and sharing good practice. The City Learning Centre has not yet made a significant contribution to the application of ICT to the strand for gifted and talented pupils.

103. Extension into the primary phase has been slow. The original proposal to establish a primary pilot began to move forward in 2001. Fifteen of the 19 primary schools in the EiC primary pilot have a strand for gifted and talented pupils. Training has been undertaken and a generic policy adopted. In general there has been more activity in the development of study support and enrichment activities than in teaching and learning strategies for the classroom. Primary schools have yet to develop individual learning plans fully, although work is in hand to provide them with additional advice on target setting.

104. Summer schools for Years 6 and 7 pupils have been increasingly successful since their introduction in 2000. They have clear criteria for admission and are now oversubscribed. Links are made between the schools and the mainstream school more easily with Year 7 pupils than Year 6. Objective evaluation is at an early stage. There are some well-developed links with higher education, both with individual schools and through the higher education summer schools.

105. Overall, the picture is mixed. There is some very sound practice, but the programme lacks coherence. A full time co-ordinator has recently been appointed to the EiC partnership and is working to draw initiatives together. The partnership is working to redefine its role and existing work with gifted and talented pupils should be a sound basis for future development.

Recommendation

To increase the impact of the programme for gifted and talented children:

- improve the monitoring of performance data in all schools to inform target setting and programme design for individual children.

Support for school management

106. Support for leadership and management remains unsatisfactory as it was at the time of the previous inspection. This judgement accords with the LEA's own assessment. Action has been taken very recently to address issues but, in general, it is too soon to judge its effectiveness. During the past year, schools have welcomed the role of the school effectiveness adviser and are beginning to see it as support rather than simply monitoring. That relationship is an important and developing aspect of support for school leadership and management. The new framework to identify schools requiring high levels of support is beginning to target them more effectively. Increasingly, governors are becoming part of the process.

107. There is now an annual visit by the advisor to a meeting with governors and training has been provided to raise their awareness of the school improvement agenda, including the use of data. Significant efforts are being made to establish mutual respect as an important first step in developing a relationship with schools as self-managing institutions. A revised programme of training and support for senior managers has just commenced. It includes significantly greater support for newly appointed headteachers, deputies and middle managers. Support for newly-appointed headteachers has been reviewed.

108. Self-evaluation has, rightly, been identified as an important aspect of school improvement and self-management. The LEA is well behind many other authorities in its development, although data provided to schools is improving, especially that relating to performance. A pilot has been launched using a self-evaluation programme purchased externally. Although awareness raising has begun with all schools, its development is at an early stage and on a small scale.

109. Little has been done to give impartial advice to schools about alternative providers, although many make use of them. In some respects, the appointment by the local authority of a private sector partner through competitive tender is in the spirit of Best Value. Senior managers recognise this is a high priority area, which has yet to progress to a point where it is satisfactory, although a start has been made.

Recommendation

<p>In order to improve the support for leadership and management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• building on the pilot, extend the programme of self-evaluation to all schools as soon as possible.

Support to governors

110. The LEA gives satisfactory support to school governors. This was the case at the time of the last inspection. The authority considered that this area would be unsatisfactory, but improvements have been put in place recently that provide effective policies to support and recruit new governors to schools. A new governor support officer acts as a link between the LEA and schools.

111. Vacancies for governors are being filled slowly from a wide base of parents and members of the local and minority ethnic communities. This is as a result of the improved support being offered, although getting and training the right people is still an issue for the authority. There are currently 87 (28 per cent) vacancies across the borough. This is too many. Two of the three political parties have responded positively to the drive to appoint new LEA governors.

112. The quality of the support and advice given to governors is improving. They are now more informed and better able to be actively involved in consultation and feedback. Governors are also more involved in target setting and work alongside headteachers attending courses together. They receive regular updates on finances and performance and feel better equipped to challenge their headteachers.

113. Training has been directed at governors' needs ranging from starter courses, information sharing and race equality to in-depth training about finance and personnel. The authority has started to evaluate courses and repeat those that are popular. Legal advice is available to governing bodies through the contractor's legal advice department. Nevertheless, governors would welcome more support about arrangements for funding and, in particular, where it affects their school situation.

114. The LEA monitors the work of governing bodies through clerking at meetings, scrutinising minutes and reading school and HMI reports. This is leading to improvements in more effective governance of schools, although the impact is only marginal at this point. The minute taking of sub-committee groups within schools is more varied and not always undertaken. Additional support is offered to governing bodies of schools causing concern from a bank of experienced and well-respected governors. Governing bodies have become more confident about the LEA supporting them in times of crisis.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

115. At the time of the last inspection, the effectiveness of services to support school management was satisfactory overall. A recommendation was made to provide schools with details of the range and level of services, which they could expect to receive as part of their core entitlement from the LEA. As yet, this information has only been provided by the contractor's human resources team. It is, however, currently being collated. Although the contractor has provided clear, helpful and differentiated service level agreements for its own services, in consultation with headteacher groups, neither the LEA nor the contractor provide information on alternative providers in the majority of service areas.

116. **Financial services.** At the time of the last inspection, financial services were generally sound. They are now unsatisfactory. An integrated IT system has not yet been implemented. Financial information is often provided late to schools. Reconciliation by schools to the council's system is time-consuming and troublesome. Guidance is offered on budget setting in a budget-planning week, however, this is unstructured and not targeted at those schools in greatest need. It is not currently related to wider resource management issues. Monitoring of schools in deficit or in danger of falling into deficit is insufficiently rigorous, particularly with regard to those schools which do not purchase the financial services service level agreement, although the contractor is beginning to address this issue.

Useful financial benchmarking information is supplied, but support for consistent financial reporting was provided very late in the financial year.

117. Payroll has generally provided a satisfactory service, however, there have been very recent concerns expressed about some elements of service quality. A decision has been taken to move this function to one of the contractor's parent companies. The implementation of this decision has been delayed until February 2003.

118. Service managers are not currently provided with monthly budget monitoring reports by the contractor. This impedes them in managing their budgets effectively at a service level.

119. **Human resources.** At the time of the last inspection, human resources was unsatisfactory, particularly with regard to casework. This function is now satisfactory, with few weaknesses remaining. The handling of casework has improved significantly. Advice given to schools is now secure and schools feel much better supported. The number and backlog of employment tribunals is being reduced. A new human resources manual has been issued, which enables schools to have access to up-to-date policies and procedures. It is planned to also include this information on the intranet when it is rolled out to schools in the near future. Relations with the trade unions are positive and they are engaged jointly with human resources in the ongoing updating of policies. Contracts are issued within the statutory time frame. Training is offered for headteachers and governors, but needs further development.

120. All the contractor's human resources staff have been integrated into one team and brought onto one site. Full staffing, a good senior manager and the introduction of monitoring processes have all contributed to an improved service. The contractor's staff has access to the staff handbook on the intranet. Relationships between the contractor, the LEA and corporate human resources services are good. The LEA is well informed on issues that relate to it as the employer or where there are financial implications.

121. **Property services.** In the last inspection, property services were identified as being generally unsatisfactory. A recommendation was made that there should be a review of the support provided to schools. There is no evidence of any radical improvement having taken place. Property services are still unsatisfactory.

122. Property services are provided through a service level agreement by building services, an arm of the council's environmental services. The quality of service received by schools is variable, dependent on the individual surveyor. Major projects are usually well handled, with project plans, site meetings and performance indicators used to measure quality and achievement. Specifications for smaller projects, however, are not always agreed with schools, resulting in some difficulties after completion. Fees for projects are high and not invoiced until the end of the year. The length of time taken to process invoices, in general, is a source of real difficulty for schools. Poor IT systems also contribute to the service's inability to prioritise work sufficiently effectively in order to meet the terms of the service level agreement. An outdated and limited list of approved contractors contributes to schools' concern about value for money. Schools are not aware of any prioritisation of planned repairs.

Recommendation**In order to improve property services support for schools:**

- undertake a formal, customer-focused review of the buildings service, in liaison with headteachers and in line with Best Value principles.

123. **ICT strategy, infrastructure and support for administration.** In the last inspection, support for ICT administration was satisfactory overall though with significant weaknesses, particularly in relation to user support and management information strategy. Despite some improvements, the pace of change has been too slow and overall the ICT strategy, infrastructure and support for administration are now unsatisfactory.

124. Management information technology and services has been reorganised to include support, research and individual projects. Staffing has more than doubled since the last inspection. The service provided by the helpdesk has improved, however, the overall quality of advice and support for schools is still too variable and dependent on the capability of individual staff. A new ICT strategy has just been produced, which is clear, inclusive and contains specific action plans. It has not yet been consulted on widely with schools.

125. Long overdue developments of infra-structure are now taking place, but are not complete. Almost all schools are on the administration network and an intranet will be rolled out to them this term. The access to communication by e-mail has improved schools' administration and is being taken advantage of by the majority of schools. Plans are in place to give all schools access to broadband by the end of this year. Data accuracy, collection and management has improved through the use of a new management information system. A more rigorous approach has been taken by the research team, but is not yet fully effective. Future planning has not been undertaken sufficiently early, for example, for the renewal of the schools administration hardware contract, due in March 2003, which, in turn, will enable the installation of upgraded or alternative software, including the financial software needed for 2003/04. This is currently causing uncertainty for schools. Links are not made in any meaningful way with curriculum ICT.

126. The council's website gives useful public access to a range of formal plans such as the EDP and behavioural support plan, section 52 financial statements and the last Ofsted report. There is a limited amount of service specific information, some of which is significantly out of date, notably regarding admissions.

127. **Cleaning and caretaking and grounds maintenance.** In the last inspection, support for schools in the areas of grounds maintenance, cleaning and caretaking, provided by client services, was of high quality. This support continues to be highly satisfactory. Regular monitoring of contractors and support for fault rectification are strengths in all these service areas. Advice is given to schools who wish to develop in-house provision for cleaning and caretaking. Training is given to site officers on health and safety. Emergency caretaker cover can also be provided.

128. The provision of **catering** was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. No fieldwork was undertaken in this area. However, the LEA's view and the absence of any specific problems raised by schools indicate that provision is still satisfactory overall.

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

129. The LEA is beginning to be more successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers and these areas of support to schools are satisfactory. This area was not part of the previous inspection and this judgement agrees with the LEA's own assessment. As planned in the EDP, a number of strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of teaching staff have recently been put in place. Currently, the LEA has a high percentage of headteachers leaving posts for neighbouring authorities, as well as an above average turnover of teachers. Few newly qualified teachers are being attracted to the authority.

130. Following consultation, a number of procedures have very recently been put in place. These are: guidelines to teachers from overseas, a drive to encourage qualified teachers who live in the borough to return to work, the getting and improving of qualifications, plus improved links with higher education institutions. However, the impact of these has yet to be realised. Vacancies are now being monitored and the LEA has recently conducted an exit survey and interviews to seek views of teachers who have left the authority.

131. The recruitment fairs run during the summer term were largely unsuccessful in boosting recruitment. Newly qualified teachers' take up of posts is erratic, as they are still attracted to more successful, higher achieving, neighbouring authorities. Surveys of why teachers are reluctant to work in the authority reveal that support for continuing professional development and the weak management of schools are the key areas of concern. The procedures in place for continued professional development and newly qualified teacher induction are recent and are not fully understood by schools.

132. National training programmes such as those for literacy and numeracy are being re-run for new teachers appointed to the authority and this is leading to better quality teaching. A number of outside speakers have been invited to talk to headteachers, so that better understanding of national priorities can be achieved. A good induction programme is now in place for newly qualified teachers, which links training to school improvement.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

133. Leadership of services to support school improvement is satisfactory overall with important progress being made by the contractor during the past year. Only very early signs of impact on standards are yet visible. The first year of the new contract has been turbulent in terms of staff stability. Some senior appointments were slow to fill, but largely because of a determination to ensure good quality staff. Other posts are still unfilled on a permanent basis, but the contractor has been swift to make temporary appointments, often from within their organisation.

134. The new leadership of the school development and review service has tackled with skill the challenge of restructuring staff, refocusing work and encouraging collaboration. The school effectiveness team is well established at the centre of change, supported especially by the raising standards team and a research function which concentrates on performance. The EDP and the revised post-Ofsted action plan are reflected in service area plans and there are also early signs of their use in the setting of personal targets. Interconnection between planning for social inclusion and school improvement is less effective than that for school

effectiveness. Service area action plans are recognised to be essential means of turning aspirations into action. They are well written, with clear objectives, accountability and timescales. There is regular monitoring with review meetings of management teams to track progress.

135. There is a structured approach to the improvement of communications. The three core consultative groups, where headteachers work with senior managers, are well engaged in the change programme. Some messages have still to reach schools at large, especially those still waiting to see whether the new contractor is sincere in the wish to bring about improvement through partnership with them. Some difficult decisions have been taken about poorly performing services and the restructured school improvement team shows how rapidly change can be brought about when driven hard. Tough decisions remain, however, such as the transformation of SEN provision and the improvement of ICT support, both of which are vital to the school improvement agenda. Some schools will wait to be convinced that the new plans will be driven through to successful outcomes. The omens look good.

136. The deployment of staff to support school improvement is also satisfactory. Both staff and schools are aware of the rationale and the differentiated approach, which is now being adopted. The experience of staff employed as school effectiveness advisers' contrasts well with the past. Almost all have recent headship experience and have been trained in inspection. There is also appropriate phase advice for the primary and secondary schools, although there is no SEN specialist. Greater use could be made of Beacon schools and advanced skills teachers to broaden the expertise available.

137. Performance management is satisfactory and improving as cultural change is introduced to the new organisation. This is principally through the European foundation for quality management programme, but there is also a commitment to work towards Investors in People status. Performance appraisal is being introduced, linked to service objectives. There is a good programme for staff development, linked to performance appraisal. Newly employed staff undertake an induction programme, which focuses appropriately on the organisation and its aims, particularly school improvement. Staff spoke positively about their experience of personal development.

138. The overall effectiveness of services to support school improvement and their value for money cannot yet be judged to be satisfactory. The LEA shares this assessment. It is making a significant investment and spends well above the average level for London and nationally. However, almost all of the change is very recent and currently lacks positive and measurable outcomes.

Section 3: Special Educational Needs

Strategy

139. The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs is unsatisfactory. At the time of the last inspection, the strategy was poor. A comprehensive review was recommended as the basis for developing an inclusion strategy. This was to involve active consultation and a clear rationale for special school provision. Review of the roles of special schools and associated special needs support services is at an early stage through initial consultation by the LEA on a strategy for SEN and inclusion. An interim strategy to address fundamental blocks to inclusion has been adopted. Impact is difficult to discern, although there has been a sharp reduction in the number of pupils with statements of SEN who are out of school. Some progress has been made, but too little, and the situation remains unsatisfactory.

140. The LEA currently maintains six special schools. This pattern of provision is historical and not well adapted to the current needs in the borough. In common with many other authorities, the LEA is short of places for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and those on the autistic spectrum. Moreover, high staff/pupil ratios result in places in the existing schools being very expensive. In addition, in spite of recent attempts to provide day places in the primary sector for pupils on the autistic spectrum, many such pupils are still placed outside the borough at high cost. Thus considerable levels of resource are tied up in the current inappropriate pattern of provision, inhibiting the implementation of any strategy aimed at supporting greater inclusion.

141. While the educational principles of inclusion appear well understood and are supported by mainstream schools, schools have little information on the practical and financial implications. There have been four meetings of the special schools working party to date, but the resource implications of a much greater degree of inclusion in mainstream schools have not yet been fully described in an action plan covering the years ahead. Since the last inspection, management information has improved considerably to the point where the LEA now has the required data about current needs, provision and costs to enable it to plan properly. Special school headteachers are currently unconvinced by the proposals for change and their support will clearly not be secured unless, as a minimum, the LEA finalises a reorganisation plan that shows clearly the steps to be taken and the timescale within which they will be accomplished.

142. The Education Development Plan 2 priorities four and eight relate respectively to underachieving groups and to social inclusion. In line with these priorities, the LEA is beginning to address a preventive approach to issues of behaviour management through the release of a revised behavioural support plan, the recent emergence of a behaviour support service, offering a graduated response to need, and the recent formation of behaviour and education support teams to support clusters of schools at risk. However, it is too early to discern any reduction in a relatively high rate of SEN referral for support and school places for pupils who have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Recommendations**Urgently improve the quality of strategic management of special educational needs by:**

- finalising a comprehensive reorganisation action plan for SEN, which relates the LEA's intentions for inclusion to the distribution of resources;
- clarifying the roles and expectations of mainstream schools, mainstream schools with support facilities and special schools; and
- working more closely and in greater depth with headteachers of special schools to secure their support for the implementation of the action plan.

Statutory obligations

143. The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN is unsatisfactory. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA was found to have failed to take reasonable steps to fulfil all of its statutory responsibilities towards pupils with special educational needs. In spite of significant advance in meeting statutory obligations, progress has been undermined by lamentable failures in communications and customer care.

144. After dealing with a backlog of 118 outstanding cases, the proportion of statutory assessments completed within 18 weeks has now climbed sharply to 85 per cent while some 65 per cent are completed on time, allowing for statutory exceptions. The referral rate is five per cent and just over two per cent of pupils have a statement of SEN, which is the norm for London LEAs and is below national averages. Recourse to education tribunals is low. Recently, a protocol has been agreed between education and social services to help guide commissioning of the purchase and placement of pupils with complex special educational needs. However, there is stark contrast between improvement of the processes for achieving statutory obligations and the adequacy of educational outcomes for pupils, parents and schools.

145. While recent new statements over 2002 have been soundly drafted, the contractor is hampered by a large legacy of earlier poorly crafted statements of SEN. A new management information system and recent investment in ICT systems are now assisting the process of production and review of statements and the production of supporting correspondence and documentation. However, the quality, tone and accuracy of written and other communications with parents, parent partnership staff and schools remain very poor. Arrangements for parent partnership are mostly satisfactory. A weakness is the failure to make literature available to parents in relevant minority ethnic languages.

146. An unacceptable lack of transparency in the criteria used and in the decisions of the assessments panel in respect of both proposed new statements and the review of existing statements, has alienated special educational needs co-ordinators and headteachers. The failure to involve headteachers and/or co-ordinators in central systems for moderation of statutory assessment and review of SEN support has compounded the lack of transparency in decision making. A new data bank has been created to help track pupils and yet, despite continuing efforts, which have made inroads into a backlog, a disturbing, if small, number of pupils with a statement of SEN remain out of school and receive limited home tuition.

Recommendations**In order to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs:**

- secure radical and enduring improvement in the quality, tone and accuracy of communications with parents, parent partnership staff and schools as soon as possible; and
- involve headteachers and special educational needs co-ordinators in central systems for moderation of statutory assessment and review of SEN support.

Special educational needs functions to support school improvement

147. The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement is poor with significant weaknesses. The previous inspection report recommended that special educational needs provision should be 'effectively managed across services'. Two actions have been given priority. Firstly, improvement of provision for pupils with emotional/behavioural difficulties has been addressed through a successful bid for capital funding, although measurable impact is not expected to be observable much before the end of the 2002/03 academic year. Secondly, schools have just been consulted upon revision of the funding basis for pupils with a statement of SEN.

148. Both school surveys carried out by the Audit Commission revealed general dissatisfaction with the LEA's capacity to support SEN. Nevertheless, there is evidence of sound practice. Following recent changes and refocusing, the special educational needs support service is satisfactory. The support provided by special needs assistants is satisfactory, although up-take of both of these services by schools is variable. Aspects of outreach support from special schools to meet the requirements of low incidence pupils with moderately intensive needs (such as visual impairment), where available, are sound, but significant gaps in support remain, for example, for pupils with moderate communication difficulties in the secondary sector.

149. The education psychology service is satisfactory. The service offers training to school staff within both whole-school and specific issues in SEN. It also manages and trains the special needs assistants service. The service is also beginning to make a contribution to preventive measures for pupils with behavioural needs through the newly formed behaviour and education support teams and has productive involvement with the child and adolescent mental health service. However, too much of the time of the service is committed to statutory assessment rather than to preventative activities in support of schools.

150. Apart from some general level training on the Code of Practice, the LEA has not defined standardised moderating procedures for the allocation of pupils to stages of the revised Code of Practice and for monitoring the use of allocated SEN resources for schools. Criteria for statutory assessment have not been updated to reflect the revised Code of Practice and emerging national policy.

151. A high percentage of SEN resource is delegated to schools. The SEN register is one of the factors upon which the distribution of additional educational needs funding is based. However, there has not been an audit of school SEN registers for some years to check their

validity. Thus additional educational needs funding for mainstream schools is not closely matched to schools' needs.

152. Annual reviews are conducted by schools, but are not monitored by the LEA. Resource allocations rarely change, resulting in mismatch of funding to needs. The LEA is unaware of whether targets are being met or whether pupils are making progress.

153. Lack of leadership by the LEA in promoting understanding of referral criteria and opaque decision making by the assessment panel and, in statement review processes, have sapped the morale of special educational needs co-ordinators who currently have little confidence in the LEA.

Recommendations

Urgently improve the quality of management of special educational needs by:

- freeing more of the time of the education psychology service to engage in preventive measures;
- up-dating criteria for statutory assessment to reflect the revised Code of Practice and emerging national policy; and
- securing sound understanding by schools of standardised moderating procedures for the allocation of pupils to stages of the revised Code of Practice and for monitoring the use of allocated SEN resources.

Value for money

154. The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions to provide value for money is very poor and fails to provide effective support for schools. At the time of the previous inspection, services to support SEN were expensive and poorly organised.

155. The high cost and suitability of places provided by special schools in the London borough of Waltham Forest remain causes of concern and severely inhibit the implementation of any strategy aimed at supporting greater inclusion. The inordinate cost of places is primarily due to low pupil : staff ratios applying to both teachers and support staff. Efforts have recently been made to provide day places within the borough for pupils in the primary sector who are on the autistic spectrum and also for some pupils who have educational and behavioural difficulties. However, much more needs to be done in order to turn around the expensive, net external placement of pupils with communication and behavioural difficulties. Although the new database, which establishes the current and historical position, has improved record keeping considerably over recent months, work remains to be done by the LEA to recoup outstanding finance owed by other LEAs, which have placed pupils in Waltham Forest special schools.

156. Additional educational needs funding for mainstream schools is not closely matched to school needs. The LEA cannot ensure value for money because it lacks mechanisms to monitor the achievement and progress of pupils with a statement of SEN; it does not participate in statutory annual reviews; it does not monitor and challenge schools on the use of additional educational needs funding and delegated funding for statements, and it does not audit school SEN registers.

Recommendation**In order to achieve value for money in special educational needs:**

- urgently put in place arrangements to monitor and evaluate the extent to which money spent on special educational needs results in improved outcomes and achievement by pupils with SEN.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

The strategy to promote social inclusion

157. The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. The previous inspection report made no recommendation on social inclusion in a broad sense. While there is no single LEA document relating to it, nonetheless, strategies aimed at overcoming barriers to social inclusion are prominent in EDP2 with clear targets set for April 2003 and in the SEN inclusion strategy and development plan.

158. The LEA has been keen to develop greater awareness of social inclusion and has consulted schools on the principles. Although the LEA's practical intentions are not at present fully clear to schools, especially in the field of SEN, steps are being taken from the beginning of the academic year 2002/03 to introduce a behaviour support service and to provide increased support for the reintegration of excluded pupils through new pupil referral units.

159. The LEA monitors achievement to identify groups at risk of social exclusion and the results are beginning to be used to devise strategies for improvement. In particular, there is strong member commitment to raising minority ethnic achievement and this is reflected corporately in the new priorities agreed in the chief executive's plan for change.

160. A number of initiatives targeting disaffected young people have been developed or are being supported by the LEA. Elements of the Excellence in Cities programme, now better led and co-ordinated, support social inclusion and foster links with the community. Other examples include: 'Towards Employability'; after school and holiday provision led by the youth service; the youth crime reduction plan involving the youth service; an initiative with Waltham Forest college, which is targeting 30 pupils at risk of exclusion; and work by Connexions for young people leaving public care. However, at grass roots level progress is uncoordinated and piecemeal and, as yet, there is no firm evidence of increased achievement that is directly attributable to these initiatives.

161. There are emerging links with the police through the safer schools project and there is a productive relationship with child and adolescent mental health services. Some good joint working goes on with local voluntary organisations and private providers, one of whom, Blue Curve, runs a useful project for disaffected young people. However, the evidence of well-established partnership working with agencies outside Waltham Forest council is limited.

The supply of school places

162. At the time of the last inspection, the provision of school places was satisfactory. A recommendation was made to maintain close scrutiny of the balance between supply and demand for primary school provision in areas within the borough to ensure that places can be offered within reasonable proximity of families' homes. Although some scrutiny of the issues has been undertaken, the problem of matching supply and demand, in general, has not been

solved. This issue relates not only to neighbourhoods with high density, but also parental reaction to low achievement in some schools.

163. The provision of school places continues to be satisfactory. Between the last inspection and the current one, school organisation planning deteriorated. The school organisation plan for 2000-05 was not published until March 2001 and the school organisation committee did not meet for 17 months. It is, however, now back on track with the publication of the draft school organisation plan 2002-07 in June 2002 and the re-establishing of regular meetings of the school organisation committee. The school organisation plan is still insufficiently developed in some areas, particularly around SEN.

164. The borough has a very high incidence of mobility, which includes the arrival of asylum seekers. It has undertaken contingency planning this year for the first time in relation to providing extra places in Year 7, should they be needed. In the event, they were not. The number of surplus places is low, particularly in secondary education. This has exacerbated the difficulties in providing parents with their first choice of school. The provision of a new Private Finance Initiative secondary school has, however, assisted in meeting the demand for places. Forecasting accuracy has not been specifically monitored in recent years.

165. The school organisation plan outlines two clear intentions: the amalgamation of schools to provide all-through two or three form entry primary schools and a review of secondary provision to establish an optimum size. Following a review of the school organisation plan, endorsed by the school organisation committee and actively supported by the new lead member for education, the secondary review has replaced a previously identified, narrower review, which was to have focused specifically on the increasing of four form entry secondary schools to six form entry. These intentions are rooted appropriately in the wider consideration of increasing achievement as well as the need for school places and are linked to the asset management plan. New places are being provided for SEN pupils, specifically those with emotional and behavioural difficulties and autistic pupils, through a £4.5 million targeted capital bid. Work is also taking place on the standardising of standard entry numbers, based on clear criteria.

Admissions

166. At the time of the last inspection, the process of admissions to schools was unsatisfactory. A recommendation was made to improve the collaboration with headteachers on the administration of admissions in order to strike a better balance between parental rights, individual pupil interests and the smooth running of schools. This has not been achieved and admissions are still unsatisfactory.

167. The LEA has taken back the central administration of all admissions - primary, secondary and casual - this year and has abolished waiting lists after the end of September in order to improve the process. The admissions booklets are well presented and contain clear criteria, which have been widely consulted upon, although no information is provided on what to look for in a school. Contact details are identified in 11 languages. Information available on the Internet, however, is out-of-date. Levels of parents achieving first preference are low, particularly in the secondary sector, and the number of appeals is high. However, the

number of successful appeals is relatively low. Independent support is provided by democratic services for parents who appeal. All timescales are appropriately met.

168. The admissions forum now plans to jointly undertake annual consultation with voluntary controlled and foundation schools, with which it has good relationships, although admissions are managed separately. Consideration of two points of admission to reception classes rather than three in a year, a change much supported by schools, has not been taken forward by the council.

169. With regard to casual admissions, the LEA aims to place a child in a school within three weeks of an application, but this is not uniformly achieved. Schools have evidence of inappropriate placements of children, particularly those with SEN or English as an additional language needs who have appeared without records. Communication with schools is still ineffective; trust is poor. The social inclusion panel meets regularly to explore routes for reintegration of excluded pupils, but there is no formal strategy or concordat between headteachers.

Recommendations

In order to improve the admissions process:

- ensure all headteachers have a common understanding of agreed principles, processes and a framework for implementation; and
- put in place procedures for admissions to reception classes, which better support, and are more acceptable to schools.

Asset management

170. The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning was not the subject of a specific judgement in the last inspection. This area is now satisfactory.

171. The LEA has met all the DfES requirements for asset management planning. The local policy statement has been graded as satisfactory, as have the improvement targets. The condition information, already completed once, is in the process of being resurveyed electronically and now includes life cycle costs in order to be more meaningful for schools. A clear five-year plan is in place to reduce the repairs backlog; at £28 million this is below the England average. Sufficiency calculations have been received from the valuation office and suitability surveys are being carried out. Clear links are made to the school organisation plan and to standards of achievement when identifying priorities. Appropriate consultation has taken place with headteachers, governors and dioceses. A three-year capital programme, 2002-05, including a three-year planned maintenance programme has been identified. A further £53 million Private Finance Initiative project for 11 schools is being implemented. There is little slippage in the delivery of plans as reserve projects are brought forward if difficulties occur.

172. Work to link the asset management planning process to corporate asset management planning and individual school asset management planning is not yet sufficiently developed. On the corporate front, progress is not sufficiently developed for effective links to be made to the lifelong learning directorate's plans.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

173. This area of responsibility remains unsatisfactory overall despite some improvement. The May 2000 Ofsted report commented critically on the LEA's failure to meet statutory requirements and, in particular, its 'woefully inadequate' lack of information about the whereabouts of children out of schools for reasons other than exclusion. Since the introduction of the intervention contract, there has been a major effort to improve performance in this area. Improvement has occurred, but without sufficient evidence yet of positive outcomes for the children concerned.

174. The inclusion support team, responsible for children with no school place, has been strengthened and, in future, will also monitor the quality of provision being made. Significant improvements have been made to the database with a new management information system, which, when fully operational, will link admissions, exclusions, attendance and behaviour support. There is now a clear protocol related to children with no school place that defines action to be taken and the timescales applicable. Linked to more accurate data, it provides a sound policy basis for future improvement.

175. A substantial number of policy procedure documents have been produced during the past year to underpin provision for pupils who have no school place, but are not excluded. Pupils educated at home are part of a clear procedure, monitored by the development and review service. Home visits commenced during the summer term 2002, although a significant number of those visited were seeking a school place rather than being educated at home. There is now a framework in place to ensure that they are followed up. Procedures for children unable to attend school because of medical needs have also been revised. An advisory teacher within the ethnic minority achievement service has specific responsibility for children newly arrived in the borough. The EMS data system in future will identify new arrivals so that support can be offered before they start school. Schools are being asked to monitor the attainment of all pupils with less than two years of UK education. The recentralisation of pupil admissions is intended to improve the speed with which pupils newly arrived in the UK can be offered a school place. At present there are substantial delays.

176. There is good work being undertaken at present to address a wide range of issues relating to making provision for pupils with no school place, including better data and sound policies. Despite much improvement in the identification of children without places, there is still much to be done in improving the quality of provision, and, in the case of a few children with special educational needs, making adequate provision. The consolidation of recent changes is not secure and value for money cannot be judged satisfactory.

Attendance

177. Support for school attendance is unsatisfactory. This judgement is in line with the LEA's own assessment. Progress since the last inspection has been slow and its interconnection with school improvement strategies is patchy. Primary school attendance remains below the national average, although secondary attendance is at the national average. The percentage of pupil sessions missed through unauthorised absence is above the national figure in both primary and secondary phases. Local monitoring indicates improvement in attendance during 2001/02. This year, for the first time, advisors are about to agree targets

with schools for unauthorised absence. The school survey indicates a decline in confidence in the service.

178. There is currently no substantive principal education welfare officer and a consultant has been employed on an acting basis to review the service. Modest change is beginning to be seen. A school audit is about to be undertaken. Education welfare officers are being recruited to the new multi-agency behaviour support teams, which will become operational in the autumn. Overall, there is insufficient synergy between issues of school attendance, school improvement and inclusion. The current service remains essentially focused on attendance, thus there is sound advice on how schools should manage attendance, but little effective targeting of those schools and groups of pupils where focused action is required. Those weaknesses are not yet being addressed with sufficient rigour.

179. Although, as indicated above, change is in the air and EDP attendance priorities are appropriate, current performance is inconsistent and lacks leadership based on clear principles. There is an urgent need for the service to be realigned in ways that bring a strategic direction to its contribution to school improvement, accompanied by a rigorously monitored action plan.

Recommendations

In order to improve school attendance for children at risk:

- implement the current review of the education welfare service; and
- ensure integration of its role within the multi-professional support teams as quickly as possible.

Behaviour support

180. This area is unsatisfactory. The previous Ofsted report recorded a ‘grim picture’ in respect of behaviour support and exclusions. It noted levels of exclusion twice the national average and higher among African Caribbean boys. It criticised poor provision for excluded pupils with no strategic leadership to bring about improvement. Pupil records were fragmented and inaccurate. Little direction had been given to schools in developing a policy of social inclusion. That being so, it is of concern that these major issues have only begun to be addressed in the past year despite inclusion in the first post-Ofsted action plan and new government legislation requiring full-time education for pupils out of school from September 2002. Late, but significant, action has now been taken.

181. Leadership to address these issues has only emerged since the contracting out of services in September 2001 and change has only been evident from mid-2002. The contractor has set about checking the accuracy of pupil records and has brought about major improvement. The rate of permanent exclusions has also been halved. Making full-time provision has been a slow process. Until the application to register new pupil referral units in July 2002, provision for excluded pupils was made in poorly accommodated, unregistered units. The quality of educational provision was often sound, but there was no strategic plan; simple reaction to demand met effectively by some skilled professionals.

182. Little action was taken to respond to the recommendations of the first post-Ofsted action plan and proposals to improve support for pupils with educational, emotional and behavioural needs are contained within EDP2. A further revision of the behavioural support plan has been undertaken, in consultation with schools. Further developments are within the draft SEN/inclusion strategy and development plan. Whereas all this activity is timely and well directed, understandably schools, and some central staff, are confused and have not yet felt fully engaged,

183. In the summer of 2002, rapid progress was made to legally create new pupil referral units and implement a major capital programme to establish a pattern of PRU provision both for excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion in both phases. At the time of inspection, the first PRU building had just been completed and further capital projects were under way. There is support for change, but concern about its coherence. For example, the new pupil referral units have not yet been established as schools, with pupil registers, budgets and, perhaps most critically, clear links and protocols with mainstream secondary schools to develop reintegration and inclusion. Some very sound first steps have been made, but they do not yet amount to implementation of an educational strategy.

184. Concurrently the authority has been selected to introduce a behaviour improvement project as part of the National Street Crime Initiative. It had made its first appointments to new behaviour support teams at the time of the inspection. Wisely, priority is being given to early training and induction. The behaviour improvement project is an exciting opportunity for a dramatic improvement in behaviour support. There are also several other important initiatives under way, which are not yet co-ordinated. They include the Excellence in Cities Partnership and the Safer Streets project.

185. Support for behaviour is at a crossroads. It is currently unsatisfactory. A range of recent initiatives has brought resources, which have the potential to bring about transformation if good leadership and management, supported at the highest level, is maintained.

Recommendations

In order to improve achievement for those with behavioural difficulties:

- develop, agree and implement a protocol for the reintegration of excluded pupils in secondary schools; and
- complete the full establishment of pupil referral units as schools, with particular emphasis on their role in raising standards.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

186. Child protection was considered satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and remains so. It is well managed and schools comment favourably on the service and, in particular, their access to sound advice from the child protection officer. There is senior education representation on the area child protection committee.

187. Procedures have recently been rewritten and the child protection officer has also contributed to the drawing up of procedures for use across London. The child protection

officer meets regularly with her social services counterpart and relations with the police child protection team are effective. Links with individual social workers are sometimes affected by the difficulties social services have in recruitment and retention.

188. The training programme, which includes opportunities for designated teachers to update their knowledge every three years, is well regarded by schools. It is largely provided by an external provider who ensures there is an education focus on child protection training. The register of designated child protection officers is updated annually. Education welfare officers are provided with a two-day course at the start of their appointment. There is no training specifically for senior managers.

189. Some effective training for schools and governors has been undertaken in the handling of allegations against school staff. Good guidelines for handling such allegations have been devised and aspects of the training are being adopted regionally.

190. There are current policies for health and safety and school security, also available electronically. Recent updates have included guidance on emergency planning procedures, risk assessment and advice on working from heights, following an HSE improvement notice. A useful safety newsletter has also been introduced.

191. A programme of school reviews has recently concentrated on the safety of younger children. They have revealed and helped to address some significant shortcomings at school level. Although it is intended to continue reviews, there is no medium term forward programme. Consultation with employees is regular and the manager speaks positively of the contractor's willingness to be involved in safety matters. Although policy guidelines include advice on risk management, there is currently no system for recording that schools, for which the LEA is responsible, have a regular system of checks. An annual safety report for each school is in draft, but not yet systematic monitoring of the position in each school. Both schools and the authority are vulnerable until this is in place.

Recommendations

To improve child protection:

- establish child protection awareness raising training for senior staff.

To help ensure that schools carry out health and safety procedures:

- accelerate the completion of the annual health and safety report by all schools for which the LEA has responsibility and also encourage its completion by voluntary aided and foundation schools for the advice of the governing body.

Looked after children

192. The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to looked after children is unsatisfactory. However, there are promising, if recent, signs of improvement. Progress has been made since the last inspection on the creation of an integrated database through which individual targets for improving attainment may be set and monitored through individual education plans. Communication with schools

on looked after children is improving. However, although members have taken some action recently and a report on looked after children has been considered by a joint social services and lifelong learning scrutiny committee, insufficient has been done and corporate parenting is unsatisfactory.

193. A new policy document, 'Going for Gold', establishes joint aims and protocols between social services and the education service and also sets targets for attainment over 2002-05 which are reinforced in EDP2. The attainment of looked after children gaining one or more A* - G grades at GCSE has risen sharply over the last two years from a very low base of achievement. In 2000/01, there were 19 per cent whereas, in 2001/02, there were 41 per cent against a national target of 50 per cent. Thorough monitoring and consistent action will be required to secure urgent improvements in the basic skills and attainment of pupils who are currently performing well below national norms for looked after children. The Waltham Forest target within EDP2 is to reach the national level by 2004, which will itself have risen to 75 per cent by then. A joint commissioning protocol is being introduced to improve decision making for those looked after children who have a statement of SEN.

194. Joint funding provided by social services and by the contractor resulted in the appointment of a responsible officer in June 2002. Following agreement on information sharing between social services and education, a database has been created recently, which is now used to record personal information and to track attainment, attendance and, when applicable, exclusion from school. The responsible officer regularly updates and validates the data held. All schools have designated teachers, but they have not yet been trained. Some children living in private residential homes do not have a home environment conducive to learning.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision for looked after children:

- ensure that members provide strong leadership in their role as corporate parent for the education of looked after children;
- institute thorough monitoring and consistent action to ensure urgent improvements in the basic skills and attainment of pupils who are in public care; and
- review the specifications of contracts between the council and the proprietors of private residential homes in order to secure an environment more conducive to learning.

Measures to combat racism

195. The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism is satisfactory.

196. The London borough of Waltham Forest has formally accepted the recommendations of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. It has formulated appropriate policies on equality of opportunity and combating racism. The chief executive gives a strong lead on equal opportunities, including race relations. Measures to combat racism are considered a mainstream matter. There is a corporate race equality board and one

for each of the four directorates, including lifelong learning services, which refine policy, reinforce strategy and monitor performance. The Commission for Racial Equality standard has been achieved at level three. Collection and analysis of employment data are good. The council aims to reflect minority ethnic representation in the community in the number and seniority of the posts in its workforce as quickly as possible. The level of employment across all services is currently 28 per cent in comparison with a background population of 36 per cent. Collection and analysis of employment data are generally good, although the council has yet to introduce ethnic monitoring by grade across all services.

197. Model race equality policy and action plans were made available to schools by 31 May 2002 in support of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, while monitoring of the adoption and use of these documents is scheduled for the autumn term. The disproportionate representation of minority ethnic pupils amongst those subject to permanent exclusion has been reduced significantly through challenge offered by LEA officers using much improved management information. Records of racial incidents in schools are monitored and advice and support given. Parents and governors from minority ethnic groups would welcome more information and consultation disseminated in the major local community languages so that it reaches a far wider audience.

198. The Education Development Plan 2 describes appropriate action to address attainment through two priorities, underachieving groups and social inclusion. Positive and successful attention is being given to the promotion of education for diversity through a wide variety of measures.

Section 5: Corporate issues

Summary

199. The strategic management of education is now satisfactory. At the time of the last inspection, there was limited and weak strategic management of education. The report concluded that the LEA lacked the capacity to improve without external help. The council sought consultancy advice on engaging external support and then made interim arrangements, while negotiating with the secretary of state about the future model. The interim period was unduly protracted and there is ample evidence of deterioration during this period. A contract was finally signed in July 2001 and enacted in September 2001. Shortly before this, in May 2001, a director of lifelong learning was appointed to head the LEA. At the time of the inspection, the director of lifelong learning was on long-term sick leave.

200. The contract specifies arrangements for partnership including a joint client /contractor education management team and a strategic partnership board incorporating key stakeholders. The former works well while the latter, conceived as an advisory body to both client and contractor, has struggled to find a meaningful role. A recent working party recommended refocusing and a change of chair. Both have just been enacted.

201. The current chief executive, who has been in post since October 2000, has initiated major corporate managerial and structural change. Political modernisation has been accomplished with the move to a cabinet and scrutiny system. A three-year budget strategy has been adopted. Nonetheless, the quality of services is not good enough and recent surveys reveal that the council is held in low esteem by many citizens. A major report by the chief executive in March of this year gave out the stark message that without further radical culture change, the council would not have the capacity to fulfil the expectations of either members or central government. It proposed a programme of continued change linked to new arrangements for performance management. These proposals were accepted and the council embarked on its radical change programme, 'Committed to Success'.

Corporate planning

202. Corporate planning is now satisfactory. The community plan is currently in draft form and its themes, of which education is one, feed through into the Best Value Performance Plan. In turn, objectives in the plan are reflected in the lifelong learning directorate plan. This has a clear vision and values, sets hard targets, which are meshed into council priorities, and incorporates appropriate references to other relevant plans, such as the EDP and the Early Years and Childcare Development Plan. The Best Value Performance Plan itself does not set out a strong vision or a clear message. Though the priorities are suitable and include education, the multiplication of themes, service priorities and partnership priorities is confusing. Links with other statutory plans are limited and insufficiently specific.

203. Nonetheless, the picture as a whole is less bleak than this might suggest. The chief executive's hard-hitting March report and its acceptance by members is evidence that the council has the capacity to review its own progress and draw hard conclusions. The report sets out a programme for change including a framework within which priorities are to be

developed over the next three years. Flowing from that, five key immediate priorities include the adoption of a three-year financial planning strategy, now in place. The council has taken corporate responsibility for delivering urgent and ambitious improvement in six key service areas, one of which is educational attainment and, in particular, that of black and minority ethnic children.

204. A new corporate performance management system is now being introduced throughout the council, coupled with a major drive to improve the management information available. The system measures staff performance against planned targets. These changes, together with the adoption of three-year financial planning, are ensuring that the mechanisms are now in place to implement plans effectively.

205. Another stream feeding into the corporate planning process is the local strategic partnership, set up in 2001. This is the forum through which the community plan is being shaped. One of its thematic sub-groups covers lifelong learning and good collaborative planning is in progress on the 14-19 strategy. The council has a draft local public service agreement. In line with the commitments made in 'Commitment to Success', this incorporates very challenging targets for improving the educational attainment of black and minority ethnic children.

206. Within education, planning is clear and consistent. Priorities flow through from one level to another and are being reflected in the newly adopted European Foundation of Quality Management arrangements by which individual staff will be managed. Targets are also clearly set out in the contract and staff know well what it is they have to achieve. Monitoring of implementation is good, with a system of 'champions' chasing progress on particular functions and regular reviews of progress on the implementation of action plans. Accountability is clear. This clarity and purpose dates from the assumption of responsibility by the contractor and represents major progress. During the interim period, whilst the focus was on the procuring of the intervention contract, planning for improvement was poor, action was erratic and uncoordinated and recommendations in the post-Ofsted action plan were not enacted. Some work had to be redone by the contractor, for instance the rewriting of the behavioural support plan.

207. The original approach to contract monitoring had substantial shortcomings and was unfit for its purpose. Following review, sensible changes have now been made, which prioritise what needs monitoring and incorporate monitoring in the corporate strategic process. Monitoring reports now go to the lead member and to scrutiny in a manageable format and consultation is underway to involve headteachers in the monitoring process.

208. The previous report identified the breakdown of trust between schools and the LEA and the need to rebuild this as a foundation for progress. Some action has also been taken on this front, though not enough. Understandably under the circumstances, the contractor's major drive has been on planning and sorting out services, in particular, services to support school improvement.

209. All headteachers have been invited to take part in liaison groups set up to cover school improvement, strategy and resources, special education and access/inclusion. Each group links with the relevant lead officer, acts as a sounding board and feeds through policy advice. Headteachers involved in these groups are beginning to engage with the LEA as

represented by the contractor, but are still wary of members in general, though those who have had contact with the new lead member for education are much more positive.

210. There has been a considerable amount of consultation, in particular about the EDP, but poor communication around budget issues this year has revived suspicion and set back the process of creating a sense of trust. History still holds sway in most schools and they remain sceptical or worse.

Decision making

211. Decision making, which was previously poor, is now satisfactory. Decisions to spend at SSA on education, to move to a three-year financial strategy and to progress the Private Finance Initiative, have all impacted favourably on education. However, communication around issues leading to decision making is not transparent enough. The role of scrutiny is developing well, on a cross-party basis, with closer and better informed attention being given to the performance of schools.

The leadership provided by officers and elected members

212. Overall, leadership by members is now satisfactory, though weaknesses remain. The approach of members is insufficiently strategic in some respects. For instance, far too many lower level decisions go to cabinet. Agendas are unmanageably long and supported by excessive documentation. The scheme of delegation is not generous, suggesting that member/officer roles are not well or clearly enough defined.

213. Where education is concerned, though major plans are still subject to council approval, the picture is somewhat different as a result of the outsourcing. Though initially reluctant, members ultimately signed up to the contracting out process. The new lead member has a clear and appropriate view of his role and has set out to bridge the gap between schools and the LEA. In the three months since he has been in post, he has visited many schools, met with many headteachers and other stakeholders and set about informing himself on key educational issues such as SEN.

214. Education reports to members are generally clear and informative. The lead member meets regularly with the contractor's head of education and is well briefed. Scrutiny now takes standing items on schools in special measures and serious weaknesses, exclusions and inclusion and results. Officers supply the required information and advice. In addition, under the newly instituted contract monitoring arrangements, there is termly contract monitoring reporting to scrutiny.

215. The leadership of senior officers is generally effective. The contractor's head of school support services has set out a sound strategy for school improvement, established a clear direction for staff and is assiduous in ensuring that commitments are adhered to and agreed work is done. The senior management team are effective, hardworking and accessible. Their approach is open and consultative and is starting to win over headteachers.

Partnership

216. Partnership with other agencies remains satisfactory, with some weaknesses. Links with the diocesan authorities and with the unions are effective. There are some useful working links with social services and a joint appointment for the education of looked after children. The contractor is developing effective partnership fora for school services. However, given that the contract covers little outside compulsory schooling, the absence of the director of lifelong learning has reduced the LEA's capacity to work effectively in partnership with a range of agencies across all phases of education. For instance, in the field of social inclusion it has not been immediately apparent to the police and the youth offending team where to forge strategic links with regard to the safer schools and behaviour and education support teams initiatives. It has also impacted on the LEA's ability to ensure co-ordinated approaches internally to educational issues across all phases, in particular, with regard to early years and the foundation stage.

Appendix: Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations.

The following recommendations should be acted upon as a matter of urgency:

Urgently improve the quality of strategic management of special educational needs by:

- finalising a comprehensive reorganisation action plan for SEN, which relates the LEA's intentions for inclusion to the distribution of resources;
- clarifying the roles and expectations of mainstream schools, mainstream schools with support facilities and special schools; and
- working more closely and in greater depth with headteachers of special schools to secure their support for the implementation of the action plan.

In order to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs:

- secure radical and enduring improvement in the quality, tone and accuracy of communications with parents, parent partnership staff and schools as soon as possible; and
- involve headteachers and special educational needs co-ordinators in central systems for moderation of statutory assessment and review of SEN support.

Urgently improve the quality of management of special educational needs by:

- freeing more of the time of the education psychology service to engage in preventive measures;
- up-dating criteria for statutory assessment to reflect the revised Code of Practice and emerging national policy; and
- securing sound understanding by schools of standardised moderating procedures for the allocation of pupils to stages of the revised Code of Practice and for monitoring the use of allocated SEN resources.

In order to achieve value for money in special educational needs:

- urgently put in place arrangements to monitor and evaluate the extent to which money spent on special educational needs results in improved outcomes and achievement by pupils with SEN.

In order to improve the admissions process:

- ensure all headteachers have a common understanding of agreed principles, processes and a framework for implementation; and
 - put in place procedures for admissions to reception classes, which better
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support, and are more acceptable to schools.

In order to improve achievement for those with behavioural difficulties:

- develop, agree and implement a protocol for the reintegration of excluded pupils in secondary schools; and
- complete the full establishment of pupil referral units as schools, with particular emphasis on their role in raising standards.

In order to improve provision for looked after children:

- ensure that members provide strong leadership in their role as corporate parent for the education of looked after children;
- institute thorough monitoring and consistent action to ensure urgent improvements in the basic skills and attainment of pupils who are in public care; and
- review the specifications of contracts between the council and the proprietors of private residential homes in order to secure an environment more conducive to learning.

However, the following recommendations are also fundamental in that they affect the LEA's overall capacity for improvement:

In order to raise pupils' standards in ICT, improve the information available to schools and give support for ICT administration in schools:

- ensure that long term forward planning, including the ICT strategy, is shared and consulted upon with all schools;
- oversee a thorough audit of systems and rigorously monitor and evaluate it to ensure more accurate information about schools' progress in meeting government targets about provision;
- monitor technical support to all schools to ensure high and consistent quality;
- develop an LEA-wide strategy for pupils' safe access to e-mail and websites; and
- ensure that the planned implementation of the new integrated central IT support systems is managed efficiently and without delay.

To increase the impact of the programme for gifted and talented children:

- improve the monitoring of performance data in all schools to inform target setting and programme design for individual children.

In order to improve the support for leadership and management:

- building on the pilot, extend the programme of self-evaluation to all schools as soon as possible.

In order to improve school attendance for children at risk:

- implement the current review of the education welfare service; and
- ensure integration of its role within the multi-professional support teams as quickly as possible.

In order to improve property services support for schools:

- undertake a formal, customer-focused review of the buildings service, in liaison with headteachers and in line with Best Value principles.

To improve child protection:

- establish child protection awareness raising training for senior staff.

To help ensure that schools carry out health and safety procedures:

- accelerate the completion of the annual health and safety report by all schools for which the LEA has responsibility and also encourage its completion by voluntary aided and foundation schools for the advice of the governing body.